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PROFESSOR EL-BAZ INVITED TO THE WHITE HOUSE FOR IFTAR

Boston University Professor Farouk El-Baz was invited to Iftar hosted by President and Mrs. George W. Bush on Thursday 17 September. The reception and dinner at the White House was in celebration of the month of Ramadan. In attendance were ambassadors of Islamic countries and prominent Americans of the Muslim faith who made significant contributors in the fields of science, technology and art.

In his welcoming speech, President Bush said: "We are reminded of Islam's long and distinguished history. Throughout the centuries, the Islamic world has been home to great centers of learning and culture. Muslim thinkers and scientists have advanced the frontiers of human knowledge." He added: "Among our guests are individuals with wide-ranging accomplishments -- from working on the Apollo Program, to pioneering advances in healthcare and medicine, to developing cutting-edge applications for the Internet."

Fasting, prayer and charity during the month of Ramadan commemorate the revelation of God's word in the Koran to Prophet Mohammad. During this month more than a billion Muslims around the world abstain from the consumption of food or drink starting at sunrise. They break the fast by Iftar shortly after sunset.

"This was certainly a very fine thing for the President to do" said Dr. El-Baz. "To take time from a very busy schedule to recognize Islamic contributions and to honor Muslim Americans was a very thoughtful gesture." He added: "During these turbulent times, it was a welcome respite."

At the end of the meal, guests lined up in a receiving line. When Dr. El-Baz was introduced, President Bush asked him what subject he taught at Boston University. When he answered space science, the President said: "So, you are the Apollo man I was speaking about!"

Dr. El-Baz is the Director of the Boston University Center for Remote Sensing. Since its establishment in 1986, The Center is internationally recognized for pioneering applications of satellite images to human needs. In 1997, it was selected by NASA as a "Center of Excellence in Remote Sensing."