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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, who's 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.

One of our guests is Farooq Muhammad. 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 Muhammad 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.

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.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:52 p.m. in the State Dining Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Imam Talal Y. Eid, founder and director of religious affairs, Islamic Institute of Boston.

Remarks on Signing the Military Commissions Act of 2006

October 17, 2006

Please be seated. Welcome to the White House on an historic day. It is a rare occasion when a President can sign a bill he knows will save American lives; I have that privilege this morning.

The Military Commissions Act of 2006 is one of the most important pieces of legislation in the war on terror. This bill will allow the Central Intelligence Agency to continue its program for questioning key terrorist leaders and operatives like Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the man believed to be the mastermind of the September the 11th, 2001, attacks on our country. This program has been one of the most successful intelligence efforts in American history. It has helped prevent attacks on our country. And the bill I sign today will ensure that we can continue using this vital tool to protect the American people for years to come. The Military Commissions Act will also allow us to prosecute captured terrorists for war crimes through a full and fair trial.

Last month, on the fifth anniversary of 9/11, I stood with Americans who lost family members in New York and Washington and Pennsylvania. I listened to their stories of loved ones they still miss. I told them America would never forget their loss. Today I can tell them something else: With the bill I'm about to sign, the men our intelligence officials believe orchestrated the murder of nearly 3,000 innocent people will face justice.

I want to thank the Vice President for joining me today. Mr. Vice President, appreciate you. Secretary Don Rumsfeld, I appreciate your service to our country. I want to thank Attorney General Al Gonzales; General Mike Hayden, Director of the Central Intelligence Agency; General Pete Pace, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

I appreciate very much Senator John Warner, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, and Congressman Duncan Hunter, chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, for joining us today. I want to thank both of these men for their leadership. I appreciate Senator Lindsey Graham from South Carolina joining us; Congressman Jim Sensenbrenner, chairman of the House Judiciary Committee; Congressman Steve Buyer of Indiana; Congressman Chris Cannon of Utah, thank you all for coming.

The bill I sign today helps secure this country, and it sends a clear message: This Nation is patient and decent and fair, and we will never back down from the threats to our freedom.

One of the terrorists believed to have planned the 9/11 attacks said he hoped the attacks would be the beginning of the end of America. He didn't get his wish. We are as determined today as we were on the morning of September the 12th, 2001. We'll meet our obligation to protect our people, and no matter how long it takes, justice will be done.

When I proposed this legislation, I explained that I would have one test for the bill Congress produced: Will it allow the CIA program to continue? This bill meets that test. It allows for the clarity our intelligence professionals need to continue questioning terrorists and saving lives. This bill provides legal protections that ensure our military and intelligence personnel will not have to fear lawsuits filed by terrorists simply for doing their jobs.

This bill spells out specific, recognizable offenses that would be considered crimes in the handling of detainees so that our men and women who question captured terrorists can perform their duties to the fullest extent of the law. And this bill complies with both the spirit and the letter of our international obligations. As I've said before, the United States does not torture. It's against our laws, and it's against our values.

By allowing the CIA program to go forward, this bill is preserving a tool that has saved American lives. The CIA program helped us gain vital intelligence from Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and Ramzi bin al-Shibh, two of the men believed to have helped plan and facilitate the 9/11 attacks. The CIA program helped break up a cell of 17 southeastern Asian terrorist operatives who were being groomed for attacks inside the United States. The CIA program helped us uncover key operatives in Al Qaida's biological weapons program, including a cell developing anthrax to be used in terrorist attacks.

The CIA program helped us identify terrorists who were sent to case targets inside the United States, including financial buildings in major cities on the east coast. And the CIA program helped us stop the planned strike on U.S. marines in Djibouti, a planned attack on the U.S. consulate in Karachi, and a plot to hijack airplanes and fly them into Heathrow Airport and Canary Wharf in London.

Altogether, information from terrorists in CIA custody has played a role in the capture or questioning of nearly every senior Al Qaida member or associate detained by the United States and its allies since this program began. Put simply, this program has been one of the most vital tools in our war against the terrorists. It's been invaluable both to America and our allies. Were it not for this program, our intelligence community believes that Al Qaida and its allies would have succeeded in launching another attack against the American homeland. By allowing our intelligence professionals to continue this vital program, this bill will save American lives. And I look forward to signing it into law.

The bill I'm about to sign also provides a way to deliver justice to the terrorists we have captured. In the months after 9/11, I authorized a system of military commissions to try foreign terrorists accused of war crimes. These commissions were similar to those used for trying enemy combatants in the Revolutionary War and the Civil War and World War II. Yet the legality of the system I established was challenged in the court, and the Supreme Court ruled that the military commissions needed to be explicitly authorized by the United States Congress.

And so I asked Congress for that authority, and they have provided it. With the Military Commission Act, the legislative and executive branches have agreed on a system that meets our national security needs. These military commissions will provide a fair trial, in which the accused are presumed innocent, have access to an attorney, and can hear all the evidence against them. These military commissions are lawful; they are fair; and they are necessary.

When I sign this bill into law, we will use these commissions to bring justice to the men believed to have planned the attacks of September the 11th, 2001. We'll also seek to prosecute those believed responsible for the attack on the USS *Cole*, which killed 17 American sailors 6 years ago last week. We will seek to prosecute an operative believed to have been involved in the bombings of the American Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, which killed more than 200 innocent people and wounded 5,000 more. With our actions, we will send a clear message to those who kill Americans: We will find you, and we will bring you to justice.

Over the past few months, the debate over this bill has been heated, and the questions raised can seem complex. Yet, with the distance of history, the questions will be narrowed and few: Did this generation of Americans take the threat seriously, and did we do what it takes to defeat that threat? Every Member of Congress who voted for this bill has helped our Nation rise to the task that history has given us. Some voted to support this bill even when the majority of their party voted the other way. I thank the legislators who brought this bill to my desk for their conviction, for their vision, and for their resolve.

There is nothing we can do to bring back the men and women lost on September the 11th, 2001. Yet we'll always honor their memory, and we will never forget the way they were taken from us. This Nation will call evil by its name. We will answer brutal murder with patient justice. Those who kill the innocent will be held to account.

With this bill, America reaffirms our determination to win the war on terror. The passage of time will not dull our memory or sap our nerve. We will fight this war with confidence and with clear purpose. We will protect our country and our people. We will work with our friends and allies across the world to defend our way of life. We will leave behind a freer, safer, and more peaceful world for those who follow us.

And now, in memory of the victims of September the 11th, it is my honor to sign the Military Commissions Act of 2006 into law.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:35 a.m. in the East Room at the White House. S. 3930, approved October 17, was assigned Public Law No. 109–366. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Remarks at a Swearing-In Ceremony for Mary E. Peters as Secretary of Transportation

October 17, 2006

Thank you very much. Good afternoon. We are here to congratulate Mary Peters on