

After meeting with black Southern Baptists, Richard Land apologizes again

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c. 2012 Religion News Service (RNS) Southern Baptist leader Richard Land has issued a lengthy public apology for his racially charged comments about the Trayvon Martin case, and said he has sent a personal letter to President Obama seeking forgiveness.

Land, who leads the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, issued the two-page apology Wednesday (May 9), a week after a five-hour meeting with African-American leaders and other Southern Baptist officials.

Because of that meeting, "I have come to understand in sharper relief how damaging my words were," he wrote in the statement released through his denomination's news service.

Land had previously apologized for his comments, which charged Democrats and civil rights leaders with exploiting the killing of the unarmed Florida teen. He also has apologized for failing to attribute the material he used when discussing the case on his radio show.

The latest apology included references to his "insensitivity" towards Martin's family, and a clarification that "racial profiling is a heinous injustice" and that he does not believe U.S. racism is a myth.

Land also confessed that he "impugned the motives" of President Obama and civil rights leaders Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton.

"It was unchristian and unwise for me to have done so," he wrote, adding that he sent them letters of apology asking for forgiveness. "God alone is the searcher of men's hearts. I cannot know what motivated them in their comments in this case."

An investigatory committee is looking into charges that some of Land's comments may have been plagiarized. In a Wednesday statement, Steve Faith, chairman of the ERLC's trustees, said ERLC leaders expect to make a public statement about the probe by June 1.

"The trustees are aware of their responsibility to the Convention and to the watching world," Faith said.

The meeting with Land included Fred Luter, the New Orleans pastor expected to be elected in June as the SBC's first African-American president; leaders of black Southern Baptist groups and two former SBC presidents, Frank Page and Paige Patterson.

Ed Stetzer, a researcher for the Southern Baptist Convention who criticized Land's comments, said he was grateful that black Southern Baptist leaders confronted Land, and wished more white leaders had spoken up.

"I am very glad that Dr. Land listened to them and apologized," Stetzer wrote Wednesday on his blog.