

# EMBASSY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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## U.S. AMBASSADOR MARCIA BERNICAT'S IFTAR REMARKS

### AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE

JULY 7, 2015

*Assalamu alaikum. Ramadan Mubarak.* Thank you all for joining us tonight.

In my experience with Muslim communities throughout my life, I have come to understand that Ramadan is a time to purify the soul and refocus our attention on God. It is a time to strengthen ties with family and friends, and – significantly – to make peace with those who have wronged us. These endeavors are especially important in our world today.

We have sadly witnessed so many tragic events during this month of Ramadan. The world is justly and deeply horrified. Tonight, our thoughts and prayers are with the victims of recent attacks and their loved ones, and with those families suffering in conflict zones. Whatever our faith, we pray together tonight for God's mercy.

The ritual of fasting is shared by many faiths, including my own. For thousands of years, Christians have fasted at Lent – the six-week period between Ash Wednesday and Easter – to reaffirm our commitment to God. Self-denial leads to greater wholeness as we shed whatever is standing between us and God. Muslims and Christians share this common belief, along with others faiths.

Together, Muslims and Christians make up over half of the world's population. It is so important that we nurture peace and understanding between our communities, and all communities, both within our own countries and between nations. And the basis for that peace and understanding already exists in the founding principles of every religion: love of God, and love of all that God has created.

President Barack Obama has underscored the importance of U.S. relations with Muslim communities in speeches at home and abroad. In Cairo in 2009, he said that a new relationship for America and Muslims must come from a sustained effort to listen to each other, learn from

each other, respect each other, and seek common ground. Here at the U.S. Embassy in Dhaka, we strive to do exactly that.

President Obama has also said that “Islam is a part of America.” We see that very vividly during the month of Ramadan. In the United States, many American Muslims mark Ramadan by joining their fellow citizens to serve the less fortunate and to host inter-faith activities that build mutual understanding in their communities. In Columbus, Ohio, for example, American Muslims invite their non-Muslim neighbors and co-workers to partake in an iftar dinner much like this one.

At President Obama’s recent iftar with Muslim American youth, he shared a table with Ziad Ahmed, a Bangladeshi-American who is growing up in New Jersey. Ziad saw early on that there was not enough mutual understanding in the world. So two years ago, he founded Redefy, a website to push back against harmful stereotypes by encouraging teens like him to share their stories. Because – in Ziad’s words – “ignorance can be defeated through education.” I echo President Obama when I say that we are all very proud of Ziad.

This Ramadan, it is imperative that people of all faiths – including Muslims and Christians – join together to work toward peace in the world. As Secretary of State John Kerry underscored in his Ramadan message, the United States government will remain in constant dialogue with the governments of Muslim-majority countries such as Bangladesh and with Muslim communities to work toward peace and mutual understanding.

The core of both our faiths, as expressed in our sacred texts, supports this message of peace and brotherly love. The Qur’an teaches us that “God created us of a male and female and made us nations and communities to better know each other.” And the Bible teaches us something similar: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Tonight, let us all remember these words and the spirit they embody, and let us come together to pray for love in our hearts and peace in our world.

*Ramadan Mubarak.*

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*\*As prepared for delivery*

**GR/2015**