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Archbishop: Arrest Quran burning US pastor

Simon Caldwell Catholic News Service | Apr. 4, 2011

LONDON -- The president of the Pakistani bishops' conference has called for the arrest of a U.S. Protestant pastor whose decision to burn the Islamic sacred book has caused fury in the Muslim world and the deaths of more than 20 people.

Archbishop Lawrence Saldanha of Lahore, conference president, said the U.S. government should seek to diffuse mounting tensions by detaining the Rev. Terry Jones of the Dove World Outreach Center Church in Gainesville, Fla., who oversaw the burning of the Quran by the Rev. Wayne Sapp, his assistant.

"The U.S. government should detain the pastor for some time," Archbishop Saldanha told the British branch of Aid to the Church in Need, a Catholic charity for persecuted Christians around the world.

"In view of the effects his actions have had all over the world, he should be controlled and understand the harm that has been done," he said in an April 4 telephone interview.

"The U.S. government talks about religious freedom -- but we call upon the U.S. government to prevent such actions by extremists and other fundamentalist Christians," the archbishop said.

He added that although there had been no reports of attacks on Pakistani Christians by Muslims outraged by the Quran burning, he said he feared that the situation "could become ugly."

Jones authorized a copy of the Quran to be soaked in gasoline and burned March 20. The incident, witnessed by a small number of people, went unnoticed until a video of the burning was posted on YouTube.

Since then, Muslims in the Middle East have reacted violently, with four consecutive days of demonstrations in Afghanistan and demands for U.S. troops to leave the country.

The worst incidents involved an April 1 attack on a U.N. base in the Afghan city of Mazar-e-Sharif, in which 14 people were killed, seven of them U.S. staff, and the killings of 10 other people in the southern city of Kandahar April 2.

Riots continued in towns in the east of the country April 4.

Last year, Rev. Jones announced his intention to burn 200 copies of the Quran on a "burn the Quran day" to mark the al-Qaida terror attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

His decision to burn a Quran last month was described as "an act of extreme intolerance and bigotry" by U.S. President Barack Obama in an April 2 statement. "However, to attack and kill innocent people in response is outrageous and an affront to human decency and dignity," Obama added.

Jones is under round-the-clock protection from the FBI, having received more than 300 death threats.

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