

**63<sup>rd</sup> Convention of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community USA**  
**Remarks of Dr. Martha Kanter, Under Secretary of Education**  
***“The Power of Community”***  
**Saturday, July 2, 2011 – 4:45-4:55 p.m.**  
**10 minutes of remarks**

Thank you for inviting me to address your 2011 Convention. For nearly a century, the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community has helped enrich the quality and diversity of life in America, and uphold the values of democracy.

And, for more than half a century, you have convened to address matters of universal significance: humanity’s yearning to achieve greater tolerance and more lasting peace, to fulfill life’s higher purposes, and to forge stronger ties with our fellow men and women.

There is something profound, something sacred, something uplifting and transformative in gatherings like this. There’s a special power at work whenever we unite to nourish the soul, share inspiration, acknowledge common bonds and mutual obligations, promote the peaceful exchange of ideas, and resolve anew to fulfill cherished ideals.

At the close of such meetings, the participants return home with fresh purpose and strength. After this meeting, each of us will return home to states and towns all across America. When we do, let’s redouble our efforts to build better lives for ourselves, our

children, and our neighbors, and secure the welfare of our communities.

I believe this word, “community”, will be a defining theme of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

It is already a theme in the field of U.S. education, as growing numbers of Americans from all walks of life join the effort to transform teaching and learning for the demands of an increasingly diverse and interdependent nation ... and world.

Millard Fuller, who founded “Habitat for Humanity”, and is considered by many the father of the affordable housing movement, said, “For a community to be whole and healthy, it must be based on people’s love and concern for each other.”

For me, one of the best and most practical means to express love and concern for each other – in a way that can equalize all our differences – is to acknowledge and nurture the inherent potential of each individual, by promoting lifelong learning.

So today, I want to ask each of you to do all you can to help forge a new culture of academic achievement, and civic engagement, in the United States.

I also want to thank your U.S. and your worldwide membership, for joining people of goodwill everywhere in the courageous stand against violence and terrorism.

Thank you for helping shine the light of unity and tolerance on the challenges of this new century. Thank you for working to end religious strife, defend the moral and humane values that are the bulwark of every just civilization, and promote justice and harmony among the nations, faiths and peoples of the world.

This country was founded on these same principles.

Now, to President Obama, Secretary Duncan, and all of us in this Administration, ensuring that every student receives a world-class education is both a moral obligation and an economic imperative.

Never has the endeavor to build a world-class education system mattered more to the vitality of our country, the prosperity of our states, and the ability of individual students to succeed. Never has the call to transform education meant more for our democracy.

President Obama calls this the drive to “win the future.” The “North Star” of our education agenda is the President’s goal that, by 2020, America will once again have the highest rate of college graduates in the world.

But, winning the future also means preparing informed citizens for the rights and responsibilities of self-government, and of maintaining a just and fair society.

At the U.S. Department of Education, we recognize that only in an environment of tolerance – only in a society that upholds the worth of each individual – only in an America where every student has equal access to an excellent education, from cradle to career – will we be able to achieve the 2020 goal.

In this Administration we also realize that America's centuries-long journey has been, and always will be, a quest toward an ever-more perfect union. This is the basis for our deep commitment to upholding constitutional principles and the rule of law – a commitment I know is shared by everyone here today.

We are determined to rid our country of bigotry, and protect the civil rights of all Americans. That's why President Obama is leading a coordinated effort to address the problem of bullying in our schools.

We reject the notion that bullying is a normal rite of passage or an inevitable part of growing up. If we tolerate a culture that allows children to threaten, isolate or harass each other because of race, national origin, religious or gender stereotype, or disability, we fall tragically short of the standards enshrined in our founding documents.

To that end, the Department is funding programs to survey local needs and support schools that are leading the way to

eradicate bullying. We're investing in models to improve school climates by reducing bullying, violence, and drug and alcohol use, and expanding counseling and social services. We need to ensure that students can focus on learning, and teachers can focus on teaching.

And, our Office for Civil Rights is working to make all schools safe for students: distributing anti-bullying guidance to help schools and colleges change the culture on their campuses, alerting state officials to promising practices and legislative measures to address bullying, and enforcing the laws that hold school leaders accountable.

It's essential for the future of our country that our schools are safe learning environments, where children are free from bullying, and where they learn citizenship skills and respect for each other's faith traditions. This is a goal of the Obama Administration, and we will continue to work together with you to achieve it.

And, earlier this year, Secretary Duncan established the Department of Education's Equity and Excellence Commission – comprised of 28 education advocates, civil rights leaders, scholars, lawyers, and corporate leaders – and led by the Department's Office for Civil Rights.

The commission will study the impact of school finance on educational opportunity and recommend ways school finance can be improved to increase equity and achievement.

The group will also look at the disparities in meaningful educational opportunities that give rise to the achievement gap, with a focus on systems of finance.

Their work will yield federal policy recommendations to address these challenges, including ways to restructure school finance systems to achieve equity in the distribution of education resources that contribute to student achievement. We need to correct the balance so every child receives a world-class education – no matter where in America he or she lives, or attends school, and no matter his or her race, or family income.

Overall, the President has a bold vision of what education can be, at home – and around the globe. That’s why he has made education part of his international engagement policies.

We are working to expand exchange programs and increase the number of scholarships for international students.

We also want to help our students build the cultural awareness and language skills they’ll need to communicate and cooperate with peers around the world. And, using the power of technology, we

aim to create wider learning communities – among students and educators – across borders and time zones.

We have so much to learn from and to share with our neighbors. In his historic 2009 speech in Cairo, President Obama noted that, “In ancient times and in our times, Muslim countries have been at the forefront of innovation and education.”

For three years, Department of Education officials have coordinated on a variety of issues with our counterparts in the Muslim world. We’ve met with the Ministers of Education of Afghanistan, Pakistan and Jordan, joined a White House-sponsored Summit on Entrepreneurship designed to deepen ties between business leaders, foundations, and entrepreneurs in the U.S. and in Muslim nations, and held a conference on community and technical colleges in Amman. Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Pakistan, are among the nations working with U.S. institutions to connect education and workforce development in high-tech, high-demand fields.

Here at home, the White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships is building bridges between the federal government and nonprofit organizations – both secular and faith-based – to better serve Americans in need, while maintaining the

line our Founders drew to separate church, mosque or synagogue ... and state.

In addition to its daily work, President Obama has charged the Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships to focus on four special priorities. These priorities are:

- First, strengthening the role of community and faith-based organizations in our nation's economic recovery;
- Second, working together to reduce unintended pregnancies, supporting maternal and child health, and reducing the need for abortion – an effort we call “Finding Common Ground;”
- Third, promoting responsible fatherhood and strong communities; and
- Fourth, promoting interfaith dialogue and cooperation.

And, this initiative has centers in agencies all across government, as well as at the Corporation for National and Community Service.

Our Center at the Education Department, for example, is collaborating with the White House and the Corporation for National and Community Service to launch local pilots to model how community- and faith-based organizations can partner with schools

to achieve student outcomes like increased attendance, enhanced academic performance and engagement, and improved access to and completion of postsecondary education.

In this light, I'd like to propose a few challenges for your consideration.

First, beginning with a kick-off at the White House on August 18, more than 300 of the nation's colleges and universities will be participating in a new national interfaith dialogue initiative, led by the President's Initiative on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships. I urge you to seek out and join with these pioneering institutions, to ensure that the Muslim faith is represented, and that your community is a prominent partner, in this important work.

Second, I encourage you to join in the Administration's "Year of Strong Fathers, Strong Families" initiative, by supporting and encouraging fathers' engagement in their children's lives – including their success in school.

Third, consider taking part in the President's Interfaith and Community Service Campus Challenge – through which higher education institutions across the country are committing to advance interfaith and community service initiatives over the course of the 2011-2012 academic year. I encourage your students and student clubs to host interfaith dialogues, and play an even stronger

role in helping to address community and campus needs through interfaith cooperation and service.

And, fourth, I encourage you, as parents and students, mentors and community leaders, to connect with your local schools, colleges and universities, and help forge a culture of academic excellence and civic engagement for this rising generation.

In his 1941 State of the Union address, President Roosevelt listed four essential freedoms that people "everywhere in the world" should possess: freedom of speech and expression, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear.

He added, "That is no vision of a distant millennium. It is a definite basis for a kind of world attainable in our own time and generation."

I believe this world, and these freedoms, are within our reach in this millennium. Based on a lifetime's experience as an educator and public servant, my heart tells me there are two other freedoms that, if universally pursued, will do so much to elevate the human condition.

The first, is the freedom to secure an education that will lift the burdens of ignorance poverty, promote tolerance, and unlock individual potential.

The second, is the freedom to join together to address common problems and promote the public good.

The potential for cooperation, within and across national borders, and among the world's great faith traditions, has never been greater. The stakes of humanity's shared success have never been higher.

From promoting peace, to tackling poverty and hunger, to improving world health standards, to safeguarding our environment, there are many examples of global problems that can only be solved when diverse nations, faiths and peoples join together – as a global community – in friendship, respect and common cause.

But first, we must prepare our students to thrive as 21<sup>st</sup> century citizens, leaders, and problem-solvers. This is the vital work entrusted to us.

I am convinced we can accomplish it, through the power of community. And, I am honored to join all of you, the members of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, in this great endeavor. Thank you.