

Florida Pastor Freed From Jail After Thwarted 9/11 Protest

Anti-Islam pastor Terry Jones was released from a Florida jail on Thursday after his arrest on a felony charge stemming from his plan to burn more than 2,000 Qurans to mark the 12th anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the United States.

Jones, 61, was arrested on Wednesday along with Marvin Wayne Sapp Jr., an associate pastor at his small evangelical Christian church in Gainesville, on charges that included carrying dangerous material in an improper container, authorities said.

The hazardous material charge is a third-degree felony, a spokeswoman for the Polk County Sheriff's Office said, adding that the men were only released after posting a bond totaling \$2,500.

An initial court appearance by Jones and his co-defendant has been set for Oct. 15.

Jones and his assistant were towing a large barbecue grill or "smoker," packed with more than 2,000 kerosene-soaked Qurans, behind Sapp's pickup truck when they were pulled over by sheriff's office deputies.

"We were proposing to burn 2,998, one for every person who was killed, massacred, during the 9/11 terrorist attack. ... We were not able to accumulate quite that many [Qurans]," Jones told Reuters shortly after he and Sapp were released.

Jones said the 2,000 Qurans he managed to collect for the thwarted protest had been confiscated by sheriff's deputies.

"They have been impounded and I believe that they will not be released back to us," he said in the telephone interview.

Jones grabbed headlines in 2010 when he first threatened to burn a Quran on Sept. 11 of that year. His plan sparked violent protests in the Middle East and he has made similar threats repeatedly since 2010.

In his comments to Reuters, Jones acknowledged that Army Gen. Lloyd Austin III, commander of the Florida-based U.S. Central Command, had called him on Monday to urge him to rethink his plan to go ahead with the latest protest.

Austin serves as top military commander in the Middle East and he cited, among other reasons, the threat the Quran-burning would put U.S. troops in the Centcom area of responsibility at greater risk, Jones said.

He said he shared that concern but decided to go ahead with his protest anyway, however.

"It's not just about running around like a cartoon figure burning Qurans," Jones said, noting that his anti-Islam campaign was aimed at raising awareness about issues including human rights and religious freedom in the Mideast. "It's hopefully about drawing attention and making people think," he said.

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