



[Briefing Room](#)

[Your Weekly Address](#)

**[Speeches & Remarks](#)**

[Press Briefings](#)

[Statements & Releases](#)

[White House Schedule](#)

[Presidential Actions](#)

[Executive Orders](#)

[Presidential Memoranda](#)

[Proclamations](#)

[Legislation](#)

[Pending Legislation](#)

[Signed Legislation](#)

[Vetoed Legislation](#)

[Nominations & Appointments](#)

[Disclosures](#)

## **The White House**

For Immediate Release

April 30, 2015

# Remarks at the Arab American Institute's Annual Kahlil Gibran Gala

**National Security Advisor Susan E. Rice**  
**Remarks at the Arab American Institute's Annual Kahlil Gibran Gala**  
**Washington, D.C.**  
**Wednesday, April 29, 2015**  
**As Prepared**

Good evening everyone. It's wonderful to be back at the Kahlil Gibran Gala. I had the honor of attending five years ago, when I wished the Arab American Institute a happy 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Tonight, I'm proud to extend my best wishes in honor of your 30<sup>th</sup> year. Should I look forward to seeing you again in 2020?

Thank you, Jim, for that wonderful introduction. Jim is a dear friend, and I have always admired your commitment to our founding ideals—that everyone is equal, that every voice matters. You and I share the belief that America's limitless diversity is a source of profound national strength.

That's the ethos behind AAI. We need to hear Arab-American voices and concerns just as we need to hear from every American—regardless of heritage or faith; gender, race, or sexual orientation. And, it's up to all of us to push back against the hatred and ignorance that are so damaging to our country and our world. So, thank you, AAI, for your leadership representing this proud and vital community. Let me also add my congratulations to tonight's honorees for the enormous good you do as advocates and educators.

Arab Americans have been at the forefront of advancing our national security and our shared domestic interests for more than a century. They serve with dedication across our armed forces, many making the ultimate sacrifice for our country. Leading diplomats and politicians and public servants of Arab descent, including many here tonight, work tirelessly to make our world a more peaceful place. Thank you for what you do.

As a country, in the 30 years since AAI was founded we've come a long way. You've led the way to overcome barriers of exclusion and intolerance, and to make sure Arab Americans are full participants in our democracy. You've helped shape our government's response on a range of civil rights and civil liberties issues, leading coalitions to ensure all ethnic and religious minorities receive equal protection under the law. And, I'm so proud that AAI is supporting the next generation of Arab-American leaders who will continue to strengthen our country.

Leaders like Sherin Nassar. Sherin's double majoring in International Affairs and Economics at George Washington University with a plan to join the Foreign Service after college. Ever since high school, she's dedicated herself to helping others—volunteering hundreds of hours with Habitat for Humanity. This year, she used her winter break to help build a school in Nicaragua. This summer, she's heading to China to help rural children learn English. And, at GW, she's worked in student government to

expand accessibility for her classmates with disabilities. Thank you, Sherin, for your commitment to others.

Leaders like Ahmad Abuznaid. Ahmad was born in East Jerusalem, and his Arab-American heritage sparked in him a lifelong passion for social justice. After graduating from law school, rather than pursuing a corporate job, he co-founded The Dream Defenders, a group dedicated to changing the culture that marginalizes minority communities and to training young people of color to be our future leaders. He's helped lead non-violent protests and advocated for important policy changes. He's even testified before the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights. So thank you, Ahmad, for taking on big challenges.

Sherin and Ahmad—like all of this year's award winners—capture the spirit of humanity we celebrate tonight. Unfortunately, as we know too well, there are those in the world who choose violence over working for peaceful change, and many of today's biggest challenges come together in the Middle East. So, let me briefly touch on some of the ways we are responding to current crises and working to improve security in the region.

First, we continue to believe that a comprehensive peace between Israelis and Palestinians is necessary, just, and possible. The United States remains firmly committed to an independent, viable, and contiguous Palestinian state living alongside a democratic, Jewish State of Israel in peace and security. President Obama has made clear that we need to take a hard look at our approach to the conflict, and that resolving it is in the national security interest of the United States. We look to the next Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority to demonstrate—through policies and actions—a genuine commitment to a two-state solution.

We know what a peace agreement should look like—Israel and an independent Palestine both need secure and recognized borders, based on the 1967 lines with mutually agreed swaps. There must be robust provisions for Israel's security. The occupation must end, and the Palestinian people must have the right to govern themselves in their own sovereign state. That's why, like every U.S. administration since 1967, we have opposed Israeli settlement activity and efforts to change facts on the ground. It only makes it harder to negotiate peace in good faith.

We're also working to address the lasting impact and human toll of last summer's conflict in Gaza. Incremental progress has been made, but we must accelerate reconstruction efforts and address core challenges to Gaza's future, including reinvigorating Gaza's connection with the West Bank and reestablishing strong commercial links with Israel and the global economy.

Second, we've assembled a coalition of more than 60 partners to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL. Together, we've conducted more than 3,500 airstrikes in both Iraq and Syria, damaging or destroying upwards of 5,700 ISIL targets. ISIL has lost control of 25 to 30 percent of the populated

areas it had seized in Iraq. We are also working closely with our Iraqi partners to stabilize and rebuild the country, making sure that local populations can return and live safely in areas liberated from ISIL.

In Syria, we've made some progress slowing, and in some cases reversing, ISIL's advance. But, we won't be able to fully root out ISIL—and the Syrian people will continue to suffer—as long as the war in Syria persists. As we have long said, there is no military solution to this conflict. Secretary Kerry and his team all throughout the Administration have tirelessly pursued a negotiated political transition, and we will continue to do so. But, the Syrian people need help now. That's why the United States has committed more than \$3.5 billion in humanitarian funding—more than any other country—to help ease the terrible suffering of the Syrian people.

We're also supporting the surrounding countries who are confronting massive challenges hosting Syrian refugees. There are more than 1.2 million Syrians just in Lebanon. To date, we've provided nearly \$800 million in humanitarian assistance to aid Syrians living in Lebanon and to support Lebanese host communities with essential services such as emergency food supplies, clean water, and health care.

As in Syria, there is no military solution to the crisis in Yemen, and the humanitarian situation will only worsen if the conflict continues. We're working with all parties to end the violence so that U.N.-led political negotiations can resume promptly and humanitarian access can be restored. We're also closely monitoring the safety of U.S. citizens in Yemen, including offering opportunities for evacuation.

Finally, even as we're facing difficult challenges, we're strengthening our vital relationships in the region. In a few weeks, President Obama will welcome the leaders of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries to Camp David to reaffirm our strong partnership, improve our security cooperation, and discuss how we can work together to end the region's conflicts.

And, as you know, together with our P5+1 partners, we recently reached a political framework for Iran's nuclear program. This is a good deal that, if finalized and implemented, will address a serious threat to the United States, the region, and the entire world. But, I want to be clear that, if there is a deal, it does not mean we will cease to confront Iran's destabilizing role in the region. Rather, we would be ensuring that Iran cannot become an even more destructive force by gaining a nuclear weapon.

There are no quick fixes. But, the United States is committed to working with our partners to do everything we can to promote greater security, prosperity, and dignity throughout the Middle East.

In the past year, I've had the privilege to meet with college students getting a world-class education

at NYU's campus in Abu Dhabi. I met with Palestinian youth in Ramallah, eager to build a more hopeful future for their people. And, I hosted the Peace Players, a group of Israeli and Palestinian teens, boys and girls, who use basketball to bridge political differences for a pickup game on the White House court. These young people are no different from Sherin and Ahmad. They have big dreams and bold ideas. They are a powerful testament to our common humanity. And, for their sake—for all the children of the region who deserve a bright future—we will continue to push forward. As we do, we ask for your continued partnership, support, and friendship.

Thank you so much.

SHARE THIS:



[TWITTER](#)



[FACEBOOK](#)



[EMAIL](#)



---

[HOME](#)

[BRIEFING ROOM](#)

[ISSUES](#)

[THE ADMINISTRATION](#)

[PARTICIPATE](#)

[1600 PENN](#)

---

[En Español](#)

[Accessibility](#)

[Copyright Information](#)

[Privacy Policy](#)

[USA.gov](#)

