

Fla. pastor presides at burning of Quran

by [Adelle M. Banks](#)

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(RNS) The controversial Florida pastor who halted plans to burn a Quran on the 9/11 anniversary last year oversaw the burning of the Islamic holy book on Sunday (March 20) after it was found "guilty" during a "trial" at his church.

"We had a court process," said Pastor Terry Jones, who acted as judge, in a phone interview. "We tried to set it up as fair as possible, which you can imagine, of course, is very difficult."

Jones said about 30 people attended the mock trial at his Dove World Outreach Center in Gainesville.

Jones considered the "International Judge the Quran Day" to be a fairer way of addressing the Islamic holy book, and denied breaking earlier promises not to burn a Quran.

If the jury had reached a different conclusion, Jones said he would have issued an apology for his accusations that the Quran promotes violence.

"We still don't feel that we broke our word -- that was in relationship to International Burn a Quran Day," he said, referring to his previous plan to burn a pile of Qurans on the 9/11 anniversary to

protest plans for an Islamic community center near Ground Zero. "We would not establish another International Burn a Quran Day."

Last year's aborted event provoked criticism from U.S. religious leaders, violent protests abroad and pressure from President Obama and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates before Jones called it off.

After a six-hour trial on Sunday that featured a Christian convert from Islam as a prosecuting attorney and a Dallas imam as a defense lawyer, a jury of 12 church members and volunteers made the judgment, Jones said.

He said the punishment -- burning the book after it had been soaked in kerosene for an hour -- was determined from four choices on his organization's Facebook page. He said "several hundred" were polled and voted for burning over shredding, drowning and facing a firing squad.

Jones considered the burning -- which was conducted by another pastor since Jones was serving as the judge -- a one-time event.

"That is not our intention, to run around America burning Qurans," he said.

Jones has launched a new organization, Stand Up America, and plans to protest the Quran, Shariah law and "radical Islam," and has scheduled an April event in front of an Islamic center in Dearborn, Mich.

Ibrahim Hooper, a spokesman for the Council on American-Islamic Relations, declined to comment at length about Jones' trial.

"Terry Jones had his 15 minutes of fame and we're not going to help him get another few minutes," he said.