



The U.S., Islam, and the Future of our Communities

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In February, President George Bush paid me a great honor in appointing me his Special Envoy to the Organization of the Islamic Conference. This appointment, which I accepted with pride as an American Muslim and humility as a man whose faith is his daily companion, represents a unique opportunity for the U.S. and Muslim communities to communicate on issues of mutual interest.

I bring to this new role no diplomatic background or particular history working with the OIC. Instead, I bring a willingness to listen and a willingness to hear what Muslim communities around the world would like the United States to hear. In my first few opportunities to interact with OIC leaders and Muslim populations, I am struck by how many values we share, including strong families, a commitment to education and healthcare, and a determination to seek a brighter future.

I am also struck by the fact that many people around the world don't know that there are over 5 million American Muslims engaged at all levels of American society—from Wall Street to Main Street—enjoying the tremendous freedom and opportunity available to them in the U.S. And moreover, for those Muslims who, like other Americans, choose to practice their faith, they are free to do so without any inhibitions or constraints in the over 1,200 mosques and other places of worship.

The Muslim-American experience is a great model for Muslim and other faith communities around the world because it is rooted in principles of respect, freedom of religion and equality by law. When I travel the country, I see tremendous dialogue between communities, between faiths, people talking to one another, learning from one another, growing closer, not apart.

These are some of the messages I am bringing to the OIC, and it is in the context of trying to grow closer that working with the OIC makes great sense. With 57 member nations, the OIC is uniquely poised to help identify new possibilities for collaboration. Unfortunately, I only have a short time as Envoy, and in keeping with my background as a businessman, I intend to move quickly. Many of the OIC's objectives over the coming decade are areas where the United States could offer its particular expertise. Those sectors include science and technology, education, and advancing the status of women. It is my intention to discuss with the OIC leadership a Memorandum of Understanding outlining cooperation in those sectors.

I am enormously proud to be representing my country in this new capacity. I understand that there will be challenges, misunderstandings, misperceptions, and even occasional hostility in this relationship. But I am convinced, and I hope Muslims around the world will agree, that dialog between and among our peoples is the foundation of progress, of a new understanding, and a hopeful future. I look forward to speaking to Muslims and non-Muslims alike from around the world, including in my own country, to better learn how we can overcome our challenges, seek new cooperation, and live in peace and prosperity, insha'allah.

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