

**Keynote Address by Secretary of State Albright
On June 3, 2009
At the World Premiere of**

FROM EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS MICHAEL WOLFE AND ALEX KRONEMER

INSIDE ISLAM: **What a BILLION MUSLIMS Really Think**



A DOCUMENTARY FILM BASED ON
THE GALLUP POLL OF GLOBAL MUSLIM PUBLIC OPINION

UNITY PRODUCTIONS FOUNDATION presents
"INSIDE ISLAM: WHAT A BILLION MUSLIMS REALLY THINK" a documentary film
featuring DALIA MOGAHED JOHN ESPOSITO and KENNETH POLLACK
executive producers ALEX KRONEMER and MICHAEL WOLFE produced and directed by ROB GARDNER



Keynote Address World Premiere June 3rd, 2009
Inside Islam: What a Billion Muslims Really Think

Gaston Hall, Georgetown University, Washington, DC

64th Secretary of State of the United States, Dr. Madeleine K. Albright

Thank you Alex, very much, and good evening to you all. I want to begin by congratulating Robert Gardner, Michael Wolfe, Alex Kronemer and their colleagues for creating the film we are about to watch. I admit to feeling jealous when, some years ago, I learned that Alex was leaving the State Department in order to make movies.

As a teenager, I had fantasized about becoming the Czechoslovak-American version of Audrey Hepburn, but somehow it didn't work out. So this invitation to a world premiere is the next best thing – especially given the timely topic of the documentary. As some of you may know, I was raised a Roman Catholic, became an Episcopalian upon marriage and discovered when I was almost sixty years old that my family heritage was Jewish.

This gives me an advantage when it comes to multi-faith dialogue. Most people need to have other people around; I just move from one chair to the next arguing with myself. Still, it's nice to have company and I'm glad to see everyone here. The question we are asked to contemplate this evening is: What do Muslims believe?

The fact that we even have to ask that question is because of a damaging “failure to communicate” between the majority in the West and the majority of Muslims. It's gratifying that this failure has been recognized at the highest level, and that President Obama will be giving a speech on this very dilemma in just a few hours. Finding the right words will not be easy, but if anyone can, I expect it is our new president.

Back when I was secretary of state, I was tempted to deliver such a speech, but felt at the time that we could communicate more effectively through our actions. If you remember, the Clinton Administration had no higher foreign policy priority than a just and lasting Middle East peace. In Bosnia and Kosovo, NATO used force for the first two times in its history, to help Muslim populations endangered by ethnic cleansing and terror.

In Iraq, we pushed through a program to use oil revenues to buy food and medicine for the poor. We encouraged progress towards democracy in Arab states, including Kuwait where—in a historic breakthrough--women were recently elected to parliament. On a more symbolic level, I initiated an annual Iftar dinner at the suggestion of Alex Kronemer and others

And as a sign of respect, we added Muslim holidays to the official State Department calendar. I also pushed for a more vigorous effort to recruit American Muslims for the U.S. Foreign Service. In response, one of our more senior ambassadors actually complained about the difficulty of working with Muslims because he said, and I quote: “Those people pray five times a day.”

Having run American foreign policy for a number of years, my own view is that praying five times a day is just about right. The message in tonight’s film is that, when thinking about Islam and Muslims, we should be guided by facts, not fear.

That is a simple concept, with logic on its side. The difficulty is that human nature and logic have a complicated relationship. No one denies the importance of facts; most of us cite them all the time. It’s just that we’re not always so rigorous about verification. Too often, we equate mere assumptions with truth. We are certain about something because everyone around us is certain. That’s why, centuries ago, people were persecuted for suggesting that the Earth might not be the center of the universe. It’s why slavery and other institutions based on ideas about racial inferiority survived for so long.

It’s why discrimination against women has tainted almost every culture. And it is why the Islamic faith is so widely misunderstood in the West. In fairness, many non-Muslim Americans would agree that they do not know as much as they should about Islam. This does not prevent them from forming opinions. Too often, Muslims are thought of as fanatics who make poor citizens because their primary loyalty is to one another and not to the nations in which they live.

Islam itself strikes many Americans as a mystery, with values outside their own traditions, and practiced primarily by men with long beards and by women in odd clothing. These impressions are reinforced by the media’s tendency to focus on the sensational – on incidents of violence and extreme chauvinism.

Thus, in recent decades, the most prominent figures publicly associated with Islam have had names such as Khomeini, Yassin, Zarqawi, Omar, and Bin Laden – people who convey nothing so much as anger and hate. This association is profoundly unfair to the vast majority of Muslims; to people who live peacefully, speak quietly, love their countries and contribute to their communities.

But fear is a powerful emotion -- certainly more powerful in many situations than reason. When fear takes over, communication stops and suspicion builds. That's why *Inside Islam* is such an important film, and why the extensive surveys conducted by the Gallup organization are so worthwhile. Together, these efforts should serve as a warning against false assumptions, especially those that center on the complex question of identity.

Years ago, an official in one government declared that "Man as such does not exist. There are only men belonging to this or that race." The speaker's name was Walter Gross. The year was 1936. His job was director of the Office of Racial Policy in Nazi Germany. We may think of ourselves now as beyond such thinking, but to what extent is that really true?

How often do we still judge people on the basis of skin color, nationality, gender, or religious faith? How often do we act, even if only subconsciously, as if there were only people belonging to this or that category of human being?

How often do we forget that we are all members of the same species, the same race? The truth is that, in judging others, few if any of us are entirely fair. Minorities are hurt the most. In some parts of the world, Christians, Jews, Sikhs, Buddhists, Hindus and others are the victims of bias.

But in the West, Muslims are among those singled out.

On a personal level, this is harmful whenever Muslims are viewed with suspicion or assumed to have opinions that they do not in fact share. It is damaging to our communities when Muslim groups are ostracized or made targets of discrimination. It hurts our nation when a Member of Congress is criticized for taking the oath of office using the sacred book of his faith.

And it is unhelpful globally when flawed assumptions undermine the foreign policy of the most powerful country on Earth, as they have done for years, but hopefully

no more. This is a subject worthy of a much longer speech, but the main problem has been our tendency, as Americans, to equate the different with the dangerous.

We have been guilty of one of the first fallacies identified in any book on critical thinking, and that is to assume that if two people or two groups have something in common, they must have many things in common. According to this line of thought, if Al Qaeda is hostile to U.S. policy in the Middle East, all critics of our policy must be sympathetic to Al Qaeda.

If the Taliban has rigidly conservative social views, all conservative Muslims must be comparable to the Taliban. If Sharia law is interpreted grotesquely in one place, Sharia law must be discredited in every place – as if it were the law and not the interpretation that was the greater problem. And if Osama bin Laden declares that jihad is a license for terror, anyone who even mentions jihad must share this view.

It's worth pointing out that religions are often poorly understood even by those who claim to believe in them. Not every Jew has a deep understanding of Judaism; not every Christian knows much about the teachings of Jesus; and not every Muslim has a real grasp of Islam as a whole. There are those within each tradition who seem convinced that God's commandment is – Thou Shalt Kill.

And that God's purpose is not to encourage love but to provide a rationale for destruction. Archbishop Desmond Tutu has said that religion is like a knife; it can be used to prepare food or it can be used to stab a neighbor in the back.

It all depends on what is in the heart of the person with the knife – which depends in turn on what and by whom that person has been taught, and on how that person perceives the contrast between wrong and right. I am neither a theologian, nor a religious scholar. But I am devoted to solving problems and have tried to learn as much as I can.

And I have found that both the Bible and the Quran include enough rhetorical ammunition to start a war and enough moral uplift to engender permanent peace. The determining factor is less what the exact words say than the overriding spirit of the message we choose to hear.

As human beings, we know that we are different in gender, race, background and skin color. We are different in age and nationality, in personal habits and sexual

orientation. We have different views of history and current events; and different ideas about the existence and nature of divine revelation.

We neither can, nor should, ignore these differences. In a confusing and increasingly borderless world, such distinctions help us to retain a sense of community and to preserve traditions that have stood the test of time. But they should not be allowed to obscure what we have in common – our humanity, our mortality, and our need to live together on a crowded globe. To thrive, we must do more than tolerate each other; we must respect each other.

We must listen to and learn from each other. We must search for the best in ourselves and in all who are around us. And we must be guided by facts, not fear.

Thank you very much.