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USA CSW urges Dove World Outreach Center to reconsider Qur'an burning

Christian Solidarity Worldwide is urging Pastor Terry Jones of the Dove World Outreach Center in Florida to reconsider plans to burn copies of the Qur'an on September 11th, as such an act is disrespectful to Muslims and will have serious ramifications for Christian and Muslim communities around the world.

According to news reports, Pastor Terry Jones plans to burn copies of the Qur'an to mark the ninth anniversary of the terrorist attacks on the US on September 11, 2001, and as a protest against radical Islam.

CSW is concerned that the burning of the Qur'an in Florida could be used as an excuse for reprisals in places such as northern Nigeria, where the publication of cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed in Denmark caused anti-Christian riots and led to an estimated 100 deaths in 2006.

A local pastor in Maiduguri told CSW, "We are the ones who are going to bear the brunt of it. Since we saw news of what he plans we have been weeping and mourning. People are already moving their families away for safety. Please prevail on the pastor not to do this."

Anglican Bishop Musa Tula of Bauchi, where members of an Islamist group implicated in anti-Christian violence in 2009 were recently freed from prison during a siege, told CSW, "In northern Nigeria the tension is high. We are in great panic because if this occurs it will be worse than 2006, and most of our churches will be burnt down. If you can plead with those people to stop the burnings it will help us."

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "The Qur'an is a sacred text to all Muslims and burning it would be both disrespectful and inflammatory. This irresponsible act could serve as an incitement to extreme violence. CSW is particularly concerned at the possible repercussions for Christian minorities living in Muslim countries, as well as any subsequent backlash against Muslims in the US and Europe. Many innocent people may pay a heavy price if this action goes ahead. We therefore urge Pastor Jones to reconsider his plans for the sake of vulnerable Christian communities throughout the world".

Notes to Editors:

1. In September 2005 the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten published a series of cartoons depicting the Prophet Mohammad. The reprinting of the cartoons by Norwegian newspapers, followed by newspapers in France, Germany, Spain and Italy in 2006 provoked violent protests across the Middle East and Africa.
2. This week in Bauchi, northern Nigeria, members of the Islamist group Boko Haram besieged the central prison and freed some of their members implicated in uprisings that led to the murders and beheadings of Christians in 2009. The sect has also been in action in Borno state, where village heads that acted as informants on Boko Haram have been targeted for murder along with police officers. CSW is concerned that extremist groups like Boko Haram will use the burning of the Qur'an as a pretext for further violence in places such as Bauchi, where the security situation for Christians is already precarious.