

Christian Leader: Quran Burning Could Endanger Persecuted Church

The head of an international advocacy organization for persecuted Christians is calling on a Florida church to cancel its plans to burn the Quran Saturday, saying the move could bring a backlash of attacks.

Carl Moeller, president of Open Doors USA, said the protest to commemorate the ninth anniversary of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks could endanger Christians in predominantly Muslim nations and violates Jesus' command to love one's neighbor.

"The burning of Qurans will only confirm what many Muslims believe – that Christians hate Muslims," Moeller said. "That is exactly the opposite message we as Christians want to send."

Indonesian Christians also warned of possible backlash after Muslims organized a protest Saturday condemning the proposed "International Burn a Koran Day."

Terry Jones, pastor of Dove World Outreach Centre in Gainesville, Fla., which is leading the Quran burning, said his group wants to warn of the dangers of Islam.

"Islam and Sharia law was responsible for 9/11," Jones told AFP. "We will burn Qurans because we think it's time for Christians, for churches, for politicians to stand up and say 'no. Islam and Sharia law is not welcome in the U.S.'"

This week, Gen. David Petraeus, the U.S. commander in Afghanistan, warned that the church's move could endanger U.S. troops.

"It is precisely the kind of action the Taliban uses and could

cause significant problems,” Petraeus said in a statement. “Not just here, but everywhere in the world we are engaged with the Islamic community.”

On Monday, hundreds of Afghans reacted to the proposed Quran burning by torching a U.S. flag. “We know this is not just the decision of a church. It is the decision of the president and the entire United States,” Abdul Shakoor, 18, told the Associated Press (AP).

Roughly 3,000 people protested the Florida church’s plans in Indonesia on Saturday in a demonstration organized by an international Muslim group called Hizb-ut-Tahir (Party of Liberation).

After the protest, the Indonesian Protestant Christian Churches Union (PGI) sent a letter to President Obama asking him to prevent the burning, AFP reported. “We’re deeply concerned as it could create tension here in Indonesia,” PGI chairman Andreas Yewangoe said.

Jones said the church planned to proceed with its plans but was “weighing” the decision.

“We have firmly made up our mind, but at the same time, we are definitely praying about it,” Jones told CNN Tuesday morning.

Later in the day, he told the AP that he wonders how many times the U.S. can back down. He said he has received more than 100 death threats and carries a gun.

“We think it’s time to turn the tables, and instead of possibly blaming us for what could happen, we put the blame where it belongs – on the people who would do it,” he said. “And maybe instead of addressing us, we should address radical Islam and send a very clear warning that they are not to retaliate in any form.”

Moeller asked Christians to pray this week that the church

will cancel its protest. The Vatican on Wednesday denounced the planned Quran burning as “outrageous and grave.” Other Christian organizations including the National Association of Evangelicals and the World Evangelical Alliance also have condemned the move.