



Obama Reaches Out To Muslim World

Barack Obama has declared that the US "is not at war with Islam", in a major speech during his first visit as president to a mainly Muslim country.

Addressing the Turkish parliament, Mr Obama called for a greater partnership with the Muslim world and said the US would soon launch outreach programmes.

"America's relationship with the Muslim world cannot and will not be based on opposition to al-Qaeda," he said.

Mr Obama also said Washington supported Turkey's efforts to join the EU.

Earlier, at a news conference with his Turkish counterpart, Abdullah Gul, he urged Turkey to help bridge the gap between the Muslim and Western worlds.

He said his visit was a "statement about the importance of Turkey, not just to the United States, but to the world".

The US president began his visit to Turkey on Monday morning by laying a wreath at the tomb of the founder of modern Turkish state, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, whose "vision and courage" he praised.

He then travelled to the presidential palace in Ankara for talks with President Abdullah Gul, before giving an address to the Turkish Grand National Assembly.

Mr Obama devoted much of his speech to calling for a greater bond between Americans and Muslims, admitting that "the trust that binds us has been strained".

"Let me say this as clearly as I can: the United States is not and will never be at war with Islam," he stated.

"In fact, our partnership with the Muslim world is critical in rolling back a fringe ideology that people of all faiths reject."

He said: "The United States has been enriched by Muslim Americans. Many other Americans have Muslims in their family, or have lived in a Muslim-majority country - I know, because I am one of them."

"And when people look back on this time, let it be said of America that we extended the hand of friendship," he

said.

"There is an old Turkish proverb: 'You cannot put out fire with flames.'"

BBC North America editor Justin Webb in Ankara says there are some back in the US who wonder if Mr Obama is going too far, but his intention seems clear.

He is on a mission to charm with the hope that in years to come, there is a tangible benefit for America and the world, our correspondent says.

'Crucial ally'

In his speech, Mr Obama said the US considered Turkey a "critical ally", despite the deterioration of their relations over the war in Iraq.

He said that while they had not always agreed on everything, the two states were stronger when they worked together.

"That is why we must listen to one another, and seek common ground," he said.

The president also reiterated that the US government strongly supported Turkey's bid to become a member of the European Union.

"Europe gains by diversity of ethnicity, tradition and faith - it is not diminished by it," he said to a round of applause from the audience. "And Turkish membership would broaden and strengthen Europe's foundation once more."

The EU agreed to open accession

talks with Ankara in 2004, but in recent years Turkey has made little progress with democratic reforms which would improve its chances of membership, correspondents say.

Later in his address, Mr Obama said the US strongly supported the full normalisation of relations between Turkey and Armenia.

At his earlier news conference with President Gul, he had stood by his 2008 assertion that the killing of Armenians by Ottoman Turks in 1915 constituted "genocide" - without repeating the word.

The issue remains highly sensitive between the governments of Armenia and Turkey, which denies those killed were victims of systematic genocide, and has prevented normal relations between them for many years.

During his election campaign, Mr Obama said the "Armenian genocide is not an allegation, a personal opinion, or a point of view, but rather a widely documented fact supported by an overwhelming body of historical evidence".

After his speech, Mr Obama was due to meet Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The US leader will then leave Ankara for Istanbul, where he will attend the Alliance of Civilizations forum.

Zuma Corruption Charges Dropped

Prosecutors in South Africa have announced they are dropping corruption charges against African National Congress (ANC) leader Jacob Zuma.

Chief prosecutor Mokotedi Mpshe said phone-tap evidence suggested political interference in the investigation.

Mr Zuma has always denied the allegations of graft, racketeering and money-laundering in connection to a multimillion dollar arms deal in 1999.

He is expected to become president after general elections on 22 April.

The BBC's Alexis Akwagyiram says the ANC office in Polokwane greeted with jubilation the decision, which was broadcast live on radio and television.

A party bus in the town turned up with a sound system, they cordoned off the road and people started dancing with banners.

Secret recordings

The chief prosecutor said the National Prosecution Authority (NPA) had obtained recordings of phone conversations which suggested the timing of the decision to charge Mr Zuma in 2007 had been manipulated.

"I have come to the difficult conclusion that it is neither possible nor desirable for the NPA to continue with the prosecution of Mr Zuma," Mr Mpshe said.

"It is a difficult decision because the NPA has expended considerable resources on this matter, and it has been conducted by a committed and dedicated team of prosecutors and investigators who have handled a difficult case with utmost professionalism and who have not been implicated in any misconduct," added Mr Mpshe.

The chief prosecutor read out transcripts of recorded conversations between former NPA head Bulelani Ngcuka and Leonard McCarthy, the man who led the now disbanded anti-corruption unit known as the Scorpions.

Mr Mpshe said the pair had discussed timing charges against Mr Zuma to cause political damage.

"Mr McCarthy used the legal process for a purpose outside and extraneous to the prosecution itself," he said. "It was

pure abuse of process," Mr Mpshe added.

Loose ends

Mr Zuma was first charged in 2005, but has never faced trial.

The charges were dropped the following year, but he was recharged 10 days after he defeated former South African President Thabo Mbeki in elections to be the ANC's leader in December 2007.

Last year a judge ruled that there had been political meddling in the case, but the NPA successfully appealed.

With only a few months to go to the elections, Mr Zuma then lodged a legal request for the charges to be reviewed.

The BBC's Africa analyst Martin Plaut says despite mountains of evidence, South African justice has proved incapable of dealing with a case that has been wrapped up in the internal workings of the governing party - the ANC.

The prosecutor provided evidence that his predecessor had manipulated the case to suite the ANC, yet said plainly that he had no evidence that this had been done at the behest of Mr Mbeki.

Mr Plaut says the long saga has left more loose ends and damaged reputations than any in the country's recent history.

Despite the outcome of the affair it is likely to taint Mr Zuma's presidency and the governance of the country as the ANC leader has not had a chance to clear his name in court and the country will not forget the serious allegations, he says.

There is expected to be an outcry from other political parties to the news.

They have previously condemned any move to drop proceedings against the ANC leader, saying it would be a clear interference in the judiciary by the government.

Earlier, opposition Inkatha Freedom Party leader Mangosuthu Buthelezi told the BBC: "If the charges are just dropped when there is no trial it seems to me the stink of what they accused him of will not go away."



Body Found In Missing Woman Hunt

Detectives searching for a missing woman who disappeared over a week ago say they have found a body.

Kirsty Grabham, 24, an aspiring model, has been missing from her home in Swansea since 28 March.

The body, which was found in Laleston, Bridgend, 21 miles away, has not yet been formally identified. Police are searching woodland, close to the M4.

Officers have been granted another 34-hour extension to question a 25-year-old man who has been arrested.

Police said a trained family liaison

officer is supporting Mrs Grabham's family.

She was last seen getting into a taxi which collected from a friend's home in Dan y Graig Road in the Port Tennant area of the city shortly before 0400 GMT on Saturday 28 March.

She had been at the Play nightclub with friends earlier that night.

After a previous appeal, police traced the taxi driver who took her home from the club.

Her mother, Catherine Broomfield, spoke at the weekend of her deep worry at the length of time her daughter had been missing.

Mrs Grabham, who lived in Rosehill Terrace in Swansea, was described as an aspiring model.

"She would phone me every day without fail because she knew I would worry otherwise. I just want her back," she told the South Wales Evening Post.

"It is completely out of character for her to vanish like this. When we spoke on the Friday she sounded fine. There was nothing out of the ordinary.

"I am just devastated. I cannot believe that she has been gone so long."

Peter Rees, a neighbour of Mrs Grabham, described her as a "cracking girl".

"I wouldn't see why anyone should harm her," he said.

"It's just horrific You fear for your own safety. She was very bubbly but a decent young lady. Bubbly but decent."

Police are continuing to appeal to anyone with information to contact the incident room in Cockett police station on 01792 562731 or Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111