

Southern Baptist leader resigns coalition supporting mosques

by [Adelle M. Banks](#)

January 26, 2011

(RNS) A top leader of the Southern Baptist Convention has resigned from a new interfaith coalition, saying some fellow Southern Baptists felt it was inappropriate for him to support the building of mosques.

Richard Land, who heads the SBC's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, told organizers at the Anti-Defamation League that "many Southern Baptists share my deep commitment to religious freedom and the right of Muslims to have places of worship."

At the same time, "they also feel that a Southern Baptist denominational leader filing suit to allow individual mosques to be built is `a bridge too far.'"

The ADL formed the Interfaith Coalition on Mosques after it was widely criticized for opposing the construction of the controversial Park51 Islamic cultural center near Ground Zero.

The ADL coalition aims to help Muslims who face opposition when they seek to build or expand houses of worship. Land was an early supporter when the coalition began last September.

Land told the ADL in a Jan. 14 letter that he had received a "spirited response" to his support of a disputed mosque project in

Murfreesboro, Tenn., and some fellow Baptists viewed it as promotion of Islam.

"I do not agree with that perception, but Southern Baptists have the oft-expressed right to form their own perceptions as well as the right to expect their denominational servant to be cognizant of them and to respect them," he said.

ADL leaders accepted Land's decision with regret.

"We respect Richard Land," said ADL National Director Abraham Foxman. "We respect his decision. We wish it were otherwise."