

Deadly Afghan riots blamed on Quran burning at Fla. church

by [Kevin Eckstrom](#)

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(RNS) The Florida pastor who presided over the recent burning of a Quran said the United Nations must protect Afghans from deadly riots, even as he denied responsibility for inspiring them.

At least eight U.N. aid workers and four others were killed Friday (April 1) at a compound in the city of Mazar-e Sharif. Media reports indicate an imam at the city's central mosque encouraged worshippers to take action against the Quran burning.

Sen. John Kerry, D-Mass., chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, quickly pointed the finger at Gainesville pastor Terry Jones, who presided at a March 20 mock trial during which the Quran was set ablaze.

"An angry mob took out its rage on selfless public servants and innocent bystanders who had no connection to the desecration of a Quran by a radical figure in Florida," Kerry said.

Jones denied responsibility, and said Islam, not he or his church, must be held accountable for inciting the crowds to violence.

"The United States government and the United Nations itself must take immediate action," Jones said in a statement. "We must hold these

countries and people accountable for what they have done as well as for any excuses they may use to promote their terrorist activities."

Last year, Jones threatened to burn a piles of Qurans on the anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks but canceled the plans after pressure from President Obama and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates. He promised at the time not to burn any Qurans.

Obama, who has taken pains to isolate Jones as a fringe radical who does not represent the views of other Americans, condemned the deadly riots without mentioning Jones in an official statement.

"Together with the American people, I offer my deepest condolences to those injured and killed, as well as to their loved ones," Obama said.

Others lay blame for the deaths at directly Jones' feet.

"Showing blatant disrespect for Muslims by burning their scriptures directly contradicts the example and spirit of Jesus, who taught us to love our neighbor as we love ourselves," said Galen Carey, director of government affairs for the National Association of Evangelicals.

"Those who burned the Quran do not represent the vast majority of Christians, who wish to live in peace and harmony with their neighbors."

The Rev. Welton C. Gaddy, president of the Washington-based Interfaith Alliance, called the riots an "unacceptable" response to the Quran burning, but said they show that actions in the U.S. can have consequences overseas.

Last week, the U.S. ambassador to Pakistan called Jones' Quran burning "abhorrent" and Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari condemned the act as a "serious setback" to world harmony.

Jones is pastor of the independent Dove World Outreach Center, which has about 30 members. Jones has launched a new organization, Stand Up America, to protest the Quran, Shariah law and "radical Islam." He has scheduled an April event in front of an Islamic center in Dearborn, Mich.