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Attorney General Attends Iftar with Islamic Institute

On Tuesday the Islamic Institute hosted Attorney General John Ashcroft for an Iftar dinner at the Islamic Center in Washington, DC. The dinner was also attended by several Justice Department officials, as well as several leaders from the Muslim American community.

Dr. Abdulla Al Khouj, the Imam of the Islamic Center, welcomed the Attorney General and offered a prayer for the guests. Then Khaled Saffuri, President of the Islamic Institute, started the meeting and thanked Mr. Ashcroft for joining the assembled Muslim leaders for an Iftar, or breaking of the fast. Mr. Saffuri also expressed some of the concerns of the Muslim American community in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on America, and called on the Attorney General to be tough on the terrorists, but to also remain just and fair in the pursuit of the government's investigations.

The dinner guests also brought several concerns to the attention of the Attorney General, including the Justice Department's controversial call for interviews of 5,000 Arab and Muslim men who have entered the United States in the last few years. The plan has alarmed many Muslim Americans, who fear that a wide dragnet being deployed by the government is unfairly targeting their community. Assistant Attorney General Ralph Boyd, who heads the civil rights division of the Justice Department and who was present at the dinner, stressed that the interviews are completely voluntary, and that no one has to answer questions from law enforcement if they do not want to.

Islamic Institute Praised for Efforts in "Take Your Kids to Vote - New Jersey" Campaign

In a letter sent to Hamdi Rifai, President of the Islamic Institute's New Jersey chapter, the Institute was praised for its role in the "Take Your Kids to Vote - New Jersey" campaign leading up to the elections on November 6th.

The letter was sent by the Partnership for Trust in Government, a project of the Ford Foundation and the Council for Excellence in Government, acknowledging and thanking the Institute for its efforts in the campaign, which was aimed at increasing voter participation and awareness for the youth of New Jersey. The program encourages parents to bring their children with them when they vote in order to promote family discussions on democracy and the importance of voting in our system of government.

The campaign proved very successful in New Jersey, and the effort culminated in major media attention from MTV, ABC News, and the major New Jersey newspapers.