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UN envoy on cultural rapprochement in appeal for end of bigotry



Ban Ki-moon (right) meets with High Representative Jorge Sampaio

3 April 2011 – The Secretary-General's High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations, Jorge Sampaio, today urged the world to honestly confront the problem of intolerance and extremism in the face of recent manifestations of bigotry, saying the vice cannot be overlooked, while silence can be seen as consent.

“Recent words and actions by Gainesville Pastor Terry Jones are offensive and dangerous. They express religious hatred and show deliberate disrespect for Muslims,” said Mr. Sampaio, a former president of Portugal, in a statement.

“The desecration of the Koran – as of any holy text – has to be vehemently repudiated. More than this, no religion tolerates the slaughter of innocents,” he added.

Mr. Sampaio's statement followed Friday's attack in Afghanistan in which a large crowd of demonstrators angry at the burning of a copy of the Koran allegedly by Pastor Terry Jones of the United States stormed a United Nations compound and killed three European UN staff members and four Nepalese guards.

“The outrageous attack on the UN Assistance Mission in Mazar-i-Sharif in Afghanistan, the victims of which include both UN workers and Afghan demonstrators, has to be firmly condemned, as does the violence that is spreading to other provinces,” said Mr. Sampaio.

The Alliance of Civilizations is an initiative launched in 2005 by Spain and Turkey under UN auspices to promote better cross-cultural relations worldwide.

Mr. Sampaio said advocacy of religious hatred that amounts to incitement to hostility or violence against believers in all regions of the world has to be condemned and prevented.

“Intolerance and extremism have to be addressed by long-term action focused on education for a culture of respect that is based on the value of toleration of diverse beliefs, commitments, and actions of different people.

“Accordingly, I would like to call on governments, religious leaders, and civil society to scale up efforts, and work closely within the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations to confront intolerance and extremism as a key dimension of peace, human security and sustainable development,” he added.

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