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Transcript: President Bush Attends Iftaar Dinner at the White House The State Dining Room

October 17, 2006

THE PRESIDENT: Please be seated. Good evening and "Ramadan Karim." Welcome to the White House. Laura and I are really glad you're here. This is the sixth year that we have been pleased to host an Iftaar at the White House. We're honored to be with you and once again we're honored to pay tribute to the month of Ramadan.

Islam is a religion that brings hope and comfort to more than a billion people around the world. It has transcended racial and ethnic divisions. It has given birth to a rich culture of learning and literature and science. And tonight we honor the traditions of a great faith by hosting the Iftaar here at the White House.

I'm so pleased our Secretary of State, Condi Rice, has joined us. Thank you, Madam Secretary. I'm pleased that Dr. Elias Zerhouni, who is the Director of the NIH, is with us. Good to see you, Elias. I thank Imam Eid, from the Islamic Institute of Boston, is with us. I welcome all the ambassadors and other members of the Diplomatic Corps.

Ramadan is the holiest month in the Muslim calendar. For Muslims in America and around the world, Ramadan is a special time of prayer and fasting, contemplation of God's greatness, and charity and service to those in need. And for people of all faiths, it is a good time to reflect on the values we hold in common, including love of family, gratitude to God, the importance of community, and a commitment to tolerance and religious freedom.

America is a land of many faiths, and we welcome and honor the Muslim faith in our nation. Our society is enriched by our Muslim citizens. Your commitment to your faith reminds us all of the precious gift of religious freedom in our country. America is a more hopeful nation because of the talents and generosity and compassion of our Muslim citizens.

Tonight we have with us a group of special guests -- American Muslims who are serving our country. We have with us New York City police officers and a EMT worker who risked their lives to save their fellow citizens on 9/11; a military doctor and a member of the Navy's Chaplain Corps; members of our Foreign Service; and military veterans who have served in Afghanistan and Iraq to protect our country and help those nations build free and democratic futures.

ISLAMABAD

Diplomatic Enclave, Ramna 5
Phone: 2080000
E-mail: infoisb@state.gov

KARACHI

Collector's Lane, 8 Abdullah Haroon Road
Phone: 5685170-9
E-mail: irckhi@state.gov

LAHORE

50, Empress Road
Phone: 6034000
E-mail: irclahore@state.gov

PESHAWAR

11, Hospital Road, Peshawar Cantt.
Phone: 279801-3, 285901-3

One of our guests is Farooq Muhammed. Farooq is the son of Pakistani immigrants, and was born and raised in Brooklyn. He spent the past decade with the New York City Fire Department, first as an emergency medical technician and now as a paramedic. Farooq was at the World Trade Center on 9/11, treating victims when the towers collapsed -- he narrowly escaped death himself. He also recently volunteered in the mountains of Kashmir, where he helped treat the victims of last year's devastating South Asian earthquake. Farooq's courage and compassion represent the best of the American spirit. Paramedic Muhammed is a proud Muslim; he is a patriotic American. And those are characteristics he shares with the other special American guests gathered in this room. All of you bring credit to your faith. You make America a better and stronger country, and we're honored by your presence tonight. (Applause.)

The United States also appreciates the many Muslim nations who stand with us in the war on terror -- some of whom are represented here tonight. You know that the majority of the victims of the terrorists have been innocent Muslims, and many of you have seen terrorist violence in your own cities and your streets. We welcome you here. We are proud to work with you to defeat the terrorists and extremists, and help bring a brighter future to millions of Muslim people throughout the world who yearn for moderation and peace.

On this special evening, we celebrate the millions of Muslims that we are proud to call American citizens. We honor the many Islamic nations that America is proud to call friends. And we renew the ties of friendship that should bind all who trace their faith back to God's call on Abraham.

Laura and I are grateful that you're here. Once again, I wish you a blessed Ramadan. And now Imam Eid will say the blessing.

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