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Remarks at Performance of Iraqi National Symphony Orchestra

Secretary Colin L. Powell

The Kennedy Center
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(6:10 p.m. EST)

SECRETARY POWELL: Thank you very much. Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you. Thank you so much.

President and Mrs. Bush, excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, I join you and Michael Kaiser in warmly welcoming the Iraqi National Symphony Orchestra to our nation's capital. I also would like to welcome the newly appointed Iraqi representative to the United States of America, Ms. Rend Rahim. Congratulations and welcome.

This evening, we will have the privilege of hearing one of the pioneer symphony orchestras in the Middle East. Tonight, we also will witness the historic reentry of Iraqi culture onto the world stage. Through long and difficult years, the dedicated musicians of the Iraqi National Symphony Orchestra that you see before you tonight have demonstrated a deep personal commitment to their art and to one another. Their orchestra is comprised of many different players, each contributing his or her own unique sound to the symphony.

So, too, the musicians embody the diversity of Iraq and the unity that comes from sharing a dream, the dream of performing the music they love in freedom. The orchestra testifies to the power of the arts to keep hope alive even under the cruelest oppressor. For the arts are the stuff of the human spirit, which no tyrant can crush. As it is for musicians the world over, to these Iraqi artists, music is life itself. And this wonderful orchestra is a symbol of normal life returning to the people of Iraq and of their reconnection to the world of music that is a living cultural legacy for them and for all mankind.

President Bush believes strongly that we must do all that we can to develop and deepen the cultural and educational ties between Iraq and America. Tonight's performance is among the first fruits of that far-reaching collaboration. Indeed, the Iraqi National Symphony Orchestra is one of the first exchange groups from any country to visit the United States under the auspices of the Department of State's new "[CultureConnect](#)" program. Americans and Iraqis also are working in partnership to sustain Iraq's cultural heritage through conservation and preservation efforts, museum management, library science, and archeology.

And next year, for the first time in a decade, 20 Fulbright Scholars from Iraq will be coming to the United States to study. I know that I speak for all of us here tonight when I say that our thoughts and prayers turn to the noble Iraqis, Americans and citizens from many other nations who are working together on the ground in Iraq building a future of hope for the Iraqi people. And President and Mrs. Bush, ladies and gentlemen, what you are about to hear is the music of hope, the sweet, sweet sound of freedom.

Thank you and enjoy the marvelous concert that is about to begin. Thank you.

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