

## Remarks at Iftar Dinner

September 2, 2010

Ambassador Howard W. Gutman  
Chief of Mission Residence  
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, Friends all:  
Salaam Alikum

One year ago, my wife Michelle Loewinger and I welcomed you into what was our new home, America's home here in Brussels. Having then just arrived in Brussels, it was the first event we had hosted in this home and in this room.

We were strangers then having never met. But even then, we felt the warmth in this room. A new day. A new beginning. For me, for my country, for our relationship together.

A year later, we have come a long way. Many of us have become friends. The kind of friend who brings a smile as soon as we see each other in the distance, even before we get close enough to shake hands and to say "hi." So Michelle and I are truly honored to join with you again tonight to break the fast this evening, during this holy month of Ramadan. Ramadan Mubarak.

We have indeed come a long way in understanding each other fully, trusting each other no matter what, working together as hard as we can to reach our shared goal of a safer, more peaceful planet for us all and mainly for our children.

We have done much together. We have seen the future together. One month after our last Iftar dinner, on October 3, 2009, Michelle, my son Chase and I brought some young Hollywood actors to the Maison des Cultures et de la Cohésion Sociale in Molenbeek. It even made the cover of Molenbeek Magazine. The girls of the community center put on a beautiful song and dance performance. It was the show of the future.

We also had a reception for the Hollywood actors here in my ballroom. Many teenagers attended. My friends, the students from Serge Creuz School, were here. Princess Astrid's daughters. The Minister of Defense's son. Belgians who could wear crowns; Belgians with blond hair; Belgians with head scarves; all together, clapping and singing together along with the music. It too was a show of the future.

I went with the artist Jan De Cock to walk around Cureghem. Many see Cureghem as a glass half empty. But talk to Jan, talk to the Mayor, talk to community leaders. Cureghem is about what can be.

And then I had my most important visit of my entire first year in Belgium. It was not to Laeken to see the King. Not to visit the Prime Minister. Nor the Parliament.

It was to Serge Creuz School in Molenbeek. It was the loudest and longest ovation I have received in Belgium. But it was not for me. It was for us. For my President, For the leaders in this room, for our new beginning together. It was the most important show of our future.

And then the most beautiful chorus of the U.S. National Anthem. And no group of Belgians ever sang their national anthem better than this group.

But even though we have come so very far, we have not yet arrived. Even though we have done so much together, we have so much still to do.

My President in his Ramadan address discusses the protection of religious liberty and controversy emerges and at times turns ugly. Peace talks blossom in the Middle East and then the few who use violence to try to undermine the peaceful will of the many kill innocent bystanders.

As nations rally to join the brotherhood of coordinated nuclear peace, one nation alone insists on threatening us all.

Can we not do better? Don't our children deserve better? Don't we all realize that the problems that we face that unite us are far greater than any differences or prejudices that have previously divided us? Don't we know that in Washington, Brussels and Cairo; in Ankara and Rabat; in Tel Aviv and Amman? Don't our children know it now?

We think hard about this message of peace, of mutual prosperity, of brotherhood during this period of Ramadan, of intense devotion and reflection. We will understand it in two weeks on Yom Kippur, and on Good Friday. We will understand it on Christmas and Kwansaa and Chanukah. There are no zero sum games – we all rise together or none of us can truly prosper.

Indeed though we have come so far, we have so much more to do. And with your help, I will go into Islamic centers and living rooms in Muslim communities across Belgium. We will have more meals, but not as Muslims, Jews, Catholics, or Protestants, not even as Americans or Belgians, but as parents and children, as husbands and wives, as citizens of our planet.

It doesn't happen with just one iftar. But we have no time to waste.

So thanks to all of you for joining with us tonight. I wish you a very blessed Ramadan.