

Vatican joins chorus opposing Quran burning at Fla. church

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VATICAN CITY (RNS) The Vatican on Wednesday (Sept. 8) joined Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and other high-level U.S. officials in denouncing a Florida pastor's plans to burn the Quran on the ninth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks.

A statement from the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue called the Rev. Terry Jones' plan to burn up to 200 copies of the Quran on Saturday (Sept. 11) "an outrageous and grave gesture against a book considered sacred by a religious community."

In Washington on Tuesday (Sept. 7), Clinton told guests at a dinner in observance of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan that Jones' proposal was "disrespectful and disgraceful." Speaking to a group of religious leaders the same day, Attorney General Eric Holder called the idea "idiotic and dangerous."

New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg, a prominent supporter of controversial plans for a Muslim cultural center near the former site of the World Trade Center, called burning the Quran a "distasteful" act that is nonetheless protected by the First Amendment's guarantee of free speech.

Jones told reporters on Wednesday he was "not backing down," despite death threats that he said had prompted him to wear a .40-caliber pistol, and numerous warnings from military officials that his action would put U.S. troops in Afghanistan and Iraq in greater danger.

"It's time to send a message to radical Islam that we will not tolerate their behavior," Jones told the Associated Press.

In Afghanistan, Muslims burned the pastor in effigy, while some of Jones' neighbors in the Florida city of Gainesville announced they would hold demonstrations protesting his action on 9/11.