

Towards Our Bright Future Together

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Chief of Mission Residence

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, Friends all:

Salaam Alaikum

This is the fifth time that we are holding an Iftar, here in my home, in America's home in Brussels since I first arrived.

When I held the first one in 2009, I had newly arrived in Brussels and was a stranger in Belgium. And, truth be told, back then, I was a stranger to the Muslim Communities and the members of the communities were strangers to me. I knew little of Ramadan.

I had as of that time met in Washington as a private citizen with the heads of State from the Emirates and Bahrain to discuss world problems and ways we could work together. I had to that point visited Jordan and Turkey and seen some mosques as a tourist. But that was about the limits of my knowledge of and interaction with the Muslim communities and Ramadan when I had arrived four years ago in Belgium.

Back then, I knew simply that together we had to do better. I knew that for too long, together, we had let misunderstanding and mistrust dominate our relationship where brotherhood and pursuit of our common goals should have ruled.

I learned much that evening, I made many friends that evening, and I loved that evening greatly. I learned that for those within the brotherhood of man, we are indeed alike – Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, Jews -- we answer the call to prayer and we seek peace and prosperity for our family, our society and our planet. We can differ on our practices, but together we know that if we practice what is in our hearts, no differences can truly separate us.

After my second Iftar, my dear friend Abdallah, the then Ambassador of Saudi Arabia to Belgium who has now gone on to even greater responsibility representing his country at the U.N., reported on our Iftar in a column in the Al-Madina newspaper in Jeddah, echoing the sentiments of peace and friendship that we share. Our friendship had crossed oceans and was reaching hearts and minds far away. For me, it was a proud and a warm moment.

And now, I am here for my last Iftar as a United States Ambassador. I have so much sadness in leaving this amazing position and in leaving this wonderful country in a few days. I will miss the daily interaction with my colleagues and friends. I will miss daily the sites and sounds of Belgium. We will be back often for business, for consulting, for friends and even next month for three weddings.

But I leave also knowing that friends and friendships, with people, with communities, and with

countries, do not evaporate. They may not be seen daily but they remain, they are built on, and they grow. We will always have such friendship. And it will grow.

And I leave so much smarter than I was and with so much more knowledge than I had when I arrived in August 2009. I have come to know you, your organizations, your communities, and your countries. I know us – our shared dreams, our shared hopes for a better tomorrow together, our shared pursuit of mutual understanding and of a planet driven by peace and bright futures for our children and their children. I know where we have come, where we have worked together, where we need to go and where we need to continue to work together.

And I have had the honor of experiencing Iftar, and the holy month of Ramadan, with you and your communities.

I know that sharing one meal will never solve all of the problems that have given us trouble in the past and present challenges for the future. But as we share meals and ideas, and as friendships grow, we continue to build. Our relationships. Our futures. And the better futures for ourselves, our families, our communities, and our countries.

Looking ahead, I am optimistic. So very sad about personally leaving, but optimistic about where we can go and where we are going as we start – as we all do every day —our new tomorrows.

We think hard about the message of the future, of peace, of mutual prosperity, of brotherhood during this period of Ramadan, of intense devotion and reflection. Indeed though we have come so far, we have so much more to do. And no matter in what job, together, we will get there.

So thanks for four years. Thanks for a future together. Thanks to all of you for joining with us tonight. I wish you a very blessed Ramadan.
Thanks so much and all the best.