



Weekly Special Report



Produced by the Public Affairs Section

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U.S. Muslims Observe Ramadan in Supportive Environment

By Lauren Monsen
Staff Writer

Washington -- Muslims in the United States typically observe Ramadan and fulfill their other religious obligations with the encouragement and support of non-Muslim friends, colleagues and neighbors, say U.S. State

Department officials Seema Matin and William Lawrence.

"I have always found that my non-Muslim colleagues and friends are very supportive during this "holy" month of Ramadan," Matin told America.gov. She recalled that when she was in college, many of her non-Muslim classmates expressed

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Muslim girls break the fast before saying prayers at an iftar in Paterson, New Jersey. (© AP Images)

Two New U.S. Programs Helping Tanzanians Live Better Lives

By Charles W. Corey
Staff Writer

Washington -- The people of Tanzania will be able to live better lives because of two new U.S. programs announced August 28 during the Washington visit of Tanzanian President Jakaya Kikwete and his delegation -- Just



Lugonda Magaiwa harvests a new variety of chick-pea seed he obtained through a USAID program at his farm in Shinyanga, Tanzania.

one day before Kikwete met with President Bush at the White House.

One program, sponsored by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), involves a "20 million joint credit guarantee being ne-

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U.S. Muslims Observe Ramadan in Supportive Environment . . .

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solidarity with her by joining in the daytime fasting that Ramadan requires. "At work, many of my colleagues will try not to eat or drink around me, and I am always touched by their thoughtfulness," she said.

Matin, an American-born Muslim whose parents emigrated to the United States from Pakistan, teamed up with Lawrence -- a convert to Islam -- to co-host a webchat and answer questions from online participants about Muslim life in the United States.

Newly arrived Muslims usually adapt very well to the United States because historically "immigrants from different lands have come to this country and have been able to integrate within a generation," said Matin. "Of course, this requires the immigrants to reach out of their own cultural comfort zone and get involved and engage with their local community and neighborhood. I think the most important part of integrating into American society is to understand that you are an American and I don't see yourself as separate from mainstream society."

Americans, she said, are among "the most welcoming and friendliest people you will find."

Asked whether the United States bars women from publicly wearing the hijab (the traditional headscarf worn by many, but not all, Muslim women), Matin replied that the U.S. Constitution protects the wearing of all religious symbols, including the hijab. "I have never had any problems wearing the hijab in the United

States," she said. In some Western societies, "there are misconceptions about the hijab," but "I think they will change," she added. "I think it's important for people to know that for many of us in America, wearing the hijab is a personal choice something that was not forced upon us by our parents or spouses."

Iftars, the dinners served at sunset to break the Ramadan daytime fast, often are shared by Muslims and non-Muslims, since U.S. mosques almost always welcome public participation. "But it isn't just the Muslim Americans who invite people to iftars in fact, some of my non-Muslim friends have invited me to iftars in their home," said Matin. "Just recently, one of my dearest friends invited me to his home for iftar and said that he and his wife -- both non-Muslim -- would even prepare the meal with halal meat that they were going to purchase specifically for this occasion. I was really moved by their kind gesture."

Interfaith events are hosted by many U.S. mosques during Ramadan, and also at other times of the year, to promote peace and understanding. "These are always very pleasant occasions for everyone," said Matin.

According to Lawrence, Americans have become more knowledgeable about Islam in the last several years, in keeping with the rapid growth of the U.S. Muslim population. "I converted to Islam in 1994," he said. "When I was young, few people in the United States knew what Ramadan was. Now nearly every American has heard of Ramadan and all Americans now know we have mil-

lions of Muslims in the U.S. Information about Islam has increased greatly."

The White House traditionally honors Ramadan by hosting an iftar, as does the State Department, said Lawrence.

In response to a question about building trust between the Islamic world and the West, Lawrence suggested that the two entities are not entirely separate. "I would like to point out that the Muslim world includes elements of the West, and the Western world includes large numbers of Muslims, so blending is part of the process," he said. "Trust starts with trustworthiness. It also includes respect, and listening, and tolerance for different points of view. Ramadan is an excellent time of year to spend more time listening and reflecting and trust-building."

On the subject of why U.S. Muslims are well integrated into the larger society, Matin said the nation's ethnic and religious diversity fosters social inclusion, and U.S. laws forbidding discrimination reinforce that concept. During Ramadan, Muslims go to work, attend school and maintain their usual schedules, while also adhering to Islamic customs. "I think America is unique in this regard that you can integrate into mainstream society without completely giving up your traditions and values," said Matin.

(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://www.america.gov>) ♦

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gotiated with CRDB Bank PLC and the African Development Bank. The credit guarantee would increase access to credit for Tanzania's small farmers and agribusinesses and promote greater agricultural output, employment and economic growth throughout the country.

A second program, announced by the U.S. Trade and Development Agency (USTDA), awards more than \$ 620,000 to establish operational protocols for implementing and enforcing regulations for electricity, petroleum and natural gas based on the best international practices.

Both programs underscore the important relationship between the United States and Tanzania, Acting USAID Deputy Administrator Jim Kunder told an audience gathered at USAID headquarters in Washington.

USTDA Deputy Director Leocadia Mak told the audience that energy is very important to the economic development of Tanzania. "Without energy, there would not be the possibility for industry cold storage for the agricultural products there would not be power for telecommunications and there would not be the ability to bring cold storage for medicines and other medical devices."

Mak said the grant should help promote the establishment of more public-private partnerships.

"The agricultural sector in Tanzania is a major driver of economic growth," Kunder said, employing approximately 80 percent of the country's population. Almost a third

of Tanzania's gross domestic product is from the agricultural sector.

Unfortunately, farmers and agribusinesses, according to Kunder, "often face difficulty in accessing credit because the sector is perceived by financial institutions as risky for investment."



Presidents Jakaya Kikwete and George W. Bush in front of Air Force One in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, February 15, 2003

Credit guarantees can help farmers and agribusinesses access financing that would allow them to expand their operations, with benefits going to the entire country, Kunder told the audience.

Credit guarantees are an important tool for economic development, he said, "because they leverage existing private-sector resources, resulting in expanded financial services to new borrowers."

What is key, Kunder said, is that with credit guarantees, banks and farmers can develop relationships and protocols so eventually farmers and entrepreneurs will be able to seek credit from banks in Tanzania without having to rely on guarantee

programs.

Kunder praised the "enormous" level of entrepreneurship in Africa and Tanzania's private-sector economy. He called the joint guarantee program a "cornerstone" of the African Entrepreneurship Facility -- a groundbreaking public-private initiative launched by USAID Administrator Henrietta Fore to help expand the private sector in Africa.

In his remarks, President Kikwete, who is also chairman of the African Union, called credit the critical link in moving the nation and its farmers from subsistence to a production surplus and out of poverty.

He readily acknowledged the difficulty of the task because "banks don't like to lend to small farmers."

Kikwete recalled that when he was minister of finance, he saw this reluctance firsthand when the bankers told him "Forget it. It's too risky, too unpredictable."

Since then, he said, he has sought ways to help. "This announcement has made my day. I am sure when Tanzanians get the message that this facility has been created, they will be thankful that someone has heard their cries and is ready to take action."

President Kikwete was in Washington on a three-day visit at the invitation of President Bush, who visited Tanzania, Benin, Rwanda, Ghana and Liberia during a February 15-21 trip.) ♦

Rice's Trip Signals New Beginning in U.S.-Libya Relations

By Merle D. Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington -- Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's trip to Libya signifies a new beginning in U.S.-Libyan relations.

Normalized relations between the two countries enables the expansion of bilateral cooperation in a number of areas, including education and culture, commerce, science and technology, security and human rights, State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said at a September 2 news briefing.

In addition to Libya, Rice will visit Portugal, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco from September 4 to September 7, he said.

Rice becomes the first secretary of state to visit Libya since John Foster Dulles in 1951.

It's indicative of the kind of evolving relationship that we have, one in which we are building trust, we are building on areas of mutual interest and mutual benefit, McCormack said. It's also an important milestone in marking the success of this administration's nonproliferation policy.

The relationship improved dramatically in 2001 when Libya accepted responsibility for the Lockerbie terrorist bombing and announced that



*Sean McCormack
State Department spokesman*

it would halt its pursuit of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons. The United States has removed many sanctions against Libya and also has removed Libya from its State Sponsors of Terrorism list.

The relationship took an even greater step forward when the United States and Libya signed a claims settlement agreement August 14. The settlement for outstanding lawsuits includes victims of the 1986 terrorist attack on a Berlin disco that killed three people and wounded 229 and the 1988 terrorist bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, that killed 270 people. It also provides for Libyans killed in 1986 when U.S. warplanes bombed Tripoli and Benghazi, reportedly leading to the

death of 40 people.

The conclusion of this agreement has been made possible also by action by the American Congress, which passed a new law "Libyan Claims Resolution Act" that President Bush signed on August 4, said Ambassador David Welch, U.S. assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs.

While in Tripoli, Libya's capital, Rice is scheduled to meet with Libyan leader Muammar Qadhafi, McCormack said. The two will discuss several bilateral issues -- including human rights -- during their meeting.

McCormack said during meetings in Portugal, Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco, Rice will discuss bilateral and regional issues that will include the president's freedom agenda in the region, building democratic institutions, the Israeli-Palestinian issue, counterterrorism cooperation, and efforts at strengthening democratic and economic reforms.

(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://www.america.gov>) ♦

Republicans Encouraged to Aid Those Affected by Hurricane Gustav

By Michelle Austein
Staff Writer

St. Paul, Minnesota -- Having limited the opening day of the Republican National Convention on September 1 to official party business, presumed presidential nominee John McCain encouraged delegates to help those affected by Hurricane Gustav.



FedEx Corp. and the Red Cross, set up an operation at the nearby Minneapolis Convention Center to assemble aid packages for the region.

Other groups heeded the call for help as well. Many festivities planned for delegates and political leaders in St. Paul and neighboring Minneapolis have been restructured to focus on raising money for humanitarian aid. Even in media lounges, where members of the press can get free food

and drinks, staff members' tip jars were replaced with bowls asking for assistance funds.

As the hurricane struck the Gulf Coast region on the opening day of the convention, McCain and other party leaders encouraged delegates and other convention participants to help those impacted by the storm. "It's time to open our hearts and wallets ... for those American citizens under the shadow of a natural disaster," McCain said August 31.

Party leaders echoed McCain's word inside the convention hall. As he called the convention to order, Republican Party Chairman Mike Duncan said, "We respond and we take care of our own." He then asked delegates to pull out their cell phones and text-message the Red Cross with a donation pledge.

First lady Laura Bush and potential first lady Cindy McCain also asked delegates to donate to the cause, promoting a Web site (<http://www.causegreater.com>) for those interested in donating to relief efforts.

"When such events occur, we are reminded that first, we are all Americans -- and that our shared American ideals will always transcend political parties and partisanship," Laura Bush said.

would ask that each one of us commit to join together to aid those in need as quickly as possible," Cindy McCain said.

Outside the convention hall, the party quickly organized fundraisers and, with the help of Target Corp.,

The Republican Party chartered flights for delegates from the states affected by the hurricane -- including Louisiana, Texas and Mississippi -- who wanted to return home to deal with the storm's impact.

LEADERS OF BOTH PARTIES FOCUS ON GULF COAST

McCain and his running mate, Alaska Governor Sarah Palin, toured an emergency operations center in Mississippi ahead of the storm August 31. McCain visited a disaster relief organization in Ohio on September 1, and might go to the Gulf Coast region after Hurricane Gustav passes.

Democratic presidential nominee Barack Obama also changed his plans because of the hurricane, postponing campaign trips to monitor events. Supporters who had signed up to receive Obama's text message announcing his vice-presidential candidate two weeks ago received another text message

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