

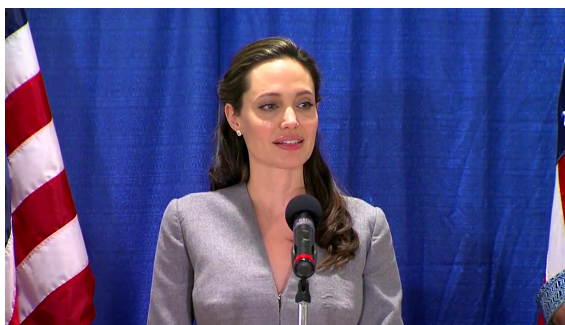


AmericanRhetoric.com

Angelina Jolie

Interfaith Iftar Reception Address

delivered 20 June 2016, ADAMS CENTER, Sterling, Virginia



[AUTHENTICITY CERTIFIED: Text version below transcribed directly from audio]

Secretary of State, Ladies and Gentlemen, Scouts: Good evening.

It is a such a pleasure to be with all of you -- with people of different backgrounds, faiths, and beliefs, all pulling in the same direction and sharing a common outlook of respect and tolerance. It reminds me how lucky we are to be living in a country that enables civil society to flourish; that provides for a rich tapestry of viewpoints and efforts. Civil society is one of the guardrails of democracy, and so I thank you for all the work that so many of you do on behalf of refugees in this country and around the world.

The principles we live by in a democracy are not new. They are not open to being reinterpreted or watered down or even set aside because of new circumstances. As citizens of we do not only want freedom and human rights for every single person in our society, we want that for every person in the world -- upholding the ideal that all people are born equal and deserve equal rights and dignity; and that is the essence of what it is to be a citizen of a democracy. It is how we treat the weakest or the most vulnerable among us that says the most about our commitment to human rights and equality and justice for all people.



AmericanRhetoric.com

And when we are most clearly seen to truly stand for those things in the world, *that* is when we are safest as a nation. That is when we are most respected and admired. That is when our word counts most internationally. And that is how we inspire others to work with us. We don't redefine ourselves as different people because we face new and daunting problems. We raise a fight within us to face down those challenges, and we remain true to ourselves.

Speaking as an American, the fact is there is not a country in the world that we are not connected to as a result of our unique history. We represent a global world. And when we are at our strongest is when we draw on our diversity as a people to find unity based on our common values and our larger identity. We are not strong despite our diversity; we are strong because of it.

So it is time to reclaim for ourselves the idea of what strength is in democratic societies. I firmly believe that strength lies in the decency and common sense of regular citizens -- such as the people who turned out in the thousands after the tragedy in Orlando, supported by millions of like-minded people around the world, from every race and religion. Strength lies in identifying how to address the very particular challenge from a small minority of people who choose the path of violent extremism, or who abuse a religion, without stigmatizing [and] isolating millions of people who share in that beautiful religion.

There is nothing strong about denigrating anyone on the basis of their religion, nationality, sexual orientation, gender -- or on the basis of any characteristic or difference, real or imagined. When we discriminate, when we imply by our actions that some lives are worth more than others, or when we denigrate the faith, traditions, and cultures of any group of people, we weaken our strength as democratic societies.

So, what would it say about us as a country and an international community if we reach the point where we decided we were not prepared to stand up for our principles? The answer to addressing the global refugee crisis surely lies in finding common purpose and drawing strength from each other, like we all feel in this room right now; in staying true to who we



AmericanRhetoric.com

are, and showing that we have the fight in us to confront our generation's test, and emerge stronger for it.

That is my hope and I believe I share it with all of you and millions of people beyond this room. So thank you so much for all that you do, for allowing me to be here with you.

Thank you for letting me join you this evening.