



NATIONAL U.S.-ARAB CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

غرفة التجارة الأمريكية العربية الوطنية

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U.S. - ARAB CHAMBER HOSTS *IFTAR* DINNER IN HONOR OF THE MUSLIM AND ARAB COMMUNITY IN HOUSTON, TEXAS

First-Ever Iftar Hosted by NUSACC Attracts Over 150 Diplomats and Business Leaders

Houston, Texas – The National U.S.-Arab Chamber of Commerce (NUSACC) held its first-ever *Ramadan Iftar* event honoring the Muslim and Arab community of the Greater Houston region. Over 150 Houstonians of multiple faiths and cultures came together to share the *Iftar* dinner at the Arab American Cultural Center in Houston.

“Hosting such a diverse group of people and sharing a meal together highlights the diversity the City of Houston enjoys,” said Jamal Bafagih, Director of NUSACC’s office in Houston. “NUSACC places great importance on holding *Iftar* events around the country each year, to provide its members from both the U.S. and the MENA the opportunity to understand and know more about each other’s cultures, and to develop trust that helps form stronger business and economic partnerships.



Honorable Ed Emmett, Harris County Judge, spoke about community building and promoting international trade through events such as NUSACC’s *Iftar* dinner.

Breaking the fast (*Iftar*) during *Ramadan* is a traditional event celebrated daily by more than a billion Muslims around the globe. *Ramadan* is a holy month of spiritual cleansing in which adherents of Islam rededicate themselves to God, worship, and reading the *Quran*, Islam’s holiest book. The month-long period is marked by fasting, personal sacrifice, self-discipline, and increased generosity, especially toward those who are less privileged.



David Hamod, NUSACC President & CEO, noted that the U.S.-Arab Chamber has served as a bridge between cultures for more than 40 years and that the *Iftar* dinner represents a unique way of bridging gaps between the United States and the Arab world. He said, “*Ramadan’s* commitment to adhering to a straight path – in a business context – translates into good ethics, corporate social responsibility, volunteerism, and respecting the rights of others, including minority shareholders.”

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This is the first year that NUSACC has hosted an *Iftar* dinner in Houston and Los Angeles, and the third year NUSACC has hosted the event in Washington DC. Over half a dozen chambers of commerce attended the event, along with a number of VIPs from Houston.



Jamal Bafagih, NUSACC’s Houston Director: “Hosting such a diverse group of people and sharing a meal together highlights the diversity the City of Houston enjoys.”

The keynote speaker was the Honorable Ed Emmett, Harris County Judge. Judge Emmett is responsible for working with four county commissioners to oversee a county government that serves more than four million remarkably diverse residents. Judge Emmett spoke about the importance of holding such events in both a communal sense, as well as for promoting international commerce. He thanked NUSACC for taking the initiative to organize the event, and emphasized that people should not be intimidated or afraid to reach out to other cultures in friendship. “That is how strong communities are formed”, he concluded. Emmett related to the holy month of *Ramadan* in his own personal life, and remarked that he still reads a copy of the *Quran* that was gifted to him by an old friend.



Over 150 Houstonians of multiple faiths and cultures came together to share the *Iftar* dinner at the Arab American Cultural Center in Houston.

Other notable Houstonian VIPs included Harris County Sheriff Adrian Garcia and the Honorable Bob Hebert, Fort Bend County Judge, who presides over one of the fastest growing counties in the U.S. Garcia thanked Bafagih and NUSACC for organizing the event, and noted how helpful such events were in



forging strong communities and peace between residents of the city and county. People of all faiths and cultures attended the *Iftar* dinner, including Christians, Jews, Hindus, and Buddhists, among others. Community leaders and families with children also enjoyed the fellowship of the *Iftar* event.



Honorable Bob Hebert, Fort Bend County Judge, and his wife Pat.

The night's guest speaker was Imam Tauqer Shah of Maryam Islamic Center. Imam Shah reflected on the significance and spirit of *Ramadan*, and why and how Muslims fast. At the beginning and end of his remarks, Imam Shah delivered a heartfelt prayer for continued harmony between all communities in the U.S., and for world peace.

Major William J. Cork, Brigade Chaplain for the 36th Combat Aviation Brigade, Texas Army National Guard, and a Seventh-day Adventist pastor, spoke about fasting in the Abrahamic faiths. He highlighted the fact that the three major faiths shared more common beliefs than differences. Major Cork also shared his

personal experiences in Kuwait and the Arabian Gulf, saying how welcoming the people of that region were to U.S. service personnel.

Seven chambers of commerce from around Houston were represented by their President or CEO, including the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce, the Turkish-American Chamber of Commerce, the Bangladesh-American Chamber of Commerce, the Pakistani-American Chamber of Commerce, the Pearland Chamber of Commerce, the World Chamber of Commerce, and the Indo-American Chamber of Commerce. Additionally, Houston's four sister city associations with other Islamic cities were represented by their presidents.

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The *Iftar* dinner consisted of a delicious Mediterranean menu that included hummus, grilled chicken and lamb, rice dishes, salads, grape leaves, and a selection of desserts. Fresh dates were flown in from Abu Dhabi.

The diversity was significant in not just the menu, but also in the guests and officials that attended the event. City, county, state, and



Mr. S. Javaid Anwar, CEO of Midland Energy Inc., the evening's Lead Sponsor (left) with Jamal Bafagih, NUSACC Houston Director.



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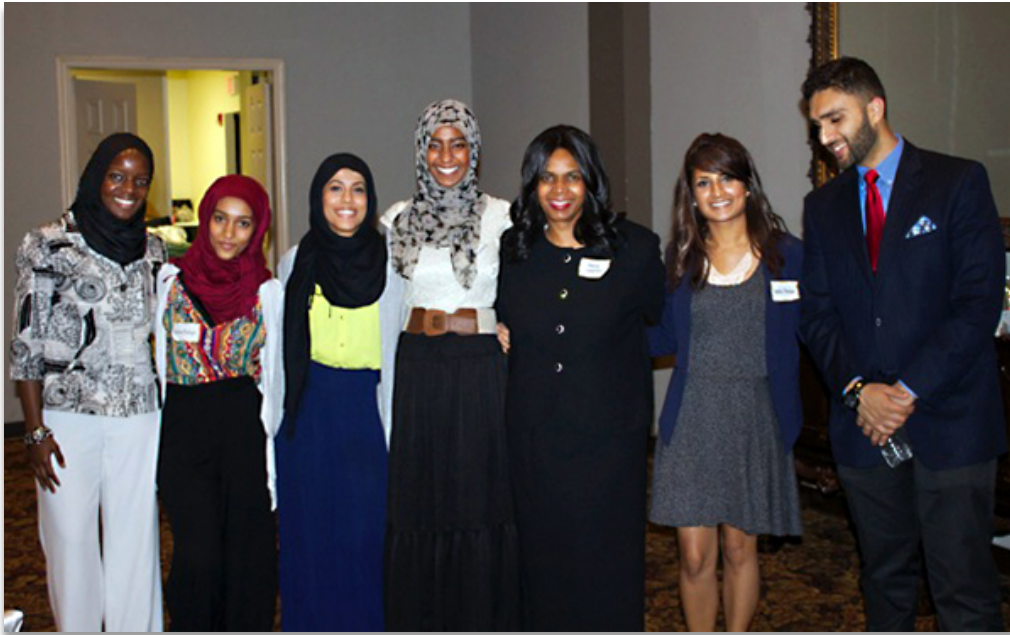
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business officials from different backgrounds and walks of life attended. From the local diplomatic community, the Consulate Generals of Angola, Canada, China, Indonesia, Japan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey were represented by either the Consul General, the Deputy Consul General, or other senior consular or trade officials.

Mr. S. Javaid Anwar, a prominent Texas businessman and owner of Midland Energy Inc., the evening's Lead Sponsor, was in attendance. In his opening remarks, Bafagih delivered special thanks to Mr. Anwar for his generous support not only to NUSACC, but also to the general Islamic and Asian community.

Bafagih concluded, "For all of us at NUSACC, the holy month of *Ramadan* and the *Iftar* events hosted by our organization in different cities around the country are an occasion to celebrate our diversity. The Houston *Iftar* dinner showed that there will always be more commonality in our faiths and cultures than differences. It is because of this precise reason, therefore, that NUSACC emphasizes the significance of organizing such events. We are already looking ahead to next year's *Iftar* event," Bafagih added.

The spirit of *Ramadan* is very much alive at NUSACC.



Volunteers and emcees came from a diverse group of women and men, including Sheila Lavallies, NUSACC Houston Certification Officer (third from right).

The National U.S.-Arab Chamber of Commerce, widely regarded as the voice of American business in the Arab world, is in touch with business communities across the United States and serves as the U.S. point of contact for the national chambers of commerce in the 22 Arab nations. On a daily basis, NUSACC works closely with leaders throughout the Arab world, as well as high-level decision makers in the U.S. business community, public policy research centers, multilateral institutions, nongovernmental organizations, media, and the U.S. Government.