

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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Message by President Obama on the Occasion of Eid ul-Fitr	1
President Obama Condemns Plans to Burn the Quran	1
Improved Security Allowing Iraqis to Focus on Economy.....	1
American Muslims Call for Volunteerism on September 11	2

Message by President Obama on the Occasion of Eid ul-Fitr

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary
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Statement by the President on the Occasion of Eid-ul-Fitr

As Ramadan comes to an end, Michelle and I extend our best wishes to Muslims in the United States and around the world on the occasion of Eid-ul-Fitr. For Muslims all over the world, Eid ul-Fitr marks the end of a holy month of fasting and prayer. It is a time of self-reflection focusing on the values that Muslims and people of all faiths share - charity, community, cooperation and compassion. This year's Eid is also an occasion to reflect on the importance of religious tolerance and to recognize the positive role that religious communities of all faiths, including Muslims, have played in American life.

On this Eid, those devastated by the recent floods in Pakistan will be on the minds of many around the world. To help in the tremendous relief, recovery, and reconstruction effort for the floods, all Americans can participate by donating to the Pakistan Relief Fund at www.state.gov.

On behalf of the American people, we congratulate Muslims in the United States and around the world on this blessed day. Eid Mubarak.

President Obama Condemns Plans to Burn the Quran

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — President Obama said that a plan by a small Florida church to burn copies of the Quran, the Muslim holy book, on September 11 is contrary to American values of religious freedom and tolerance of all faiths and religions.

During an interview September 9, Obama said the "stunt" being planned on the ninth anniversary of the terrorist attacks on the United States could endanger the lives of U.S. soldiers and Marines serving in Afghanistan and Iraq, and endanger Americans everywhere. He said that news of the planned desecration of the Muslim holy book has already caused demonstrations against the United States in some parts of the world.

The president said that what the church's pastor is "proposing to do is completely contrary to our values as Americans, that this country has been built on the notions of religious freedom and religious tolerance."

"And as a very practical matter, as commander in chief of the armed forces of the United States, I just want him to understand that this stunt that he is talking about pulling could greatly endanger our young men and women in uniform who are in Iraq, who are in Afghanistan. We're already seeing protests against Americans just by the mere threat that he's making."

The pastor of the Florida church, which has a congregation of about 50 people, has proposed burning copies of the Quran to mark the September 11 anniversary. Obama joined with other senior U.S. officials and dozens of prominent religious leaders of multiple faiths in condemning this act of religious intolerance.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said September 8 that this planned act "doesn't in any way represent America or Americans or American government or American religious or political leadership."

Obama expressed concerns that this single act could give further aid to the spread of terrorism.

"This is a recruitment bonanza for al-Qaida," the president said on ABC's Good Morning America program. "You know, you could have serious violence in places like Pakistan or Afghanistan. This could increase the recruitment of individuals who would be willing to blow themselves up in American cities or European cities."

Improved Security Allowing Iraqis to Focus on Economy

Washington — An increase in the capabilities of Iraqi security forces is enabling Iraqi civilian leaders to focus more on their country's economy and its regional relationships, a senior State Department official said September 8.

Speaking to reporters in Washington, Michael Corbin, the State Department's deputy assistant secretary for Iraq in the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, said that although many Iraq observers have focused on the level of violence in the country as the United States withdrew the last of its combat troops in August, the Obama administration sees Iraq's institutions as being able to withstand future attacks, and its government is taking steps forward toward improving the rule of law and expanding economic opportunity.

There is "a pattern of violence that continues" as terror groups seek to make their presence known and test the interim government, but Corbin said "their ability to maintain coordinated attacks is far diminished," and their attacks, which have often targeted Iraqi civilians, have failed to gain popular support.

"We see the fact that they have failed in the past in their attacks on economic infrastructure and their attacks on the coalition forces," he said. "We think that the Iraqi government, even the interim government, can stand up to this type of attack and ... we have declared our combat mission over because we have seen the progress that the Iraqis have made with managing their own security."

After months of discussions following a very close March election, Iraqi politicians "are on the way to forming a government," Corbin said, and "have all called for a representative-inclusive government" that would include members from the country's Shi'a, Sunni and Kurdish communities.

"This is very different from the situation in 2006, the last time they formed a government, when there was ... a lot of violence ... [and] ethno-sectarian warfare in some areas, and where the government that was formed was formed on the basis of strict ethnic lines rather than on the basis of an inclusive representative government," Corbin said.

"Because of this effort to form a coalition government, there's a lot of compromise and a lot of discussion going on that we haven't seen in the past, so we're encouraged by that," he said.

For Iraq's next government, U.S. officials see economic issues as being its key concern, he said.

"We see a big push for the economy, for jobs, [and] for services. The electricity provisions situation has gotten much better, but we still see people clamoring for better services, for water, [and] electricity," he said.

U.S. officials are also encouraged that the two international bids that were held for companies to develop Iraq's oil industry were free from corruption, and there is "a wide variety of international oil consortiums who are involved now in the southern oil fields in Iraq," he said.

Iraq now has a chance to "develop as a positive force in the region," with the reestablishment of diplomatic relations in the Middle East and beyond, and progress toward lifting the trade sanctions that were imposed by the international community in response to actions taken by Saddam Hussein's regime.

Corbin said Iraq has been chosen to host the 2011 Arab League Summit, and there has been "tangible progress" on removing the U.N. Security Council sanctions that were related to Iraq's weapons of mass destruction programs.

The United States has been working closely with Iraq to

get the sanctions lifted, as well as also preparing for the launch of discussions aimed at removing the sanctions that were imposed following Iraq's 1991 invasion of Kuwait once an Iraqi government is formed, he said.

"We're playing a supporting role," Corbin said. "We will, as always, support Iraq in all the international organizations, including the U.N. and others, but we'll be working cooperatively with the Iraqis" to support its reintegration into the region and the world, he said.

American Muslims Call for Volunteerism on September 11

Grass-roots coalition aims to continue trend of Muslim community service

By M. Scott Bortot
Staff Writer

Washington — A grass-roots coalition of Muslim Americans is calling on its community to do what Muslim Americans do all the time: give back to their country.

Since the summer of 2009, Muslim Americans have participated in thousands of community service projects around the country in response to President Obama's "United We Serve" campaign. As part of this effort, this year the coalition of groups and individuals is asking Muslim Americans to join "Muslim Serve," an initiative to spend September 11 in the service of others.

"Muslim Serve is about demonstrating how our Islamic values inspire us to serve humanity, and is meant to highlight the great contributions that the Muslim community has provided and continues to provide our great nation," said an Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) press release. "ISNA is proud to endorse this campaign, and we encourage all to participate in their community."

Zeenat Rahman, director of public policy for the Interfaith Youth Core, said Muslim Serve will help challenge misperceptions about Islam in America.

Rahman described how recent protests directed toward the Muslim community, including a planned Quran burning, made her feel that "we needed to revisit and tell the story again of Muslim-American contributions to the United States." She noted, however, that the 2010 date is not "a reaction to 9/11 but a progression of initiatives that was started last year."

The coalition comprises 15 individuals and organizations. Scholars Imam Zaid Shakir of Zaytuna College and Sherman Jackson at the University of Michigan endorse the Muslim Serve initiative and the Muslim Public Affairs Council, the Nawawi Foundation, and the Council for the Advancement of Muslim Professionals are asking their

communities to participate.

“The beautiful thing about this campaign is that it is owned by all of the community so all of the organizations participated,” Rahman said.

In last year’s “United We Serve: Muslim Americans Answer the Call” initiative, Muslims from all walks of life volunteered in projects to enrich society. Muslim Americans worked in soup kitchens, homeless shelters and prisoner reintegration programs, to name but a few activities. Muslim Americans exceeded an initial goal of 1,000 days of service by logging in more than 3,500 days of volunteering.

Zeba Iqbal, executive director of the Council for the Advancement of Muslim Professionals (CAMP), said Muslim Americans like herself participate in empowering their communities every day.

“It is just part of what we are doing,” Iqbal said about CAMP’s activities. Her organization is composed of Muslim professionals who work to empower each other not only in their careers, but also in their community and philanthropic efforts.

Iqbal said CAMP members in New York often volunteer at soup kitchens with Muslim and non-Muslim organizations and CAMP’s Chicago chapter organizes care packages for refugees with like-minded groups during Ramadan. The New York chapter is planning to hold a toy drive for sick children during September and they recently sent aid to flood victims in Pakistan.

As a sign of growing involvement in American civic life, CAMP is expanding. CAMP has chapters in the cities of New York, Philadelphia and Chicago and the state of New Jersey, with plans to start chapters in the state of California and the city of Washington.

Organizations and individuals involved with Muslim Serve are asking imams to discuss the campaign with their communities. As the day of service unfolds, Rahman said, efforts by Muslim Americans to help their neighbors will be recorded.

“We will be proactive in pitching human interest stories about what is really happening in communities and the positive contribution of Muslim communities,” she said.

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