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Remarks at Meeting of First Iraqi Fulbright Students

Secretary Colin L. Powell

Washington, DC
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1:30 p.m. EST

SECRETARY POWELL: Thank you very much. It is such a pleasure to have you all here, and so nice to see you. This morning at the Cabinet meeting with the President, I told him one of the most important things I had to do that day was not the Cabinet meeting, but to be over here to welcome you all here to the Department, and the President is looking forward very much to having the opportunity to see you all as well.



I'm delighted to join Under Secretary Tutweiler and Assistant Secretary Harrison in warmly and formally welcoming you to the Department of State. A warm welcome also to Rend Rahim, who is the Iraqi Representative to the United States, it's always a pleasure to see you, ma'am, welcome.

MS. RAHIM: Nice to you.

(Applause.)

SECRETARY POWELL: And we wish all of our guests a blessed Eid. Eid Mubarak.

In this beautiful, yet very intimate setting, we greet many important guests, and that is why it is fitting that we should meet here with you, the first Fulbright students and scholars from a now free Iraq.

You certainly, as I said earlier, are the most important people, I think, that I will meet this week because you are the future for an open, democratic, prosperous Iraq. The hopes of your countrymen and women in America are with you, reside in you. You carry those hopes forward into the future. A great deal depends on your commitment to your country.

As Fulbright pioneers for a free Iraq, you must be inspired to know that Fulbright alumni from other countries rose to the challenge of leadership when their nations made historic transitions to democracy. Fulbright scholars stood at the forefront of Poland's first post-communist government and launched the first political and economic reforms in Poland. Poland's current Foreign Minister is a Fulbrighter, as is the Polish Ambassador to the United States.

Polish Fulbright alumnus Marek Belka, a former Minister of Finance and Deputy Prime Minister of Poland, serves now as the Coalition Provisional Authority's Director of Economic Development in Iraq.

A Fulbrighter who studied at the University of Minnesota, helped to lead East Timor's struggle for independence. He served as one of the two Timorese on the commission responsible for the elections that established East Timor as the first new nation and first new democracy of the new Millennium. Today, he serves as Minister of Education and Youth.

Fulbright alumni and their students in the former Yugoslavia helped lead the democratic opposition that brought down the murderous Milosevic regime. They paved the way for free markets and for free elections. One of them served as Deputy Prime Minister for Foreign Economic Relations in the post-Milosevic government, and was instrumental in Serbia-Montenegro's reintegration into the world economy.

Alejandro Toledo, a shoeshine boy turned economist, was a Fulbright scholar at Stanford University in the mid-1980's. He led Peru's democratic opposition and became the first person of Indian origin to be elected president of Peru.

There are so many remarkable stories such as these, and I want each of you to know that the United States Government, Iraq's academic community and all those involved in our worldwide Fulbright program are deeply committed to see that each and every one of you achieve equal success to the examples that I just gave. Don't everybody want to become President at one time though, take turns.

(Laughter.)

This program is an essential part of a broader international effort to help the Iraqi people reconnect with the world and contribute to your nation's democratic development. We all owe a debt of gratitude to Ambassador Bremer for spearheading the resumption after 14 years, of our Fulbright partnership with Iraq. Our deep appreciation also goes to the dedicated staff of the Coalition Provisional Authority, and especially to Ambassador Ghougassian for your hard work.

Thank you very much, Mr. Ghougassian.

(Applause.)



These individuals worked intensively and tirelessly with their Iraqi counterparts to achieve an historical renewal of exchanges between our two great and culturally diverse nations. The great diversity of the American people has immeasurably enriched our own nation. Iraqi Fulbrighters will see it firsthand, as you travel, as you travel throughout our land and participate in the orientation programs at the Universities of Indiana, Arizona, California-Santa Cruz and Oregon. Indeed, we, in America, regard our diversity as one of the greatest national assets in a globalizing world.

Not surprisingly then, the Fulbright Program is dedicated to reflecting the wonderful diversity of its partner nations, and you, our first group of Iraqi students and scholars from a free Iraq, represent every region of your country and a wide variety of ethnic and religious groups, all of whom must work together, if all the citizens of Iraq are to see a better future, which is our hope and our goal.

Meeting the 21st century challenges that confront our countries and our international community will require an unprecedented degree of cooperation among nations and among leaders in every field. As has been true in the past, I have no doubt that in the future Fulbrighters like you, from across the globe, can be counted upon to serve your countries and to serve the world that we all inhabit.

Already you have shown great promise in your chosen disciplines of law, business, public health, journalism, public administration, education and environmental studies. Your American colleagues look forward to building relationships with you that will form the foundation of mutually beneficial partnerships between our two countries in the years ahead. Our best colleges and universities welcome you with open arms. They will do their utmost to help you continue to grow professionally and personally.

While you are here, we also hope that you gain a better understanding of our society, what makes America work, and that the Americans who are lucky are enough to get to know you will gain a better understanding of Iraqi culture in all of its wonderful variety.

Of course, the real value of the Iraqi Fulbright Program will only be realized when each and every one of you returns home. Your country will not only need your professional skills, Iraq will need your activism to create a vibrant civil society, form an accountable representative system of government and establish independent media that will help

your people represent and present their views to the government.

This is such an exciting moment for all of you. In short, each of you should know that we are counting on you to make important contributions to the renewal of intellectual political and economic freedom in Iraq, and an Iraq that values and protects these precious freedoms is sure to give great gifts of knowledge and peace to all of humankind.

We hope that you will stay in touch with us, here at that State Department, as you pursue your studies, and we know that each and every one of you is going to have a wonderful time as a member of this program. Get to know us, we want to get to know you. And I know that when you are finished here and go home, your people will be waiting for you, waiting for you with open arms, waiting to embrace you and waiting to take advantage of all that you have learned here and teach us while you are here all you can about your wonderful country.

Thank you all.

(Applause.)

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