

By Congressman David Price in Cary, NC -

Good Afternoon! As-salamo Alaykum. It's a pleasure to be here on the gorgeous fall day to kick off this Fifth Annual Eid Festival with all of you. I want to offer a special thanks to the festival's organizers, including the Chair of the NC Eid Festival Board, Dr. Nadeem Iqbal, and to Mayor Weinbrecht, and the Town of Cary for its sponsorship of this celebration.

And what a celebration it is! One quick look at today's program should leave no doubt that this is truly, as advertised, a "festival without borders." This year's intercultural theme: "Sacred Music: Rhythms of Religion".

This concentration on diverse cultures is fitting, because Islam itself is a religion without borders: its traditions and teachings are woven throughout the cultural and religious fabric of every country in the world, including our own. Just as the world's other major religions are far from monolithic, so too is Islam a religion of diversity, tolerance, and respect for local values and customs.

This is especially the case in the United States: A recent Gallup poll of American Muslims found that Islam was by far the most ethnically diverse religion in our country.

The Eid Observance itself reminds us of our common religious roots. The first "Eid" (Eid al-Fitr) is a celebration of the end of the holy month of Ramadan, in which Muslims are called upon to rededicate themselves to worship and devotion. And while this holiday is unique to Islam, the principles and traditions it embodies – fasting as a tribute to the divine, breaking of the fast with friends and loved ones, and promoting peace and brotherhood in the community – are central to every religious tradition.

The second "Eid" (Eid al-Adha) commemorates a story with which we are all familiar – the willingness of Abraham to sacrifice his child on Mount Moriah as a test of his faith. Like Abraham himself, this tale of sacrifice and devotion is central to the three Abrahamic faiths, and its lessons are relevant for the religious and non-religious alike, as is the emphasis that is placed during Eid on ensuring that the poor have enough to eat.

This common thread in our religious traditions should serve as a reminder that even in today's fractured world, we have much more in common than we have apart, and an opportunity to rededicate ourselves to striving for unity and brotherhood among all races and religions.

As your representative in Congress, I have advocated for greater U.S. engagement with the Muslim world and a fair approach to vexing foreign policy challenges such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the rise of Islamist political parties – and by speaking out strongly against those who lump Muslims together with terrorists or adopt a black-and-white approach to the world's problems.

I have also engaged with Muslim leaders directly as the chairman and co-chairman of the House Democracy Partnership, a bipartisan commission that works to build stronger, independent legislatures in 14 countries around the world, including six majority-Muslim nations: Pakistan, Afghanistan, Lebanon, Iraq, Indonesia, and Kosovo.

I've just returned from a Middle Eastern trip that featured engagements with our parliamentary colleagues in Lebanon and Iraq and engagement with a range of activists and political leaders in Tunisia and Egypt –still working their way from the excitement and promise of the Arab Spring to building durable and effective democratic institutions to sustain that promise. Many of you have expressed to me the hope that our country will express steadfast support for ending repression and protecting citizen liberties and religious freedom in that part of the world. I hope to give this effective expression by engaging with these new parliaments just as soon as they are elected.

Thank you for inviting me here today, and I wish all of you an "Eid-sa-yeed" (happy Eid).