

Prominent faith leaders denounce Islamophobia

by [Adelle M. Banks](#)

September 8, 2010

WASHINGTON (RNS) Three dozen faith leaders Tuesday (Sept. 7) issued a declaration denouncing anti-Muslim bigotry as the nation prepares to mark the anniversary of the 9/11 attacks at a time of inflamed religious tensions.

Ingrid Mattson, president of the Islamic Society of North America, was joined by Christian and Jewish leaders in responding to the "atmosphere of fear and contempt" generated by the controversy over plans to build an Islamic center near Ground Zero. She said fellow Muslims are feeling levels of anxiety similar to just after the 9/11 attacks.

"They are nervous about their children as they head back to school this week, that when they go to school they are going to face people who are looking at them as aliens when in fact they are citizens that were born in this country," said Mattson.

The faith leaders were especially critical of plans by a Gainesville, Fla., church to burn copies of the Quran, the Muslim holy book, on Saturday, the ninth anniversary of the attacks.

"We insist that no religion should be judged on the words or actions of those who seek to pervert it through acts of violence," reads the two-page statement.

The 35 religious leaders who gathered for the "emergency interfaith meeting" said they could no longer be silent about recent attacks on Muslims and mosques.

"That is not what we are about," said Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism. "It is not what our religions are about and it is not what this nation is about."

The Rev. Richard Cizik, president of the New Evangelical Partnership for the Common Good, said of evangelicals who participate in anti-Islamic bigotry: "I say shame on you."

The leaders urged acts of cooperation among interfaith leaders at the state and local level to demonstrate solidarity with Muslims.

Some of the participants in the meeting were scheduled to meet with Attorney General Eric Holder Tuesday afternoon to discuss action by the Justice Department to address the recent intimidation and violence against Muslims.