voices

INAUGURAL NEWSLETTER



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE TO MUSLIM COMMUNITIES

In this Edition:

Honoring the Next

Generation of Muslim

Change-Makers

What is the Office of the Special Representative to Muslim Communities?

What We Do

- Build respectful and strong longterm relationships between the U.S. government and Muslim communities, especially the next generation of Muslims
- Support organic and credible alternative narratives that counter violent extremism
- Create resilient and strong communities by building online and offline global action networks of like-minded leaders

How We Work

- Engage at the grassroots, people-topeople level
- Scout out talented, creative "changemakers" who positively impact their communities
- Use 21st century tools to reach the next generation and to create networks of like-minded thinkers around the globe
- Collaborate and partner with our embassies around the world



President Barack Obama greets Special Representative Farah Pandith at White House iftar. See President Obama's iftar remarks.



Secretary Clinton introduces "Generation Change" at the State Department's iftar.

Find out more about the Office of the Special Representative to Muslim Communities:

www.state.gov/s/srmc

Twitter: http://twitter.com/Farah Pandith

Facebook: www.facebook.com/FPandith

In the News

- ▶ Special Representative Farah Pandith's talk at Harvard Kennedy School's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs: "Not a hearts and minds campaign: U.S. policies toward Muslim communities are about connecting people..." December 13, 2010
- ▶ Radio New Zealand interviews Special Representative Pandith: "A vision of engagement based on mutual interest and mutual respect..." December 9, 2010
- ► Shining City TV profile on Special Representative Pandith's outreach to Muslim Youth on October 29, 2010
- ► CNN video: "How Muslims Vary Around the World" September 8, 2010
- ► Special Representative Pandith speaks with Dialogues on Civilizations: "We need an alternative narrative to the narrative of violent extremism..." July 15, 2010

In this issue, we highlight one of the many youth initiatives launched by Secretary Clinton in 2010: "Generation Change."



Secretary Clinton's Townterview Hosted by Al Jazeera at Carnegie Mellon University Qatar Campus in Education City, February 15, 2010.



A young girl attired in Pakistani national dress presents a bouquet to Secretary Clinton upon her arrival in Islamabad for a Town Hall Meeting July 19, 2010.



Special Representative Pandith discusses Muslim Engagement on Freedom Radio in Nigeria in October 2009 and visits youth groups in Chinguetti in April 2010.

Generation Change

Voices of Youth

This year, Secretary Clinton did something never done before: She invited almost as many young people to the State Department iftar as she did senior diplomats. Why youth? According to many approximations, over half the world's Muslim population is under the age of 30. But these were not just any youth. They earned their invitations by being "change-makers" and social innovators...

Secretary Clinton's Remarks at State Department Iftar

...I am delighted to welcome you to the State Department's iftar. It's a wonderful and welcome tradition for me personally, and for this Department. My husband and I hosted our first Eid celebration at the White House in 1996, and over the vears, these occasions have given us a chance to stop and reflect and connect with many colleagues and friends. At last year's iftar, I introduced Farah as our first Special Representative to Muslim Communities. Here with us tonight are Rashad Hussain, the U.S. Envoy to the Organization of Islamic Conference, and Precious Muhammad, a highly regarded historian who is hard at work putting together a chronicle of Islam in the United States for the State Department. And it is indeed a rich history that extends back hundreds of years.

I also want to acknowledge a new initiative that I launched this past April, called Partners for a New Beginning. It is chaired by former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, and the vice chairs are Muhtar Kent of Coca-Cola and Walter Isaacson of the Aspen Institute, who is here with us tonight, and thank you, Walter. I am excited that over the years to come, we will be working with some of America's most influential leaders from the private sector and civil

society to advance opportunities in Muslim communi-

ties around the world. And they will soon be announcing new commitments in four key areas: entrepreneurship, science and technology, education, and exchanges.

Now, as Farah has already said, as you look around the room, you may not see as many familiar—and may I dare say older—faces that you would have seen last year. We are delighted once again to have so many ambassadors and high-level diplomats from countries, but equally if not more exciting this year, we have 70 young American Muslim leaders who did take part in an event called "Generation Change."

Now, these young people, if I might just say a few words about a few of them, have already accomplished extraordinary things. They have started programs to keep Pakistani girls from dropping out of high school; founded the first soccer league for Afghan girls; brought wounded Iraqi children to the United States for medical treatment. One 17-year-old boy from Connecticut organized a group of students to advocate for Middle East peace. And a recent University of Michigan graduate started a group that sends medical supplies to Africa. And a



Special Representative Pandith gives opening remarks at Secretary Clinton's iftar.

young woman from Chicago has become a prize-winning poet.

Now, others in this group of extraordinary young Americans have used movies and blogs; music and novels; and comedy and art to explore what it means to be an American Muslim, and their efforts have sparked discussions about issues of identity and belonging. And now, they are starting quite a conversation on the "Generation Change" Facebook page. They are innovative; they are committed; and they are reaching beyond traditional boundaries and creating new avenues of dialogue to touch other young people, not only throughout our country, but literally around the world.

This kind of engagement, in my view, is really a form of diplomacy, and so all of you are unofficial ambassadors on behalf of our country, our values, and our own communities as well as yours. Our embassies now are sponsoring more events like "Generation Change" in order to listen to young people and to help connect up young people across the globe, to connect them with other change-makers. Some of you attended the President's Entrepreneurship Summit where a remarkable exchange of ideas, information, and creation of networks took place.

So I welcome all of you to our iftar, and we're grateful that you would be here to share this important evening with us. The Holy Month of Ramadan is a time when Muslims around the world fast and pray, and strive to do good deeds. It's also a time for reflection and introspection, for charity and for compassion.

Ramadan teaches and reinforces values that are honored by millions and tens



Generation Change Break-Out Session to discuss questions of identity; foreign relations; and education about Islam.

and hundreds of millions of people from other faiths and beliefs. So tonight, while we celebrate together, let us consider how we can build broader and deeper bonds of mutual understanding, mutual respect and cooperation among people of all faiths in the year to come, here at home and abroad. And let us also reflect on how we can improve our efforts to ensure that we create more opportunity for more people in more places to live up to their own God-given potential.

We sit down together for this meal on a day when the news is carrying reports that a pastor down in Gainesville, Florida plans to burn the Holy Qu'ran on September 11th. I am heartened by the clear, unequivocal condemnation of this disrespectful, disgraceful act that has come from American religious leaders of all faiths, from evangelical Christians to Jewish rabbis, as well as secular U.S. leaders and opinion-makers. Our commitment to religious tolerance goes back to the very beginning of our nation. Many of you know that in 1790, George Washington wrote to a synagogue in Newport, Rhode Island, that this country will give "to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance."

The real story of Islam in America can be found in this room and rooms across America. We write it tonight, in the spirit of fellowship and the celebration of goodwill that is a hallmark of Ramadan. We will write it in the months and years to come, as we continue to reach out to engage people around the world in a search for common ground, common understanding, and common respect.

Just in the past week, we are reminded by the resumption of Middle East peace talks that progress always, always must be possible in spite of difficulty. And when there is a willingness to engage,

click!

- ► MBC Interview featuring Generation Change
- Secretary Clinton and Special Representative Pandith discuss Generation Change at State Department iftar
- ► Watch Generation Change Guest Speakers
- ► Generation Change Press Release

to convey respect to those of differing views, we can work toward reconciliation. In the end, I believe with all my

heart that most people in the world are united by a shared desire for a peaceful future in which all our children, regardless of where they were born or how they worship, can have that opportunity to become all that they are meant to be in the name of the Almighty and in furtherance of our common humanity.

In the weeks and months ahead, President Obama and I will do everything we can to help advance the cause of a comprehensive peace, not only in the Middle East, but across the world, and inside the hearts and minds of our fellow Americans. In the Middle East, it is ultimately up to the people of the region to determine their own future.

As I said when I welcomed Israeli and Palestinian delegations, peace needs champions on every street corner and around every kitchen table, and not just there, but everywhere. So I hope that we at these tables and at similar tables everywhere where people are meeting in the spirit of Ramadan to break-fast, we will reflect on how we each can demonstrate that a different future is possible, a future built on the universal human values of mutual respect and inclusion.

Thank you. Ramadan Kareem.



Ainee Fatima delivering her poem at Chicago's Louder than a Bomb Poetry Competition.

Watch "Generation Change" speaker,

Ahmed Ahmed's, "Axis of Evil" Tour.



ABOVE RIGHT: Secretary Clinton with 18-year-old Ainee Fatima, "Generation Changer" and prize-winning poet.

ABOVE: Generation Change guests and diplomats mingle after the Secretary's iftar.

Anum Khan, Founder of "Spread the Peace," and Mousa Mosawy, Founder of "First Aid Link," discuss their experiences at the Secretary's Iftar on **Odyssey Networks**.

The responses from "Generation Changers" were overwhelmingly positive:

"...For the first time in my life, I was surrounded by socially and politically minded Muslims who were actively facing and engaging in the same questions that I gradually became aware of in the months and years following 9/11..."

 Mustafa Abdullah
 Organizer for CHANGE (Communities Helping All Neighbors Gain Empowerment)



Anum Khan, Founder of "Spread the Peace," with SR Farah Pandith.

"... As the first such representative in our history, Farah Pandith has become a source of pride and inspiration for so many young Muslim-Americans like myself... Today, after all the smiles and handshakes and exchanges of business cards, sitting at home at the same converted dining room table, something has already changed. Joining the 74 other Generation Changers and learning about all the amazing things they're doing—both locally and globally-has given me more hope than ever that the type of change this country needs is already happening..."

~ Melody Moezzi Author, <u>War on Error: Real Stories of</u> <u>American Muslims</u> "Generation Change came in the perfect moment amidst all this misunderstanding about Islam and fear of what Islam can provide for its youth and American citizens. It was important that we got the opportunity to connect with other Muslims leaders and changemakers in the United States, from NASA to the fashion industry."

~ Anum Khan Founder of "Spread the Peace"

"In light of the last nine years of panic inducing headlines obsessed with Islam which continue to hold a nightmarishly idealized version of the religion up as a composite of our views it was a relief to not be asked, "What is your view?" or "Why do you hate us?" but rather, "Welcome, let's begin."... Thank you for this gift of community..."

~ Cihan Kaan Filmmaker and author of Halal Pork

"...a final message Rashad Hussain, Ambassador to the OIC, shared with us continues to resonate. He told the audience that he remembers sitting where we were sitting today...and with slight goose bumps, I realized that although there is much work to do, we should continue to improve, strive and further affect positive change."

~ Randa Kuziez Faiths Act Fellow



Secretary Clinton with Harvard historian, Dr. Precious Muhammad, who is creating a timeline of the history of Islam in America, at the State Department iftar.



Secretary Clinton with 17 year-old "Generation Changer," Mansoor Alam, Founder of Enough, a student-led group advocating for peace, progress and unity in the Middle East. Watch Mansoor Alam's speech at the De-radicalization Conference for the Pakistani American Community.

"Within 15 minutes, I found myself sitting next to people whose works I had read, poetry I had heard, and films I had seen...They had the power to facilitate change,



the resources of youth and energy, and were finally given the opportunity for collaboration..."

~ Imran Hafiz, co-author of <u>The American</u> <u>Muslim Teenager's Handbook</u>

> Special guest speakers included Dr. Naif al-Mutawa, creator of "The 99;" Senior Advisor in the Office of the Vice President, Herro Mustafa; and comedian Ahmed Ahmed.

See creators of the "New Muslim Cool," and Generation Change Special Guest Speakers and Members, Kauthar Umar and Hana Siddiqi's PBS blog about the event.

Vibrations Abroad

his season, U.S. Ambassadors broke the fast of Ramadan with Muslim communities everywhere. In doing so, they shared Islam's remembrance of the poor, and partnered on charity projects with local community leaders who often had had little previous contact with Americans.

From Kinshasa to Astana—to Maputo to Mbabane—to Capetown and Yaoundé—and across the Middle East and South Asia—U.S. embassies in every region of the world found creative ways to build new bridges.

Here are a few highlights:

In Berlin, the U.S. Embassy collaborated on the organization of "Nights of Ramadan," a cultural festival with a reading by the award-winning Arab-American poet Nathalie Handal.

In Rotterdam, American Muslims from the "Interfaith Youth Core" conducted a two-day workshop on interfaith tolerance. This kicked-off their multicountry Western European "tour."

In Vienna, the U.S. Embassy sponsored three workshops for Muslim youth on entrepreneurship and bridging cultural divides between Muslims and non-Muslims in Austria.

In Calgary, the Chair of the Muslim Council of Calgary presented the U.S. Consul General with a plaque in appreciation of her support for cooperative, inter-faith dialogue at an event hosting 70 representatives of Calgary's Muslim, Jewish, and Christian communities.

In Paris, U.S. Embassy programs were featured in a <u>New York Times</u> story highlighting surprising new ways the U.S. has been engaging Muslim communities in France.

In Ceylon, the State Department sponsored the visit of U.S. Imam Khalid Latif to open up a platform of discussion about U.S. foreign policy and local economic concerns raised by women.

In Cairo, over 600 alumni of the International Visitor Leadership Program and friends attended the U.S. Embassy iftar.

For the first time, a U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs traveled to **Trinidad and Tobago** to meet with 12 imams and the President of the National Muslim Women's Organization of Trinidad and Tobago.

In Cotonou, the Public Affairs Section showed a film addressing the practice of female genital mutilation, followed by a public conference on the role of women in Islam led by Islamic scholar and religious leader, El Hadj Afis Ambekema.

In Lagos, Consul General Joseph Stafford hosted an iftar for over 175 guests, including leading members of the local Islamic community; a senior representative of the Catholic Cardinal; traditional rulers; civil society and business leaders; and representatives of the Lagos State government. Ramadan remarks focused on the need for religious tolerance.

In Dar es Salaam, U.S. Economic Officer visited a mosque where she was welcomed by a local sheik and over 100 community members.

In Jerusalem, the American House organized an iftar and a party for over 100 children. The evening included a Ramadan sing-along; a puppet show; and balloons and school gifts for the children.



U.S. Ambassador's iftar in Port of Spain.



Nights of Ramadan Poetry Reading:

During the Nights of Ramadan cultural festival in Berlin, award-winning Arab-American poet, Nathalie Handal, recited her poetry at the Museum for Islamic Art. Moderator Mita Banerjee, an Indian-German Professor of American Studies, explored Nathalie Handal's creative work and discussed her efforts to bring unknown writers of Muslim descent to the attention of international audiences. A video of the reading is available on YouTube.



"Remarkable Current," performed at Muhammadiya's Dr. Hamka University; an orphanage; and schools throughout Jakarta in September. The band's mission is "to build understanding and awareness of America's diversity through musical friendships and collaborations abroad."



Germany: Iftar at Ambassador Murphy's Residence

On September 7, 2010, U.S. Ambassador to Germany Philip Murphy and Mrs. Murphy hosted an interfaith iftar. More than 90 distinguished guests from the Muslim, Christian, and Jewish communities attended the event, as did business, political, and community leaders involved in integration issues. "We are committed to learning and listening, to creating bridges of understanding and respect, and building stronger bonds of cooperation. We are working to ensure that our communication, our partnerships, and our policies reflect those core principles." Guests commented on the warm atmosphere at the Ambassador's Residence and the reception

provided an excellent networking opportunity. As a guest said: "This is quite an impressive audience. Some of the guests do not get along with each other; you invited them and they accepted and now they talk—this is true integration." This was the fifth consecutive year an iftar was organized by the U.S. Embassy in Berlin.



In Addis Ababa the Chargé participated in a Ramadan charitable event sponsored by a local women's organization at the Islamic Affairs Supreme Council of Ethiopia. The Public Affairs Section donated \$6,000 for school fees and iftar food supplies to orphans and other vulnerable children.

Denmark: Iftar at the Residence

Nearly 50 government officials, religious leaders, community leaders and NGO representatives attended an iftar hosted by Ambassador Fulton.





The Charge d'Affairs hosted a women's iftar for eight members of a Cameroonian women's group. The women discussed the role of faith in society, the perception of Islam in America, and the importance of women's organizations.



Ireland: Embassy Dublin Hosts Muslim Entrepreneurship Conference in Ireland

Embassy Dublin sponsored the first-ever "Muslim Entrepreneurship in Ireland" conference with the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT). Attendees strategized on how to increase entrepreneurial activity within Muslim communities in Ireland and discussed how to run a business in an environment without sharia-compliant banking.

GENERATION CHANGERS AT WORK IN THE WORLD

Randa Kuziez presented a research paper entitled "The Future of Faith in Globalisation" at a conference in Sarajevo hosted by the International Institute of Islamic Thought and the Association of Muslim Social Scientists.

Kalsoom Lakhani's company, ML Social Vision, in partnership with Pakistani Peace Builders, has raised over \$135,000 for the organization's emergency first response flood relief efforts: Relief4Pakistan.

Seemi Choudry is working on the New Americans Democracy Project (NADP) at ICIRR (Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights) – an integrated campaign to empower the immigrant community.

Hamza Khan is working on Project Akbar, a social media project bringing America's top college politicos together with Pakistan's emerging young political activists to talk about policy, religion, stereotypes and domestic affairs.

Adam Sitte is starting law school at the University of Chicago and writing about gender issues for Altmuslimah.

Saad Malik is creating Muslim-Startups.com – a platform to help ambitious people who love business learn from a mix of experienced mentors.

Dena Elkhatib helped the Iraqi Orphan Intiative gain momentum in Illinois and raised sponsorship for an Islamic Finance Conference in Malta this past Fall.

Amin Gharad is organizing a debate between the Young Democrats and Young Republicans of Lexington, KY. As president of Paul



Wajahat Ali's play, "The Domestic Crusaders:"

Laurence Dunbar High School's Young Democrats club, he will be the keynote democratic debater.

Ilana Alazzeh is working for the U.S. Immigrants Project and interfaith activities in her community, and was a guest speaker at Smith College this fall.

Filmmaker **Justin Mashouf** traveled to Pakistan this month to produce a documentary about an orphanage and school for girls.



Justin Mashouf, filming documentary in Iran. Check out one of his films: Warring Factions.

Bilal Kaleem recently assisted his company, Boston Asia Capital, to finalize a deal with the Nigerian government that will create dozens of advanced manufacturing jobs in Massachusetts while providing a clean-energy solution to Nigeria.

Haroon Moghul is leading the Maydan Institute, a consultancy that specializes in empowering Muslims and develops access to Muslim audiences and beliefs.

Nadia Naviwala's research on how USAID can better engage local NGOs and leaders in Pakistan was recently published by Harvard's Carr Center for Human Rights Policy.

Wajahat Ali's play, "The Domestic Crusaders" – one of the first major plays about Muslim Americans – was performed at the Kennedy Center and the Atlas Theatre to a full house in Washington, DC this fall. The published play was released by McSweeney's on Dec 1st.

Ali Baluch has completed his second short film and was accepted to Tribeca Flashpoint Academy.



Jibril Hirsi with Somali President sending message of peace to Somalis

Sarah Jawaid organized a Zero-Trash iftar during the month of Ramadan and is one of the lead organizers for DC Green Muslims.

Melody Moezzi is working on her second book, which deals with her experiences with bipolar disorder, physical illness, and the American mental and physical healthcare systems. She published an article on CNN.com this fall in honor of Suicide Prevention Day

Danish Kurani recently placed Top 20 in an international design competition hosted by Sucker-Punchdaily.com. You can see her proposal and more details on DanishKurani.com.



Hana Siddiqi with trophy for Best Documentary at the Luanda Film Festival for New Muslim Cool.

Kauthar Umar and Hana Siddiqi's film, New Muslim Cool, won Best Documentary Award for 2010 at the Luanda Film Festival in Angola. Hana Siddiqi was there to show the film and deliver a series of workshops sponsored by the American Documentary Showcase and the U.S. Embasssy in Luanda. The Dutch broadcaster NTR aired New Muslim Cool in The Netherlands on December 16th.

Looking Ahead and Within: Generation Changers Express Themselves

In her poetry, Ainee
Fatima raises topics
discussed during the
"Generation Change"
event. In "Graceland,"
she deals with the
question of identity
in a surprisingly
lighthearted way:



Secretary Clinton, Ainee Fatima



Read the essay: "What does a Muslim Woman Look Like?" in <u>The Washington Post</u> by "Generation Changer" Shazia Kamal, contributor to Altmuslimah.com

"I am not 'visibly' a Muslim female—in other words, I don't wear a hijab, the headscarf worn by some of my Muslim peers. Because people cannot instantly identify..."

Read more about Altmuslimah and their new blog at On Faith.

GRACELAND: PART I

"I ain't no saint, but I have tried never to do anything that would hurt my family or offend God" ~ Elvis Presley

I shift into park, kill the engine, unbuckle my seatbelt. I've been casing the joint for days.

The Tennessee twilight hangs in pastel orange, blue, purple.

As sweat drips down my temple, the light above the front entrance goes out. And step out of the minivan into the Memphis evening.

I pop the trunk, grab my guitar case. (You will breathe in deep through nose now) The air is clean, close, and sweet.

My black burq'ha conceals me as I climb each music note on the gate and drop in. I move unnoticed past the stone lions, and Slide in through the window into the kitchen.

Past guitars, past gold and platinum records, past gun collections that glow beneath lights: I pass it all- even the velvet rope that secures the second floor from tourists.

No one is here except me, my guitar case, And the things of the King I came for. Inside the double padded doors of his bedroom,

A shoulder high statue of Christ greets me. I slide Jesus some skin and wink at him. "Gotta date with the King, Issa."

Pleated red velvet lines the bedroom walls.

Smoked mirrors trimmed in black velvet.

I put my guitar case on the bed, next to the '68 comeback leather jacket.

I'll get that on my way out. I stroll slowly into in his closet:

Hundreds of jumpsuits I caress them as I pass, Chinese Dragon, no. Bengali Tiger, no. Powder Blue two-piece, maybe.

The '77 Hawaii gold -studded American Eagle on white, absolutely.

I liberate myself from my Burqah and slide on the jumpsuit. Adjust the belt, fasten the cape...the cape I make my way back into the bedroom, and

The drag co-efficient is Elvis awesome. In the smoky mirror rimmed in black velvet, arms stretched eagle wing wide

I'm a Muslim woman who must be

covered; I accept that,

But I'm also American, baby: You accept that.

Wise men say

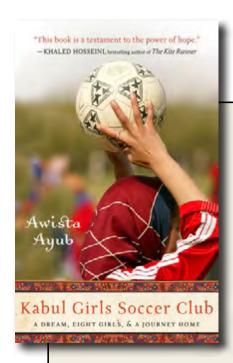
only fools rush in

But I can't help

falling in love with you

~Ainee Fatima





In a recent letter to our office, Awista Ayub, author of <u>Kabul Girls Soccer Club</u>, calls Generation Changers to Action:

On, September 7, 2010, I had the unique opportunity to attend both the iftar hosted by Secretary Clinton, as well as the Generation Change meeting hosted by Farah Pandith, Special Representative to Muslim Communities. While I have been involved with issues related to Afghan girls and sports since 2004, this meeting was the first time I have been surrounded by, and interacted with, so many accomplished young Muslim Americans from throughout the country and from various ethnic backgrounds.

As I sat alongside such an accomplished group, I could not help but wonder why the U.S. media is not reaching out to more of us to speak about our own individual and collective efforts toward helping to shape the dialogue surrounding Islam today, both here and abroad. While many of us have long become representatives for our faith, voluntary or not, now is the time that we should be called upon in a concerted effort to speak up as Muslims about what it means to live our hyphenated identity as Muslim Americans, and further, to share stories about how we are contributing in positive ways toward changing the social fabric of that identity. Too often, non-Muslims speak for us in the mainstream media, and what I know for sure is this: we can speak for ourselves. We, collectively, are a group of vibrant and driven individuals representing various cultures and programs and should be utilized to help drive our own narrative.

Where I think this network has the greatest potential to create impact driven change is how the U.S. Department of State now utilizes us to identify issues specific to our communities, as well as to determine promising solutions to address those issues. I hope that we become a valued and vital resource for future programs within the U.S. Department of State, and elsewhere, as we seek to address the challenging issues that we face today. Now is the time to let us speak on our own behalf.

Awista Ayub is the author of Kabul Girls Soccer Club (formerly However Tall the Mountain), and has previously worked as the Education and Health Officer with the Embassy of Afghanistan in Washington, D.C. Awista has been featured on ABC News (Person of Week), Glamour Magazine, ESPN and CNN. Log onto www.awistaayub.com for more information about her work. Become a fan on facebook.