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Remarks at the U.S.-Islamic World Forum

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(As Prepared)

Your Highness, Sheikh Haamid Emir of Qatar, OIC Secretary General Ihsanoglu, distinguished guests and friends, it's an honor and pleasure to be here with you. I thank the organizers of this Forum and the many partners, including the Qatari Government, for their hard work in making this conference so successful. I thank the Brookings project on U.S. policy toward the Islamic World. Brookings is a home for scholars and experts and over the years has made important contributions to public policy debate.

The theme of this year's U.S.-Islamic World Forum, "Leaders Effect Change," underscores the crucial role that leaders play in transforming societies. And as we all know, those leaders come not just from government, or business, or the great leaders of our faith communities -- leaders sometimes come from the most unlikely of places.

Last fall, my country mourned the death of a woman who never would have described herself as a great leader, but became one -- from a most unlikely place. She was a black woman living in the segregated south. She didn't have power, or wealth, or any position of particular influence -- she had something far more valuable: a quiet dignity and an unshakeable belief in justice.

When Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on the bus to a white man, she was tired after a long day's work as a seamstress -- but most of all, she was tired of a life of indignity and injustice in a country that was failing to live up to its founding conviction that all of us are created equal.

Rosa Parks' act of quiet defiance helped spark America's civil rights movement. She came to symbolize the conscience of my country, a country that still strives every day to live up to the pledge we make of liberty and justice for all. Rosa Parks reminds us that we should never underestimate the difference that one person of courage and conscience can make.

This fall will mark the 5th anniversary of a terrible day in America. I was working at the White House on September 11, and I will never forget the shock, and horror, and sorrow of realizing that terrorists had launched a massive and unprovoked attack,

killing thousands of innocent people.

Those attacks were acts of hate and murder inspired by a violent ideology that seeks to impose tyranny by force and fear. The contrast with the peaceful means and noble ends of Rosa Parks could not be starker. Yet those terror attacks also sparked a new recognition – that just as America must work every day to advance liberty and justice at home, we also have a vital interest in fostering them abroad. As President Bush said in his second inaugural: "For as long as whole regions of the world simmer in resentment and tyranny – prone to ideologies that feed hatred and excuse murder, violence will gather, and multiply in destructive power, and cross the most defended borders and raise a mortal threat. There is only one force of history that can break the reign of hatred and resentment, and expose the pretensions of tyrants, and reward the hopes of the decent and tolerant, and that is the force of human freedom." In the aftermath of September 11, America came to recognize that there will be no real security, no lasting peace, until America stands with those brave voices crying out for liberty and justice throughout the world.

Those voices sometimes come from unlikely places. I think of a young woman from Pakistan who was brutally gang-raped, then dared to speak out and challenge the status quo and foster change by saying that rape is always a terrible crime and never a matter of honor. For this young woman, speaking out could not have been easy; history suggests that advocating change rarely is. Change challenges us, shakes our certainty and our assumptions, make us uncomfortable. Change is frequently feared and fought, yet often, once it finally arrives, is seen in hindsight as not only necessary but also too long in coming. As Secretary Rice said in Cairo, "all great moral achievements begin with individuals who do not accept that the reality of today must also be the reality of tomorrow." Throughout history, the prospect of change has set people free to imagine a different and better world -- and great leaders not only see this potential, but seize it and help bring it about.

Throughout the world today, brave leaders -- some of them from unlikely places -- are challenging the status quo, advocating change, seeking to unleash that most powerful force of human freedom to make their societies more just, more honest, more open, more accountable.

A few hundred miles north of here, a heroic Iranian journalist, Akbar Ganji fights a lonely battle for liberty in his beloved land. Imprisoned for almost six years now, his so-called crime was daring to bring to light through his writing the involvement of government authorities in a series of killings of writers and dissidents. He represents a new generation of Iranians who will insist on change. The people of Iran desire liberty, they deserve liberty and one day they will make Iran's Government worthy of its great people. As Secretary Rice noted in her testimony this week before the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, America and our international partners are very concerned about the destabilizing policies of the Iranian regime throughout the region, policies that support -- and export -- terrorism and violent extremism. We are determined, as the Secretary said, to "actively confront the aggressive policies of this Iranian regime...at the same time, we are going to work to support the aspirations of the Iranian people for freedom in their own country."

In Kuwait, a brave woman named Roula al-Dashti spoke out to the men leading her country with a compelling message: "half a democracy is not a democracy." She challenged the status quo, recruited student leaders from Kuwait University to join her cause and helped women gain the right to vote and run for office in Kuwait.

Some of these leaders advocating change have paid a terrible price. In Egypt, Nobel Prize winning author Naguib Mahfouz can no longer write as a result of an attempt on his life by violent extremists. The only Arab author ever to be awarded a Nobel Prize for Literature, Mahfouz is beloved for his sensitive portrayals of Egyptian and Arab character. As a supporter of Anwar Sadat's peace initiative with Israel, he made a brave statement in favor of Egypt's future. His characters have become household words in Egypt and the Arab world, and those who tried to silence him instead made his voice even more influential.

In Lebanon, one year ago this week, Prime Minister Rafik Hariri was brutally murdered. Yet this enormous loss for Lebanon sparked a great change he would have welcomed in his life, as the Lebanese people discovered the power of their voices and demanded

an end to Syrian domination and occupation of their country.

And, tonight, we remember someone who should be with us but is not, Mustafa Akkad. A Muslim and an immigrant to America, he was a son of Aleppo who loved both America and his homeland. He tried through film to present an Islam that is compassionate, humane and spiritual. His death and that of his daughter in the Amman hotel bombings are tragic losses for all who appreciated his art and his spirit.

Throughout the Islamic world, people are beginning to make their voices heard in free elections. I'll never forget waking up in the morning and seeing the pictures in my newspaper, somewhat blurry because of the tears in my eyes -- of the long lines of men and women in Afghanistan and later Iraq -- defying the threat of death to vote for a better future -- and raising purple ink-stained fingers in triumph. Think about the enormity of what we have witnessed in a very short time: two elections in Afghanistan for a president and a parliament; three elections in Iraq for a constitution, an interim and permanent government, two in Egypt for President and Parliament, two in the Palestinian territories, one in Lebanon, and municipal elections in Saudi Arabia. Some of these elections were more open and freer than others, each had a very different outcome, yet each was a part of fostering freedom by encouraging debate, stimulating discussion, allowing greater participation of people who deserve to chart their own course to their future.

Recently, the Palestinian people had an election and voted for change. I want the Palestinian people to know that America shares your hope for a better life and your dream of a state of your own living side by side in peace with Israel, and we are working to help you achieve both. We congratulate you on conducting free, fair and open elections. You made your voices heard -- you want better services and an end to corruption. We also believe you want to live and work and raise your children in peace. President Bush spoke of that dream -- of two free and democratic states living side by side in peace and freedom. That vision of course is only possible if we all accept the idea of two states. The two-state concept is at the heart of two peace treaties, and many international decisions, agreements and understandings -- yet it is still not accepted by some. But to live, to work, to go to school, to live free and productive lives, people must feel free from violence and terror -- and must understand that others should have that same freedom from fear. America and the international community, which care deeply about the Palestinian people, have quite reasonably said that we must all share the same principles -- principles we have agreed on through years of negotiations-- to arrive at our common goal of Palestinian statehood. And so to deliver on its promises to achieve a better future for the Palestinian people, it is the responsibility of any Palestinian government to renounce violence and terror, to recognize Israel's right to exist and to accept previous agreements and obligations, including the roadmap. This is the only way forward.

And let me be clear: America believes in democracy even when we strongly disagree with the views of those elected, just as America believes in free speech even when we are deeply offended by what is sometimes said.

Of course, with freedom comes responsibility, *maa-alhurria*, *mas'uliya*. Governments have responsibilities to their people -- to establish the rule of law, protect human rights, including the rights of women and minorities, fight corruption and widen political participation. Elections are an important part of democracy, but they are only a part -- a thriving democracy requires independent political parties, non-governmental organizations, a free press, and civic institutions that allow people to assemble freely and engage in discussion and debate without fear or government harassment. The challenge for leaders in this region is to listen to their people's call for greater freedom: allow them to form political parties, let them gather and speak more freely, give them access to newsprint so they can run their own newspapers.

In a free society, individuals have community responsibilities as well. We have a responsibility to respect and appreciate, even celebrate, the views of others. In a genuine democracy, all have a right to express their views, share ideas and participate as equals. In a society built on freedom and justice, we have the right to offend one another but the responsibility to do our best not to. In my country certain racial and ethnic slurs are no longer used by civil people even though there is no law prohibiting it -- and while newspapers would be free to publish them most would never do so -- just as many American newspapers chose not to reprint

the cartoons depicting the Prophet because they recognize they are deeply offensive, even blasphemous to the precious convictions of our Muslim friends and neighbors.

As we discuss these often difficult issues, we must not allow the extremes to define us -- and that's frankly a very difficult task in a world of instant news where rumors can spark riots and violence gets far more attention than peaceful protest. Both Western and Islamic voices have denounced the cartoons as offensive. Both Western and Muslim voices have called for tolerance and respect. Both Western and Islamic voices denounced the violence. Protestors were wrong to threaten lives and vandalize property; governments and others were wrong to try to manipulate genuine anger -- yet thousands of people also marched peacefully, exercising their own right to express themselves. I also hope that governments, journalists and others will take this opportunity for introspection and speak out forcefully against anti-Semitic and anti-Christian statements that appear too often in the publications of this region.

Five years after September 11, some are claiming the cartoon controversy speaks to a clash of civilizations -- but that is exactly the clash our enemies are trying to provoke and we must not allow it.

Five years after the sudden fires of September 11, we have learned a great deal.

First, Americans, the peoples of the Islamic world, and decent people throughout the world face a common threat, and we must face it together. Terrorists attacked not only America, but everyone who dares disagree with them or stands in their way or those who simply find themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time. Since September 11, terrorists have continued to strike, killing hundreds of innocent victims in Afghanistan, Indonesia, Iraq, Jordan, Egypt, Great Britain, Russia, and Spain and many others. And many of those killed were Muslims.

Second, our opponents are trying to make this a matter of religion, when theirs is truly a political ideology of tyranny and hate. Urging young people to strap bombs on their bodies to kill themselves and as many innocents as possible is not a legitimate tenet of any faith. Islam, Christianity, Judaism -- all the world's great religions -- view life as precious, and the taking of innocent life as wrong. We know from their own statements and writings that the extremists' real agenda is take over one or more of the proud nation states in the Islamic world and impose a super-state in which violent extremists would dictate the fate of millions. The people of Afghanistan know better than anyone the political agenda these extremists want to impose on the rest of us -- because they were forced to endure it. The Taliban stifled debate, creativity, expression. Listening to music, watching television, flying kites -- even laughing out loud -- were banned. Women were virtual prisoners in their homes, unable to freely go to the market, banned from working even if they had no husband or other means of support. Little girls were not allowed to go to school or even to learn to read at home. The people of Afghanistan have lived the ideology our opponents espouse, and in a recent poll an overwhelming majority rejected it. Eighty-two percent said overthrowing the Taliban government was good for Afghanistan. Muslim communities throughout the world should take note that the Muslims who know the violent extremists the best emphatically reject them.

Third, all of us must work to foster greater interfaith understanding and dialogue. People's faith convictions are deeply held, and precious. I know, because mine are to me. I worry that America's freedom of religion is sometimes mistaken for freedom from religion. Americans believe in the separation of church and state -- that means our government does not dictate how Americans can worship -- people are free to worship as they wish. Many Americans are deeply committed to their faith, and all people of faith have a great deal in common. As a Christian, my Savior says my highest priorities are to love God and love my neighbor -- and my Muslim and Jewish friends share that belief. Americans respect all religions, including Islam and an estimated 7 million Muslims live, work and worship freely in my country. As a government official, I represent people of all faiths, as well as those who have no faith at all. In a country as diverse as ours, we must all honor the beliefs held sacred by each other -- and the best way to do this is through dialogue and respect and understanding.

Finally, I believe it is incumbent on all of us to work to foster common interests and common values between our diverse peoples. We have much to learn from each other and we have more that can unite us than divide us. We all value education and want its benefits for our children. We value science and technology and want to explore new frontiers together. We all want to protect our families. We all want to live honorable and decent lives, lives that we hope can make a difference for good.

I view my job as waging peace. And I use the word waging very intentionally because achieving peace, helping to bring about a freer and better world will take the wholehearted commitment of each of us. As this conference suggests, leaders effect change -- and I want to take this opportunity to challenge every one of us -- in government, in business, in journalism, in think tanks -- and a lot of individuals out there who may become leaders from unlikely places -- to raise our voices against terror and to confront the culture of hate. We must come together as a world community to say no matter how legitimate the grievance, no matter how valid the cause -- the wanton killing of innocents is not ever right and not ever acceptable. We must do for terror what was done to slavery and make it an international pariah. If we truly desire to reach a better understanding of each other, if we truly want our dialogue to produce results, we have to stop demonizing each other and replace hate with hope.

My country is known as a land of opportunity, where people who are willing to work hard can achieve their dreams. As a mother who loves my own and other children dearly -- I want that opportunity for all the world's children. America works and will continue to work with the many nations of the Islamic world in a spirit of partnership -- we seek to be a partner for peace, a partner for progress, a partner for a better life for all our peoples. And I am convinced that together we can effect change and bring about a world of greater liberty and justice for all. Thank you.

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