

Remarks at the Iftar Dinner

July 25, 2013

The President. Thank you. Good evening, everybody. Please have a seat.

Let me begin by saying welcome to all of you. I'm so glad that all of you were able to attend. I want to acknowledge members of the diplomatic corps; we have Members of Congress here, including Keith Ellison and Andre Carson. Where's Andre? He's usually not hard to miss. [*Laughter*] There you go. Leaders from my administration and guests from all across our Nation, and to all of you and to Muslim Americans all across the country and around the world: *Ramadan kareem*.

Here at the White House, we now have a tradition of celebrating the sacred days of our various faiths. And these are occasions to reflect on the teachings that so many religions share: to celebrate the diversity that defines our country and to reaffirm one of our most deeply held beliefs that here in America and around the world, people should be free to choose the God that they worship however they choose, to practice their faiths freely, or to practice no faith at all.

For Muslims, Ramadan is a time of reflection, a chance to demonstrate one's devotion to God through prayer and through fasting. But it's also a time for family and friends to come together—as we do tonight—in a spirit of love and respect, to renew our obligations to one another, as well as to renew our commitment to our neighbors and helping the most needy among us. For as the Koran teaches, "Whoever does an atom's weight of good, will see its results."

Throughout our history, Islam has contributed to the character of our country, and Muslim Americans and their good works have helped to build our Nation. And we've seen the results. We've seen those results in generations of Muslim immigrants: farmers and factory workers, helping to lay the railroads and build our cities. Muslim innovators who helped build some of our highest skyscrapers and who helped to unlock the secrets of our universe.

Every day, Muslim Americans are helping to shape the way that we think and the way that we work and the way that we do business. And that's the spirit that we celebrate tonight: the dreamers, the creators whose ideas are pioneering new industries, creating new jobs and unleashing new opportunities for all of us.

We celebrate entrepreneurs like Shazi Visram, whose parents came here from Pakistan and Tanzania to give their children a better life. And as the founder, CEO, and "Chief Mom" of Happy Family—[*laughter*]—Shazi is a leader in affordable, organic foods for children, which makes Michelle very happy. In just 7 years, she's grown to 58 full-time employees, 75 part-time working moms, and they're on track to hit \$100 million in revenue this year. So no wonder she's been called a "Rockstar of the New Economy."

By the way, every time that they sell one of their products, they contribute to global efforts to end child hunger. So Shazi is not only just an outstanding businesswoman, but also a leader that all of us can emulate.

We celebrate innovators like Aunim Hossain. In one of his first ventures, he designed a hand-held device to help detect breast cancer. Now, as the creator of Tista Games, he's setting

his sights on the video game industry. But Aunim also has a bigger vision, and that's harnessing the talents and energy of hundreds of millions of gamers around the world to do social good. And he imagines applying the same high-quality stories and graphics in his games to the next generation of educational material to help children learn. So we're very appreciative for Aunim for the good work that he's doing.

We celebrate pioneers like Dr. Iya Khalil, whose father came here from Libya to finish his education; she grew up watching him in his lab and dreaming of being a scientist herself. Today, she calls herself a recovering physicist, and she puts her talents to work as an entrepreneur. She cofounded her own bio-tech research company, which today employs almost 50 people and is a leader in genomic medicine, making it possible for doctors to prescribe personalized treatment plans for patients with diseases like cancer and giving new hope to people around the world. So we thank Iya for her efforts.

So Shazi, Aunim, Iya, and so many of you who have traveled here tonight: Each of you have traveled your own path, but each of you have also lived out an American story. You started with an idea, something no one had done before. You took a leap of faith. And with daring and determination, you brought your dream to life. And that's what we Americans have been doing for more than two centuries. That's what we do every day: We work a little harder, we aim a little higher, and we keep striving to create more opportunity for our children and future generations.

And of course, this isn't just the American Dream, it's the aspiration of people around the world. It's the basic human desire for progress, to find dignity that comes from work, to give our children something better. These yearnings for economic freedom and opportunity, just as much as political freedom, are at the root of so much of the change we've seen around the world in the past few years, including in North Africa and in the Middle East.

And that's why, even as we support citizens seeking to determine their own destiny, a key part of our engagement with Muslim communities around the world has to be supporting economic opportunity and entrepreneurship. So we launched our annual entrepreneurship summit to spur innovation and business growth in Muslim communities. I'm going to be attending one when I go to the ASEAN meeting in Southeast Asia later this year. In my second term, we're going to keep helping young entrepreneurs pursue their dreams and create opportunities, the kind of prosperity that can transform lives around the world.

Whoever does an atom's weight of gold [good]^{*} will see its results. And when I look around the room tonight, beyond the communities you represent, I see all the profound good that's been accomplished. So all of us are seeing the results of your good work: the opportunities to create for your colleagues and your communities and for our country. So I want to thank you for what you do, and for reminding us that our Nation is stronger and more successful when we harness the talents of all Americans, no matter where we come from or what we look like, what our last names are or how we pray.

So God bless you all. May you and your families have a blessed Ramadan. And with that, I know people are hungry—[laughter]—let's eat. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:50 p.m. in the State Dining at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Iya Khalil, executive vice president and cofounder, GNS Healthcare.

^{*} White House correction.

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