



NATIONAL U.S.-ARAB CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

غرفة التجارة الأمريكية العربية الوطنية

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U.S. – ARAB CHAMBER HOSTS FIFTH ANNUAL IFTAR DINNER IN WASHINGTON, DC

*“The Most Elegant Iftar in America” Attracts 200
Public and Private Sector Leaders, Including Numerous Chiefs of Mission*

*Seven Sponsors – Including Ritz-Carlton and the UAE Embassy –
Help to Make This Iftar NUSACC’s Best Ever*

Washington, DC – The National U.S. – Arab Chamber of Commerce (NUSACC) this week hosted its fifth annual Ramadan *Iftar* celebration in honor of the Arab diplomatic community and the League of Arab States. Over 200 leaders of numerous faiths attended the high-profile gathering held at The Ritz-Carlton Hotel in downtown Washington DC. Attendees included business leaders and senior U.S. and Arab government officials, including Chiefs of Mission from Bahrain, Iraq, Lebanon, Oman, Somalia, Yemen, and the League of Arab States.



Arab Chiefs of Mission, U.S. Government officials, and business leaders from around the United States attended NUSACC’s fifth *Ramadan Iftar* celebration.

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Breaking the fast (*Iftar*) during Ramadan is a traditional event celebrated daily by more than 1.7 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 the underprivileged.



“In the spirit of Ramadan, let us count our blessings,” said David Hamod, President & CEO of NUSACC. “The Holy Month gives us an opportunity to celebrate what is good in the world, but it also encourages us to tackle challenges in order to make the world a better place.”

H.E. Salah Sarhan, Arab League Ambassador to the United States: “Invitations during the month of Ramadan symbolize affection, harmony, and cooperation, as well as a great heavenly reward.”

***Iftar*: A Nexus for Contemplation, Business, and Fellowship**

The NUSACC *Iftar* dinner has become an annual meeting place for leaders from all walks of life. For this year's celebration, business leaders flew in from across the United States, in part to rub shoulders with other corporate leaders and government officials, especially the Arab ambassadors.



Over 200 leaders of numerous faiths attended NUSACC's annual *Iftar* at The Ritz-Carlton Hotel in downtown Washington DC.

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Imam Mohamad Bashar Arafat: “May Almighty Allah bless us to be among those who spread peace, speak in a peaceful manner, and live in peace.”

“Gatherings such as the NUSACC *Iftar* help to build bridges between the U.S. and the Arab world, and they promote tolerance and a more peaceful coexistence,” noted H.E. Yousef Al Otaiba, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Ambassador to the United States. “Ramadan is a spiritual time to reflect on the things that bring communities and cultures together.” The [UAE Embassy](#) was a Lead Sponsor of this year’s NUSACC *Iftar*.

The other Lead Sponsor was the [Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company](#), which has been NUSACC’s *Iftar* partner from the very beginning. “The Ritz-Carlton hotels of the Washington DC area

were honored to co-sponsor the NUSACC *Iftar* again this year,” said Bob Kharazmi, the Ritz-Carlton’s Global Officer for Worldwide Operations. “We were delighted to share the company of so many diplomatic and business community leaders at the Ritz-Carlton in Washington DC.”

Kharazmi concluded, “This has become a great annual tradition, an opportunity to show our respect for Islam’s holiest month of the year. *Ramadan Karim!*”

In recent years, NUSACC’s *Iftar* partnership has included four Washington DC-area Ritz-Carltons: Washington DC, Georgetown, Tysons Corner, and Pentagon City. This year, for the first time ever, eight more Ritz-Carlton properties from around North America participated in the NUSACC *Iftar*. Senior Ritz-Carlton executives flew to the nation’s capital from such destinations as Florida (Dorado Beach, Naples, and South Beach), Massachusetts (Boston), New York (Central Park), Philadelphia, and Canada (Montreal and Toronto).

Five “Platinum Plus” members of the National U.S. – Arab Chamber of Commerce served as corporate sponsors for this year’s *Iftar*: [Black and Veatch](#), [Dubai Silicon Oasis Authority](#), [Etihad Airways](#), [Innovative Security Products](#), and [Lockheed Martin](#).



Honoring the Diplomats

The annual *Iftar* provides NUSACC with an opportunity to honor Arab embassies, particularly the Ambassadors, as well as the League of Arab States, which formally recognizes NUSACC as a business gateway between the United States and the 22 countries of the Arab world.

Arab Chiefs of Mission confirmed to attend the *Iftar* included:

- Kingdom of Bahrain – H.E. Sheikh Abdulla Al Khalifa
- Republic of Djibouti – H.E. Mohamed Siad Douale
- Republic of Iraq – H.E. Lukman Al Faily
- Republic of Lebanon – H.E. Carla Jazzar
- Kingdom of Morocco – H.E. Rachad Bouhlal
- Sultanate of Oman – H.E. Hunaina Al-Mughairy
- Palestine – H.E. Maen Rashid Areikat
- Federal Republic of Somalia – H.E. Ahmed Isse Awad
- Republic of Tunisia – H.E. Fayçal Gouia
- Republic of Yemen – H.E. Dr. Ahmed Awad Bin Mubarak

H.E. Ambassador Salah Sarhan, Chief Representative of the League of Arab States to the United States, spoke at the *Iftar* on behalf of the 22 countries of the Arab world.

“On the occasion of the Holy Month of Ramadan, I would like to convey to you and your families my best wishes for good health, peace, and prosperity during this blessed month and throughout the year,” noted Ambassador Sarhan. “It should be noted that these invitations during the month of Ramadan have a special meaning and significance, as they symbolize affection, harmony and cooperation among those who are invited, as well as a great heavenly reward. I would like to thank the National U.S. – Arab Chamber of Commerce for this heartfelt



The head table included leaders from all walks of life from around the United States.

annual event, a tradition known for its positive impact on Arab Ambassadors and other invitees.”

Ambassador Sarhan used the spiritual occasion of the *Iftar* to extend his sincere sympathies to the families and victims of the June 12 shooting in Orlando. He said, “I would like to condemn the horrific terror attack on the Orlando night club last Sunday and to extend my deep personal condolences



David Hamod, NUSACC President & CEO: “Islam holds deep respect for the sanctity of life in all its parts.”

– and those of the Arab League – to the families of the victims killed. And to the wounded, I wish them a full and speedy recovery.”

The wanton killing in Orlando was a theme that was revisited throughout the evening. David Hamod, NUSACC’s President & CEO, noted, “Personally, it troubles me deeply that the assailant, in his own ‘twisted’ way, carried out this massacre in the name of Islam. I want to say categorically that this is not Islam. Such senseless killing has nothing to do with Islam, which holds deep respect for the sanctity of life in all its parts.”

Remarks of the Imam

Imam Mohamad Bashar Arafat, who flew in from Morocco to participate in the NUSACC *Iftar*, carried a strong message of peace and respect to the gathering. “When we see people killing others, as was done during the recent shooting in Orlando, it only takes one ounce of logic and mercy to know that what occurred was a horrible murder,” he said. “Islam not only prohibits us from hurting others physically, but also from hurting other peoples’ reputations through vain talk and backbiting.”

Providing a broader context for the Holy Month of Ramadan, he noted, “We are not only breaking the fast with food, but when we invite others, we are also breaking walls that are sometimes constructed of ignorance, misunderstanding, and suspicion Fasting also allows us to grow spiritually. We connect with the Divine through prayer, meditation, and charitable giving as we are fasting.”



Imam Arafat highlighted the relevance of Islam to the modern world. He pointed out that during Ramadan, “We read the Qur’an to be reminded of how to live in a multicultural and religious world like ours. Even within our own religion, there are multiple perspectives. When the Prophet Muhammad passed away, the population of Medina was 65,000 or 70,000 Muslims. Today,



The elegant *Iftar* dinner was enhanced by the music of the 'oud, a traditional instrument of the Arab world.

that population of Muslims has grown to 1.7 billion.”

He continued, “How am I, as an Imam, supposed to deal with 1.7 billion Muslims around the world and their diverse perspectives, which may be different than mine? For me to impose my understanding of the Qur’an on others is against the teachings of Islam. Today, some ‘Muslims’ kill others because they are different, and this is a tragedy. Ramadan provides an opportunity for us to learn how to coexist with one another and develop and demonstrate good manners (*akhlaq*).”

In that same spirit, Imam Arafat said, “It hurts me when people who have never read the Qur’an judge Islam by the behavior of bad representatives of the religion. The word of God has never been about encouraging terrorism, killing, or hurting others. We don’t have ‘radical’ or ‘violent’ Islam because Islam is a religion based on peace . . . Even the Prophet Muhammad was told to use logic, not the sword, and to carry on conversations and debates when interacting with the idol worshippers.”

Imam Arafat continued, “It brings joy to my heart to see interfaith *Iftars*. Wherever you go in America today, there is nothing like sharing a meal in which more ends up being shared than just food. This goes back to the idea that the month of fasting is not just about eating and drinking at certain times; it is also about building and strengthening the ties of our communities.”

He concluded, “Ramadan is meant to inspire us to look deep into ourselves and to improve our relationships with Allah and others. Ramadan is the month when we need to reach out to the entire family of Adam & Eve and say: Let us build a more peaceful world together. May Almighty Allah bless us to be among those who spread peace, speak in a peaceful manner, and live in peace.”



Concluding Remarks

Celebrating the interfaith nature of the NUSACC *Iftar*, Amin Salam, NUSACC's Vice President for Business Development, noted, "Tonight's *Iftar* is special because we have with us members of the Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, and Buddhist faiths." He suggested that the first *Iftar* at the White House took place during the tenure of President Thomas Jefferson over 200 years ago. Jefferson's Quran is on display at the White House, he pointed out, "reminding us that along with the generations of patriotic Muslims in America, Islam -- like so many faiths -- is part of our national story."



Amin Salam, NUSACC Vice President: "Let us rededicate ourselves to the community of humanity."

"Ladies and gentlemen, let us all try to make this occasion one on which we build closer ties – according to your own faiths, your own beliefs – for the prosperity and well-being of the United States of America, the nations of the Arab world, and to the world," Salam concluded. "Let us respect the communities to which each of us belongs – irrespective of our religion, gender, or color – while rededicating ourselves to the community of humanity."



Photo courtesy (all photos): [Felipe Ledezma](#)

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.

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