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**TRANSCRIPT FROM TUESDAY, OCTOBER 25, 2022: MAYOR ERIC ADAMS HOSTS
AND DELIVER REMARKS AT DIWALI CELEBRATION**

Ingrid Lewis-Martin, Chief Advisor to the Mayor: Good evening. And it's a wonderful evening. It's indeed a pleasure for me to be here as we celebrate Diwali Day. Come on now. And I'm learning more and more about Diwali Day every day. For the longest time I thought that it was in Indian culture alone, but I find out that my brothers and sisters from all parts of the world and other continents, Guyana and other places celebrate Diwali Day, and I'm celebrating it too.

So it's my pleasure and distinct honor to introduce to you, actually present to you, someone who I'm sure everyone in this room knows and loves. An Assemblywoman who was the first woman of Indian descent to become a state elected official. Not only did she become a state elected official once when she became a district leader, she became it twice when she became an Assembly member. This woman worked tirelessly with so many others to ensure that Diwali Day is properly celebrated. And let me tell you something, our mayor doesn't listen to anybody, not at all. But he listens to her.

Today we were supposed to make the announcement about Diwali Day, but because of our Assembly Member Rajkumar... Come on, give her a hand. Come on. She told him, "You have to do it before the celebration so that when people come to our house, Gracie Mansion, they will have something to truly celebrate." Happy Diwali Day to my brothers and sisters, and I present to you our assemblymember Jenifer Rajkumar.

New York Assembly Member Jenifer Rajkumar: Let's give a big warm round of applause for Ingrid. She truly has the goddess Lakshmi inside of her. She's a phenomenal woman and leader for this city. But I'd like to start by bringing up some other incredible leaders of our city, and they're all incredible path breakers. I'd like to start with someone who's no stranger to us. The first Indian to be elected to the state legislature, no other than our senator, Kevin Thomas.

New York State Senator Kevin Thomas: Good evening everyone. Happy Diwali. Give it up for my colleague from Albany, Jenifer Rajkumar. Thank you to Mayor Adams for hosting us once again at Gracie Mansion. Today Hindus, Jains, Sikhs and Buddhist, some of the world's oldest religions, light the Diya with family and friends. You celebrate life's blessings, the triumph of knowledge over ignorance and good over evil. But Diwali's also a time for prayer and

contemplation to reflect on our obligations to help our fellow human beings, particularly the less fortunate. And this is why it is incredibly important for us to get Diwali as a school holiday here in New York City. And Mayor Adams has promised that and he's going to fulfill it. Thank you, Mayor Adams.

Assembly Member Rajkumar: Thank you, senator. Next up, everybody wants an Indian American in the City Council. Am I right? Well we're fortunate to have Councilman Shekar Krisnan. Please join us and say a few words.

City Council Member Shekar Krishnan: Good evening everyone, and happy Diwali. My name is Shekar Krisnan. I am Council member for Jackson Heights and Elmhurst, Queens. And that's right, Queens in the house. And I am so proud to be the first Indian American ever elected to our city government. We show today the power of our South Asian Indo-Caribbean communities by being here to celebrate. Diwali, a festival where we celebrate the light inside all of us that we collectively bring together in a bonfire of justice to dispel the darkness around us, even in these difficult times, to fight against oppression and injustice and to blaze the way forward. We have seen that in so many of our fights with our South Asian communities, like our taxi workers that achieved a historic victory last fall. Now let's give them a big round of applause.

And now we will continue making sure the voices of our communities are heard so that children like my own, can learn about Diwali in their schools, see themselves in what they learn, and most importantly, that we make sure and we work together with Mayor Adams and our state government that we have Diwali as a school holiday in New York City. We can do no less. We must lead the way. And if today shows, our South Asian communities and Indo-Caribbean communities are loud, they are powerful, and we will make sure our voices are heard at every level of government across the country. Happy Diwali, everyone. Thank you all so much.

Assembly Member Rajkumar: Next up, we are joined by the amazing Councilwoman Amanda Farías.

City Council Member Amanda Farías: 30 seconds. Hi everyone. I really just want to say thank you all for coming out here this evening. Happy Diwali. I want to shout out my Bronxites. I know Rahm Hadler's here from (inaudible) in the community. Hey everyone from the Bronx, thank you for coming out. As my colleague in government said, we really need to show the power behind our vote, the power behind our organizing. This is one of the first of many where all of us need to come out and support our communities in a real way, so thank you, thank you, thank you. And I look forward to celebrating with all of you. Have a good night.

Assembly Member Rajkumar: And my colleague in Queens, the incredible councilwoman, Linda Lee.

City Council Member Linda Lee: Good evening everyone. Namaste. (Speaks in Hindi.) Okay, that's all I know. I need to know some new languages, sorry. But I'm so honored to be here along with my other colleagues. I represent district 23 in Eastern Queens and have a huge community that celebrates this holiday. And as the first Korean American, along with my colleague Julie Won in the City Council, we are proud to fight alongside our councilmember colleagues like

Shekar Krishan and Amanda Farías to make sure that your community voices are heard. Thank you so much. We need to celebrate light. Get rid of the darkness. We've been dealing with it way too much. Thank you so much.

Assembly Member Rajkumar: Right, well said. Namaste, (speaks in Hindi). Happy Diwali, New York City. Make some noise for me if you are excited about Diwali. I am so proud to stand before you tonight as the first Hindu ever elected to New York State office. My parents immigrated to this country from India with just \$300 and a suitcase, like so many of us. And my parents came from Punjab. Are the Punjabis here tonight? Okay, how about the Gujaratis? Are the Indo-Caribbeans in the house? When my parents came to this country, they never would've dreamed I would be standing on this stage as your state assemblywoman. But anything is possible in the greatest country on Earth.

Goddess Durga showered me with her blessings, and that's why I won. I followed the teachings and focused like Arjuna on the Mahabharata, and that is why I won. And ladies and gentlemen, it is my faith that has brought me here to the table of power. So tonight, from the bottom of my heart, I wish you happy Diwali, everyone in New York City and across the world. Last night I celebrated Diwali in the White House.

And this year, we also celebrated Diwali in Times Square. And thank you, Nita (inaudible) for that. Thank you. We also celebrated Diwali on the streets of Richmond Hill, Queens on Liberty Avenue. Are my Queens people here? But I must say that the biggest crowd that I have seen for Diwali is right here in the mayor's house. And that is no surprise. On the streets, they actually call him the Hindu mayor. He keeps a plant-based diet. He meditates. He is the only mayor in the history of our city to cite the Ramayana in his speeches. He goes to Hindu temples all around this city with an open heart. All of us in this room have seen him at the mandirs around the city. Am I right?

Audience: Yes.

Assembly Member Rajkumar: This August, there was an anti-Hindu hate crime at the Tulsi Mandir and Mayor Eric Adams came to the temple and stood up for us. The mayor gave us a platform. He gave us a voice. And after the mayor stood up against this anti-Hindu hate, the whole world followed, including the White House, every elected official, and people around the globe. The mayor was the first to stand up for the Hindu community and the whole world followed his lead. And for that, we thank the mayor. On this Diwali, we thank you, Mayor Eric Adams. And I have a very important question for you. Who wants Diwali to be a school holiday in New York City?

Audience: Yeah.

Assembly Member Rajkumar: What? I didn't hear you. Mayor Adams is the only mayor in the history of our city to ask the Department of Education to find a way to do it. And as was announced last week and now viral all around the world, he found the way. For over two decades, many of you in this room have fought to make Diwali a school holiday in New York

City. I've been with you in that fight. And for the first time, a New York City mayor has stepped forward to lift us up and create the Diwali holiday.

Ladies and gentlemen, as Hindu Americans, it is time for us to be seen for who we are. Ours is the culture that inspired Martin Luther King Jr. Martin Luther King famously said that India's Gandhi was the guiding light of his movement for social change. As Hindu Americans, we have a central place in the civil rights tradition of this country. As Hindu Americans, we believe in mutual respect and love for all faiths. Om has many forms. Om is Lakshmi, Om is Krishna, Om can be Jesus, Om can be Allah. I feel equally at home in a church, at a synagogue, at a mosque, at a mandir because that is who we are. As Hindus, we don't just tolerate people who are different than us. We go one step further and we actively love them. And it's time for us to shine our light, our dharmic light, across the entire country.

So this Diwali, we remember Lord Ram's triumphant return to Ayodhya after 14 years of exile. Who would like to hear from Mayor Eric Adams? Well, Lord Ram was incarnated on Earth and through his life and his struggle to defeat the demon king, what did we learn? We learned that all humans have it within themselves to defeat the evil in this world. And when I think of the story of Ram and all that he overcame to defeat the demon king, I think of our mayor, Eric Adams.

Every day, Mayor Adams is working to end crime in our city, to handle an unprecedented migrant surge as immigrants come here from other states. Every day, he is working to uplift our schools and our children to end poverty, to stop hate. So this Diwali, let us pray that our mayor and our city wins. Let us pray that we win in the fight over darkness; love over hate, knowledge over ignorance. And let us remember that Ram could not defeat the demon king without friends and allies. Ram needed Hanuman. Ram needed the army of monkeys and bears. So let us all support the mayor. Let us be his Hanuman. Let us carry the mountain for him as Hanuman did. He is giving the city the best he has every day, a hundred percent. Am I right? So let's give him a hundred percent.

So finally, as was publicized in the news this week, the mayor reads a speech by President Teddy Roosevelt, the man in the arena. And he reads it every morning, the man in the arena. It is not the critic who counts, not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly, who errs because there is no effort without error and shortcoming, but who strives to do the deeds, who knows the great devotions, the great enthusiasms, who at the very best knows the triumph of high achievement, and who if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly. This Diwali, may our mayor win in the fight of light over darkness. May our city win in the fight of love over hate, knowledge over ignorance. Please join me in welcoming our man in the arena, our Hindu mayor, the mayor of New York City, Eric Adams.

Mayor Eric Adams: Thank you. Thank you very much. And I'm happy to be here with two members of your community because it's one thing to state that I want your support and then when I come in office, I don't have my government be a reflection of your community. Number one, the first... deputy mayor from your community is here to my left running some of the most important agencies in our city: Deputy Mayor Meera Joshi. And as we deal with our

environment, as we deal with how we're going to ensure proper water supply, how we're going to ensure dealing with the resiliency, I turn to no other than Commissioner Aggarwala from the community, strong leader in our community. And I want to thank...

Commissioner Ashwin Vasani, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene: Sorry I'm late.

Mayor Adams: Oh, man. And the... could be model of my administration. (Laughter.) When we deal with the health crisis — navigating out of polio, navigating out of COVID, navigating out of Monkeypox, dealing with these real health issues — we turn to your community to find a leader and we found the leader and Dr. Vasani. And I want to thank EmblemHealth. EmblemHealth, who has opened and sponsored just about all of our cultural events. George Holtz, you should be up here on this stage, matter of fact, George Holtz has sponsored all of our events and as many events, you know what, Ingrid? You can sneak that right up here, Ingrid. Let me just get a little higher. George, you and EmblemHealth, you have been amazing for our city and bringing together the various groups. But let me tell you my love for this community. Let me tell you why I believe this community is so important to the city. When I looked at during the 70s when we saw such a large wave of those who came from India, moved to Queens, wanted to believe in American dream. You worked hard and opened small businesses, and you sent your children to school to learn different skills so they can be deputy mayors and doctors and leaders of agencies and help our city move forward. You fortify the strength of our city.

And when you do an analysis, you notice your presence in law enforcement, healthcare, small businesses, your faith. You're one of the largest economic groups in this country, one of the largest educated groups in this country, one of the largest small business owners in this country. You believe in the American dream and you live it out every day. And as I was on the campaign trail, the level of support that you showed me was unprecedented. You were there through all the difficult times. And I'll never forget that. And you asked me on the campaign trail as we went from location to location, you said, Eric, we want to be acknowledged by having a holiday. While children can not only take off to acknowledge Diwali, but other children will have to now ask the question, "What is Diwali? What does it represent?" And we were faced with an awesome challenge. There were no more days in the calendar and everyone stated it was not possible.

But I believe we must look at life not through a deficit, but a surplus. We have to stop saying what we can't do and figure out how to do it. So it may have been impossible for others, it was possible for me. It was possible for Assemblywoman Rajkumar. It was possible for the community. And so we put the plan together. Now we need your help. As we go back to Albany in January, you need to go back with a clear message to every assembly person, every senator, the governor and everyone say, pass the law so we have Diwali holiday. You must make sure that's clear. Where's Jenifer? Come on up, Jenifer. But here's something else as I conclude. We always think of Ram when we think about Diwali and we think about the fight against evil and how he pushed against darkness and brought light.

But when you look at that important story, don't forget Sita. Don't write Sita out of that narrative. Sita was a strong woman who did not succumb to all the riches, all the glory that the darkness wanted to provide for her. She stood firm and committed. And the word Sita itself is a word of

sacrifice. And so as we talk about uplifting Ram and uplifting Diwali, you can't uplift what you celebrate and downgrade women in the process. This must be a city that leads the way of acknowledging that women are not behind us, but side by side. That's why for the first time in history, we have five women that are deputy mayors of the City of New York. We have a woman police commissioner, we have a woman that leads the Department of Sanitation, a woman that leads probation, we have a woman that is my chief advisor. You see the equality in our administration because I can't give you a holiday if I'm not going to ensure every day that we are going to live up to what we speak about.

And finally, we have to live true to what Diwali represents. There's too much darkness. We have been engulfed in the desire to just find places we disagree. We're spending all of our times trying to prove that we are wrong and everyone else is right.

It is time for us to live up to Diwali, to sit down and communicate, to push back against hate crimes against Sikhs, against AAPI, against those of the LGBTQ+ communities, against African Americans, against Latinos, against Irish and Jewish and Polish and all the other groups that make this city. We need to be the beacon of light that shows the country how we need to push away darkness. And we have to do it not by hope and chance, but to do it in a very creative way by hosting dinners and meetings where we integrate with each other and show the beauty of this city. If we only celebrate the pushing of darkness away for one day, then we are betraying the principles of Diwali. It is every day that we must live at that magnitude and at that height.

My Sikh brothers and sisters in their temples, they feed people regardless of what their religion and faith is. During COVID, they fed thousands of people. And all of us in this room can trace our heritage of coming here, frightened, unsure, not understanding the language, afraid. And this country opened its hearts to us. That is exactly what the migrants and asylum seekers feel right now. And when we close our hearts to them, think about if someone would've closed their hearts to our ancestors, how would we feel? So, if Diwali is real, then find a coat to give to someone that's in the shelter. If Diwali is real, then find a pair of socks to give to someone in the shelter. If Diwali is real, find undergarments, find a hat, find some books, make a meal during this Thanksgiving. It's not thanks-receiving, it's Thanksgiving, so find something to do for someone during this Diwali holiday.

We have 1,100 people in this room. If each one of us help just 10 people who are asylum seekers, we will solve that problem. So let's live in the spirit of Ram. Let's live in the spirit of Sita. Let's live in the spirit of Diwali. Let's live up to what this holiday represents and then we would know that we fulfilled our responsibility and obligation. Happy Diwali holiday to you all.

Deputy Commissioner Dilip Chauhan, Trade and Investment, Mayor's Office of International Affairs: Happy Diwali to everyone. Now, the most important part is the diya lighting ceremony. I would like to request Pundit Chaitanya Anand Das and Pundit Radhanath Swami to please come on the stage and offer prayer.

(Prayer is recited.)

Deputy Commissioner Chauhan: Thank you Mayor for an outstanding leadership. You can see here Queens, Bronx, Staten Island, Long Island, Westchester is here. Thank you, wonderful Mayor Eric Adams. Now, I would like to request our chief advisor, Dr. Ingrid Lewis-Martin, as well as Assemblywoman Jenifer Rajkumar. Please come. First, we are going to recognize few people. They have done such an outstanding work for the community. So I would like to request Global Organization of People of Indian Origin. Dr. Thomas Abraham, please come here and accept the recognition. One minute. Oh, yes.

Lewis-Martin: Good evening. Good evening. Listen, we are here for a purpose. We have some honorees, so we need to be loving and respectful to the honorees just as we were to our mayor. We are here for a purpose.

Deputy Commissioner Chauhan: Dr. Thomas Abraham. Let's all have big round of applause for the amazing work and bringing Indian community globally united. So I would like to request Dr. Thomas Abraham. Dr. Ingrid Lewis-Martin and Jenifer Rajkumar are going to present. Now, just one second. Okay.

Dr. Thomas Abraham, Global Organization of People of Indian Origin: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. Thank you, the administration. And happy Diwali to all of you. I accept this on behalf of all the volunteers who have worked with me for the last 15 years. Thank you.

Deputy Commissioner Chauhan: Now, we have from Indiaspora, MR Rangaswami. During the time of the COVID, they raised \$15 million to help U.S. and India. MR Rangaswami, we are very proud of you.

MR Rangaswami, Indiaspora: Hello everyone. Let's make Diwali a National Holiday. How about that?

Deputy Commissioner Chauhan: Thank you. You can go this side. Now we have two times Grammy nominee and Grammy Award winner, Falu Shah.

Falguni Shah: Happy Diwali, everybody. Thank you for such an honor. Thank you to everybody for sharing so much love for our culture and heritage. Thank you.

Deputy Commissioner Chauhan: Now, we have from Queens, Tulsi Mandir. I would like to request Lakra Maharaj and community leader Romeo Hitlall to please come and accept the honor.

Romeo Hitlall: Happy Diwali. Are we going to make Diwali a holiday? Thank you to Assemblywoman Jenifer Rajkumar and our mayor, the Hindu mayor, Mayor Eric Adams. Happy Diwali, everyone.

Deputy Commissioner Chauhan: Thank you. Now we have from Federation of the Indian Association, Ankur Vaidya. Now, we are going to have a group picture.

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