

**Mansion House Iftar
29 September 2006
Speech by Dr Muhammad Abdul Bari
Secretary General**

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Dear Lord Mayor of the City of London, Your Excellencies, parliamentarians and honoured guests, it gives me great pleasure to welcome you to this seminal event, the breaking of fast in the illustrious setting of Mansion House. I'd like to thank the City of London Corporation for their kindness in co-hosting tonight's reception and in working with us, the Muslim Council of Britain, to organise an event which celebrates many of the great things our city is renowned for.

Ramadan is a unique month in the Muslim calendar. It is a month in which Muslims are required to fast from before sunrise to sunset as elucidated in the Qur'an:

'O you who believe, fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you that you might learn self-restraint'.

Ramadan is a time of spiritual recalibration and purification. It is a month in which Muslims seek to re-orient their lives through deep spiritual reflection and increased prayer. It is also an opportunity for increased charity and hospitality to one's neighbours and friends as they invite one another to gather and break their fast together. The Lord Mayor has demonstrated these traits in his hospitality tonight with the hosting of this dinner in such a prestigious venue.

The event tonight also seeks to recognise the significant but unsung contribution of Muslims to Britain's economy. As witnessed by the crowd gathered here, Muslims are represented in a whole array of professions, from the public sector to accounting, law, banking, consultancy and other professional services.

Their participation in the City and in the wider economy demonstrates that integration is indeed possible and not as difficult or thorny a prospect as many would like us to believe.

I hope through our gathering here tonight our guests may learn more about their Muslim colleagues and the rites they perform during the month of Ramadan. Hopefully they will witness an aspect of Islamic culture that frequently Muslims undertake in private when in an office environment.

Diversity is one of our city's greatest strengths. It is my firm belief that London, more than any other capital city, exudes confidence in its diversity and pride in the contribution of its many varied communities to the British economy.

Indeed diversity is something that should be celebrated. The British economy has much to gain from the contributions of its composite communities, as witnessed by increasing growth in the Islamic financial services sector. London is now a leading centre and the benchmark for Islamic finance in the world. As stated by the Chancellor in his speech at the International Finance and Trade conference in June this year, it is our intention to make the UK the gateway for Islamic finance and trade with the Islamic world. The involvement of the British Muslim community and its many professionals in this endeavour is a very pleasing development. These incremental steps are essential to our aspirations to see Muslims play their full part in Britain, alongside their co-citizens.

I'd like to thank the staff in the Lord Mayor's office for their all their hard work in ensuring this evening's success. I'd also like to thank the Business and Economics committee of the MCB, particularly Tariq Hameed and Samar Farooq, for their initiative and commitment to this event.

I wish you all a very enjoyable evening...