



## **IFTHAR DINNER REMARKS**

Chargé d’Affaires – Mitchell Benedict  
August 27, 2010

Distinguished guests, honorable officials, members of the Muslim community... Thank you for coming this evening. As the new Deputy Chief of Mission, I welcome you on behalf of the people of the United States of America. We are here tonight to join our Muslim colleagues as they break the fast of Ramadan.

We are here tonight to reaffirm the friendship between our nations. And, we are here tonight to celebrate the tolerance and mutual respect that allow people of all religious traditions to break bread together in peace.

Sierra Leone and America have a long history of peaceful cooperation, and I am proud to be living and working in your beautiful country. As I learn more each day about your homeland, I would like to share some things about mine and especially about the role of Muslims in American society.

As President Barack Obama noted at an Ifthar dinner he hosted earlier this month: “Ramadan is a reminder that Islam has always been a part of America. The first Muslim ambassador to the United States, from Tunisia, was hosted by President Jefferson, who arranged a sunset dinner for his guest because it was Ramadan making it the first known Ifthar at the White House, more than 200 years ago.”

My country would not have been founded, would not have come into existence, would not be what it is today if not for people demanding and searching for religious freedom.



Thomas Jefferson said, 200 years ago, that freedom of religion is the most inalienable and sacred of human rights. Respect, tolerance, and acceptance of all religions is fundamental to who we are as a people and nation.

Just as in Sierra Leone, Muslims play an important role in America: they care for our sick and wounded, they teach in our universities, and they play an active role in public service. In short, they are citizens. Citizens who are free to retain their unique religious identity while forming part of a larger whole. This is the essence of our motto E PLURIBUS UNUM: out of many, one. I hear an echo of this idea in your own national motto: Unity, Freedom, Justice.

By coming together in this one house, united in our freedom, we are making a small but important contribution to a more just and tolerant world. Here, in the food and drink we share there is proof of our common humanity and hope for the future.

Let me close by saying that this is not my first Ifthar. Nor is it my first African Ifthar. I planned and attended several Ifthars while serving in Kenya, and I look forward to continuing this tradition in Sierra Leone. It is gatherings such as these that show the great strength of your nation and people, as they live and work in peace toward a better tomorrow for all.

I thank you for coming tonight and I look forward to working with you and your organizations in the coming years.

Thank you.