



NATIONAL U.S.-ARAB CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

غرفة التجارة الأمريكية العربية الوطنية

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NATIONAL U.S. – ARAB CHAMBER OF COMMERCE (NUSACC) NAMES IRAQ’S FAREED YASSEEN AS 2021 “AMBASSADOR OF THE YEAR”

Upwards of 150 Leaders, Including More Than 20 Ambassadors, Participate in the Award Ceremony and Luncheon

Ambassador Yasseen’s “Role in Maintaining Communication between Washington and Baghdad in All of These Efforts was Key. [His] Leadership was also Felt Profoundly in the Field of Cultural Preservation.”

- U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken

Washington, DC – The National U.S. – Arab Chamber of Commerce (NUSACC) has just recognized Dr. Fareed Yasseen, Iraq’s Ambassador to the United States, as the 2021 “Ambassador of the Year.” The award ceremony and luncheon, held at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Washington DC, brought together upwards of 150 leaders from business, government, media, multilaterals, and the non-governmental organization (NGO) community.

The gathering attracted stakeholders from across the United States and as far away as Baghdad. More than 20 current or former Ambassadors were involved in the event, including recent U.S. Ambassadors to Iraq, recent Iraqi Ambassadors to the USA, and Ambassadors from across the Arab world and around the globe.

“The United States and the Republic of Iraq have traveled a long road together over the years,” said David Hamod, NUSACC’s President & CEO. “Today’s honoree, Ambassador Fareed Yasseen, has had a hand in many of the successes that our two nations have achieved. He has skillfully and strategically built partnerships between Iraq and America that will serve our respective countries for decades to come.”



H.E. Fareed Yasseen (center), Iraq’s Ambassador to the United States, is named “Ambassador of the Year.” Presenting the award are David Hamod, NUSACC’s President & CEO, and Margaret Brennan, Moderator of “Face the Nation” at CBS News.

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H.E. Fareed Yasseen, Iraq's Ambassador to the United States.

Amb. Zalmay Khalilzad (right), former U.S. Ambassador to Iraq.

Upwards of 150 leaders honored H.E. Fareed Yasseen.

Ambassador Yasseen expressed his gratitude and deep appreciation to NUSACC for this award, stressing the fact that it was bestowed previously on three of his friends and most esteemed colleagues, Ambassador Madjid Bouguerra of Algeria, Ambassador Dina Kawar of Jordan, and Ambassador Faisal Gouia of Tunisia. He also expressed his intention to increase cooperation with NUSACC, given its unique value proposition and its extensive access to business executives and government officials across the United States.

Ambassador of the Year 2021

The “Ambassador of the Year” award, begun in 2004, is given annually to a member of the Arab diplomatic corps for his or her outstanding contributions to U.S. - Arab commercial relations. Iraq has posted some distinguished ambassadors to the United States over the years, but this is the first time that an Iraqi diplomat has been named “Ambassador of the Year.”

No event was held in 2020 because of the pandemic, and every precaution was taken during this year’s award ceremony to protect against COVID-19.

The Lead Sponsor of this year’s event was the [Trade Bank of Iraq](#), which is playing an instrumental role in promoting Iraq’s economic development through trade. Platinum sponsors (in alphabetical order) included the [American University of Iraq \(Baghdad\)](#), [Chevron](#), [K2 International](#), [KBR](#), and [Weatherford](#). This year’s Airline Partner was [Qatar Airways](#), which serves as a bridge between the United States and Iraq via Doha.

“In a way, this year’s sponsors represent a microcosm of modern Iraq,” noted NUSACC’s David Hamod. “Think of it this way: A nation founded on energy resources, growing steadily through trade and infrastructure development, with a focus on the nation’s youth as Iraq gradually transitions from a hydrocarbons-based economy to a knowledge-based economy.”



Hon. Antony Blinken
U.S. Secretary of State

“Your leadership was also felt profoundly in the field of cultural preservation. The Department of State was proud to partner with you in facilitating the voluntary repatriation of more than 17,000 ancient artifacts.”



Amb. Matthew Tueller, U.S. Ambassador to Iraq

“I can attest from personal experience that there is no greater advocate for a strong relationship between Iraq and the United States than Ambassador Fareed Yasseen. His skill as a diplomat, his open and engaging approach to problem solving, and his keen intellect have helped the two countries to successfully navigate a series of challenges that emerged in the relationship over the past few years. As a result of overcoming those challenges, the relationship has emerged stronger than ever.”

Key Partner of the U.S. Department of State

The Honorable Antony Blinken, U.S. Secretary of State, commended Yasseen as a key partner over the years. “We reset our relationship through a series of Strategic Dialogues that set a course toward greater economic, health, and educational cooperation, and we rallied support from the international community to help Iraq organize the most credible elections in its history,” he said. “Your role in maintaining communication between Washington and Baghdad in all of these efforts was key.”



Hon. Antony Blinken
U.S. Secretary of State.

Blinken went on to say, “Your leadership was also felt profoundly in the field of cultural preservation. The Department of State was proud to partner with you in facilitating the voluntary repatriation of more than 17,000 ancient artifacts, including the famous Gilgamesh Dream Tablet.” He concluded, “These artifacts tell part of the story of our collective beginning as a human family, and we are heartened, thanks in part to your dedication, that they are turning to their rightful home.”

The U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, the Honorable Matthew Tueller, sent his best wishes from Baghdad. “I can attest from personal experience that there is no greater advocate for a strong relationship between Iraq and the United States than Ambassador Fareed Yasseen,” Tueller noted. “His skill as a diplomat, his open and engaging approach to problem solving, and his keen intellect have helped the two countries to successfully navigate a series of challenges over the past few years. As a result of overcoming those challenges, the relationship has emerged stronger than ever.”



**Amb. Barbara A. Leaf, Senior Director
Middle East and North Africa, National Security Council**

“The Biden Administration is unequivocally committed to a long-term strategic partnership with Iraq, and we have worked over the last year to strengthen our bilateral relationship across every sector. With that in mind, I am grateful to the National U.S. - Arab Chamber of Commerce for recognizing Fareed Yasseen for the critical role he plays in advancing our shared interests. He has been critical to sustaining and building on the United States’ strategic partnership with Iraq.”



Hon. Joey Hood
Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, U.S. Department of State

“What Iraqis and Americans will most remember Fared for is his passion to preserve Iraq’s cultural heritage for future generations. His relentless efforts to secure cultural property smuggled out of Iraq produced spectacular results, including the return of 17,000 artifacts. The vast majority of these were cuneiform tablets with beautiful and intricate stories etched in clay, thousands of years old.”



Hon. Joey Hood, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, U.S. Department of State.

Yasseen’s tenacious efforts to restore his nation’s antiquities had a profound impact on both nations. “What Iraqis and Americans will most remember Fared for is his passion to preserve Iraq’s cultural heritage for future generations,” suggested the Honorable Joey Hood, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary at the U.S. Department of State. Yasseen’s “relentless efforts to secure cultural property smuggled out of Iraq produced spectacular results,” Hood said. “The vast majority of these were cuneiform tablets with beautiful and intricate stories etched in clay, thousands of years old.”

Not Your Run-of-the-Mill Diplomat

Yasseen is not your run-of-the-mill diplomat. He was trained as a physicist at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne, Switzerland, and later carried out research at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Over time, he was drawn into political activism, with a focus on human rights advocacy. Given the nature of the Iraqi regime at the time, Yasseen, who had left Iraq in 1974, persevered anonymously for fear of endangering relatives and friends in Iraq.

In the mid-1990s, Yasseen became involved with the worldwide effort to curb greenhouse gas emissions and to limit global warming. He joined the secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, managing their information unit to better serve the secretariat’s constituencies, especially developing countries. The new technologies that he pioneered then, including webcasts, are now an integral part of the UN’s activities. Yasseen has maintained his keen interest in this subject, and he participated as an Iraqi delegate in both the Paris Climate Conference (COP21) in 2015 and in Glasgow (COP26) last month.



Amb. Robert Ford, former Acting U.S. Ambassador to Iraq

“Fared is a diplomat, and he is also a man of great culture. For example, he works on issues like climate change. He helped to create the United Nations framework for climate change that later helped produce the Paris Climate Accords. He’s not just a diplomat from Iraq, he’s a fine citizen of the world.”



Amb. Douglas Silliman, former U.S. Ambassador to Iraq

“When I was the U.S. Ambassador in Baghdad, I saw immediately what a spectacular choice Fareed would be in Washington. It was apparent that he was also a good man, a man of humility, moral fiber, and grit. Because of his intelligence, erudition, and generosity, I can think of no one more deserving to receive this year’s award as NUSACC’s Ambassador of the Year.”

Yasseen noted, “This is a subject I have been involved with since the beginning, and it is a topic that I am deeply concerned about.” Moreover, he said, “This is a subject that is affecting Iraq from several angles: Climate change could lead to greater water scarcity, more dangerous weather fluctuations, and a rise in sea level.”

In addition, he suggested, Iraq, as an oil producer, will be affected by measures that the international community will need to take in order to address these threats: “In other words, we need to transform our fossil-fuel based economy now.”

Building Bridges

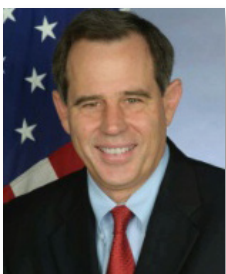
Ambassador Yasseen has done a remarkable job of building bridges among diverse communities in the United States.

Addressing attendees of the award ceremony, he said, “Look around you. You will find not only members of the business community, but also elected officials, current and former government officials, diplomats, academics, researchers, human rights activists, journalists, and friends, including a couple of my Baghdad College classmates. I don’t blush, and I am not easily humbled, but this turnout is truly humbling.”

In his remarks at the award ceremony, Dr. Michael Mulnix, President of the American University of Iraq (Baghdad), put it this way: “‘Bridge Builder’ might best describe Fareed Yasseen. As an ambassador, he did not limit his role to just negotiations and political issues, as some diplomats do. Instead, he saw the broader picture and worked to build bridges through public diplomacy, business, education, science, and cultural relations.”



Dr. Michael Mulnix, President of the American University of Iraq (Baghdad).



Amb. Stuart Jones, former U.S. Ambassador to Iraq

“I would say that during your five years in Washington, Fareed, you have had a tremendous impact through your personal diplomacy, through your humility, through your creativity and your wisdom.”



Dr. Naufel Alhassan, senior official Government of Iraq (ret.)

“Fareed has a very good relationship with the Iraqi diaspora in Europe and here in the United States . . . and he has an interest in topics like climate change, the environment, human rights, and protecting minorities. His heart is with Iraq’s heritage, promoting diversity in Iraq.”



Maryland Governor’s Citation, initiated by Hon. John Wobensmith, Secretary of State of Maryland, was presented at the award ceremony by Mr. Luis Borunda (left), Maryland’s Deputy Secretary of State.

Bridge-building was also at the heart of a special Citation crafted by the Governor of Maryland, the Honorable Larry Hogan. The Citation congratulates Ambassador Yasseen – “with great respect, admiration, and gratitude” – for being named Ambassador of the Year by NUSACC. The Citation lauds Yasseen for his “exceptional work and success in promoting America’s relationship with Iraq.” The Citation, initiated by the Honorable John Wobensmith, Secretary of State of Maryland, was hand-delivered to the award ceremony by Mr. Luis Borunda, Maryland’s Deputy Secretary of State.

The Honorable Ryan Crocker, a former U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, has known Ambassador Yasseen for two decades.

“Over an especially critical period spanning two radically different American Administrations and three Iraqi Prime Ministers, yours has been a steady hand on the tiller,” Crocker stated.

“In this highly divided country, you have earned the respect of the leaders of both parties, on the Hill, and in the Administration. You have demonstrated that the Iraqi-U.S. relationship is about more than security, sponsoring events highlighting cultural figures and events from both countries.” Crocker concluded, “You have supported NGOs that seek small improvements which, when added together, become very big indeed.”



Amb. Stuart Jones
Former U.S. Ambassador to Iraq.

Another former U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, the Honorable Stuart Jones, put it this way: “I would say that during your five years in Washington, Fareed, you have had a tremendous impact through your personal diplomacy, through your humility, through your creativity, and your wisdom.”



Amb. Ryan Crocker, former U.S. Ambassador to Iraq

“Foreign Service Officers in this country, such as myself, are not overly fond of what we call political appointees – individuals from other professions with ties to the party in power strong enough to get them an appointment as ambassador But every now and then, an individual emerges with such extraordinary skills, as well as political connections, that if we are being honest, we career types must admit that no one, career or non-career, could be better. Such a one is Fareed Yasseen.”



Dr. Michael Mulnix, President American University of Iraq (Baghdad)

“Although Iraq is an ancient land that can literally trace its beginnings to Adam and Eve and the Garden of Eden, it is also a modern republic, an independent nation-state that has been a key player and leader in the Middle East – culturally, intellectually, politically, socially, and economically. Balancing these ancient and modern attributes would be a challenge for any statesman, but Ambassador Yasseen has done it with great skill, charisma, and insight.”

High Note in Muslim - Christian Dialogue

In the spirit of building bridges, Yasseen shared one of his “proudest moments as an ambassador,” when he hosted a dinner for leading Muslim and Christian clerics. This gathering commemorated the meeting in March 2021 between H.H. Pope Francis and Grand Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani in the holy city of Najaf.



Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani (left), meeting with H.H. Pope Francis in Najaf.

Photo: Office of the Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani

In Iraq, Pope Francis said, “Hostility, extremism and violence are not born of a religious heart: they are betrayals of religion . . . We believers cannot be silent when terrorism abuses religion; indeed, we are called unambiguously to dispel all misunderstandings.”

H.E. Armando Varricchio, Italy’s former Ambassador to the United States, characterized the high-level meeting this way: “Every papal visit is important, but that visit is historic.”

Yasseen’s unique ability to tackle wide-ranging issues like religion, physics, philosophy, and foreign affairs has distinguished him among fellow ambassadors in Washington DC.

The Honorable Douglas Silliman, a former U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, characterized Yasseen as a “good man, a man of humility, moral fiber, and grit.” Over numerous conversations, Silliman said, “I learned that he truly cares about the future of his country. Because of his intelligence, erudition, and generosity, I can think of no one more deserving to receive this year’s award as NUSACC’s Ambassador of the Year.”



Amb. Douglas Silliman
Former U.S. Ambassador to Iraq.



Luma Jaffar, Board of Directors, Iraqi Children Foundation.

Supporting Underprivileged Communities

Dr. Naufel Alhassan, a retired senior official in the Government of Iraq, highlighted Yasseen’s commitment to serve underprivileged communities. He said, “Fareed has an interest in . . . human rights and protecting minorities. His heart is with Iraq’s heritage, promoting diversity in Iraq.”



Dr. Naufel Alhassan, senior official, Government of Iraq (ret.).

Yasseen’s empathy for underserved communities inspired him to support numerous humanitarian initiatives. One of these is the Iraqi Children Foundation, a people-to-people initiative composed of ordinary Americans, Iraqi diaspora, American veterans who served in Iraq, American businesses in Iraq, and Gold Star families.



Ms. Luma Jaffar, a Board member of the Iraqi Children Foundation (ICF).

Ms. Luma Jaffar, a Board member of the Iraqi Children Foundation (ICF), flew in from Austin, Texas to participate in the award ceremony. She said, “Ambassador Yasseen has been an active advocate for the ICF and for Iraqi children: orphans and child laborers who are vulnerable to abuse, neglect, and exploitation by criminals, traffickers and extremists.” She went on to say, “He is always prepared to step up and lend a hand. We applaud Ambassador Yasseen and his passion and commitment. He is a true friend to the United States, the ICF, and the children of Iraq.”

In recent years, the State of Nebraska took in more refugees per capita than any other state in the Union. This is especially true for Yazidi refugees – one of Iraq’s oldest minorities – who were targeted and persecuted by the Islamic State (ISIS). For thousands of Yazidis, Lincoln, Nebraska, has become a second home.



Hon. Robert Evnen, Secretary of State, State of Nebraska

“In 1986, a promising young physics student at EPF Lausanne University was awarded his Ph.D. in physics. As it turns out, that promising young physicist is our honoree today, H.E. Dr. Fareed Yasseen.

Dr. Yasseen’s prominence in the study of theoretical physics was assured, but in the mid-1990s, his attention was drawn to other matters – matters of human rights, and the plight of his fellow Iraqis under the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein. He cofounded the Center for the Disappeared, committed to the remembrance of those lost under Saddam’s rule.

Today, behind his steady, quiet, thoughtful demeanor there is a powerful, undiminished passion for the Iraqi people. Ambassador Yasseen at all points counsels that we must stay the course, that transforming a dictatorship into a democracy is not an easy thing to do, nor is it easy to maintain.”



Congressman Seth Moulton (MA), Co-Chair, U.S. Congressional Iraq Caucus

“I don’t know any ambassador in Washington who is more passionate about both his country and ours. Iraq and America are fortunate to have Ambassador Fareed Yasseen at the helm of our critical relationship. As Co-Chair of the Iraq Caucus, I have come to know Fareed as a great partner and good friend, and I look forward to continuing our work to strengthen our alliance in the years ahead.”

With that in mind, Nebraska’s Secretary of State, the Honorable Robert Evnen, flew from Nebraska to Washington DC to participate in the award ceremony. (His gift to Ambassador Yasseen was two cuts of Halal Nebraska beef.)

Evnen said, “We are grateful to Ambassador Yasseen for the humanitarian attention that he has given to minorities, including the Yazidis. In Nebraska, we are proud to have the largest group of Yazidi immigrants in any state in the United States.”



Nebraska’s Secretary of State, Hon. Robert Evnen (left), gifted Ambassador Yasseen two cuts of Halal Nebraska beef.

Milestones

Iraq faces continued challenges, but the relationship between that nation and the United States has been going from strength to strength over the years.

The Strategic Framework Agreement is at the heart of the partnership, and it is no coincidence that Ambassador Yasseen was part of the Iraqi team that negotiated the Agreement in 2008. It is an overarching document that covers all practical dimensions of U.S. - Iraq bilateral relationships.

Over the last few years and because of the need to fight ISIS, both governments focused on economics and on security cooperation. But as things normalize, these temporarily overlooked dimensions will again receive the attention that they deserve. An example of that is Ambassador Yasseen’s insistence to include representatives of the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Agency in the most recent Strategic Dialogue.



H.E. Philippe Etienne, Ambassador of France to the United States

“I would like to warmly congratulate you on this much-deserved award, for the tremendous work that you are doing here in Washington to deepen the crucial relationship between your country, Iraq, and the United States.

In these challenging times, you are the living testimony of what it means to be a great diplomat, and why we need more people like you. I am grateful to the National U.S. - Arab Chamber of Commerce for recognizing your achievements and honoring you today.”



H.E. Anatoly Antonov, Ambassador of the Russian Federation to the USA

"I am proud to have a chance to work with such a great professional, a man of wisdom, talents, and high moral character. Your achievements never cease to amaze me, and I am sure that even more of them lay ahead in the coming years. I wish you all the best and hope that your excellent work will encourage others."

The Honorable Joey Hood, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, characterized Yasseen's involvement this way: "When we celebrated the total liberation of Iraqi territory from ISIS, Iraqis and Americans alike turned to one another and asked, 'What next?' Fareed had the answer. He was already hard at work expanding our cooperation in commerce, science, climate, water, and health. Leaving no stone unturned, Fareed specifically requested that the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration join the climate and energy discussions at the last Strategic Dialogue. Their attendance, and his ideas, rejuvenated a conversation to protect Iraq's fragile environment."

Iraq has just held its sixth election since 2003, one that was generally recognized as free and fair. The United States and many other governments noted, "The Iraqi people now have an opportunity to exercise their fundamental right to vote. We support the Iraqi government's efforts to ensure a safe, free, fair, and inclusive electoral environment for all Iraqis, including women and youth, who have long faced violence and intimidation in the pursuit of reform."

Iraq's commitment to free and fair elections is a main reason why that nation was invited to participate in America's recent Summit on Democracy. Iraq, the only country in the Arab world to be invited to the Summit, is one of only two Arab countries (along with Tunisia) whose Freedom House score has *improved* since 2011, the onset of the Arab Spring.



H.E. Jean-Arthur Regibeau, Ambassador of Belgium to the USA

"I have come to know the Ambassador as a diligent envoy, an astute observer of his environment, and a softspoken voice for clear messages. I recognize these qualities to be those of the greats in our line of work, and I commend the National U.S. – Arab Chamber of Commerce for their excellent choice in nomination.

To me personally, it also means honoring a lucid political analyst, a perfect practitioner of the French language, an expert in all things related to my second motherland, Switzerland, and a citizen of the free world. Fareed, may this award be a stepping stone to a bright future!"



H.E. Dina Kawar, Ambassador of Jordan to the USA

“For those of you who do not know Ambassador Yasseen, he is an exceptional Ambassador, a valuable colleague, and a dear friend. I can honestly say, Fareed is one of the most loyal, sincere, and decent human beings that one can know.

Iraq is very lucky to have him as he represents his country in the finest manner. For that, I am happy that today NUSACC has decided to choose him as Ambassador of the Year, a truly terrific choice.”

Concluding Remarks



Iraq’s Prime Minister, H.E. Mustafa al-Kadhimi (center), visits Washington DC. From right to left: Iraq’s Ambassador, H.E. Fareed Yasseen; Nebraska’s Secretary of State, Hon. Robert Evnen; Maryland’s Secretary of State, Hon. John Wobensmith; NUSACC’s President & CEO, David Hamod.

The Honorable Robert Evnen, Secretary of State of Nebraska, is an astute student of human nature. He participated in a meeting in Washington DC with Iraq’s Prime Minister, H.E. Mustafa Al-Kadhimi, in July 2021. That meeting, arranged by Ambassador Yasseen, was largely convened to discuss Iraq’s commercial capabilities and potential.

Following the meeting, Evnen said of Yasseen: “Today, behind his steady, quiet, thoughtful demeanor, there is a powerful, undiminished passion for the Iraqi people. Ambassador Yasseen at all points counsels that we must stay the course, that transforming a dictatorship into a democracy is not an easy thing to do, nor is it easy to maintain.”

H.E. Dina Kawar, Jordan’s Ambassador to the United States, is a former recipient of NUSACC’s “Ambassador of the Year” award (2018). She is also a longtime friend of Fareed Yasseen; before coming to Washington DC, the two of them served together as fellow Ambassadors in France. “For those of you who do not know Ambassador Yasseen,” Kawar noted, “he is an exceptional Ambassador, a valuable colleague, and a dear friend. I can honestly say, Fareed is one of the most loyal, sincere, and decent human beings that one can know.”

“Iraq is very lucky to have him as he represents his country in the finest manner,” she concluded. “For that, I am happy that today NUSACC has decided to choose him as Ambassador of the Year, a truly terrific choice.”



For five decades, the National U.S. - Arab Chamber of Commerce (NUSACC) has served as a commercial bridge between the United States and the Arab world. Widely regarded as the voice of American business in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, the Chamber serves over 50,000 members and stakeholders in the USA and across the Arab world. Awarded the E-Award for export excellence by the President of the United States, NUSACC is the only business entity in the USA that is recognized by the League of Arab States and the Union of Arab Chambers.

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