



**EMBASSY OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

MOONAH PLACE, YARRALUMLA ACT 2600
CANBERRA, AUSTRALIA

OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS
TELEPHONE: (612) 6214 5765
FAX (612) 6273 3051

MEDIA ALERT

September 9, 2010

U.S. Embassy Condemns Florida Church Plans To Burn Copies Of the Koran

The United States Embassy condemns plans by a small Florida church to burn hundreds of copies of the Koran on the anniversary of September 11.

Ambassador Jeffrey Bleich called the proposed plan, “an infantile act of intolerance, division, and disrespect. Indeed, the deliberate destruction of any holy book is an abhorrent act.”

“The actions of those who plan to burn the Koran do not reflect the values upon which our nation was founded; in fact, their conduct reflects the very opposite. Religious freedom and religious tolerance are fundamental pillars of U.S. society. They are as important a bedrock of our values today as they were at our country’s founding.”

Officials in Gainesville, Florida, where the church is located, denied the church’s permit for the burning under the local fire ordinance and have said they will take further steps if the church goes forward with its plans.

Our nation honors and respects the Islamic faith and its sacred texts; indeed, over seven million Muslims today contribute to the life of our country and live and work and worship freely in the United States. President Bush added a copy of the Koran to the White House library, and a member of Congress took his oath of office on a Koran once owned by Thomas Jefferson – one of America’s founding fathers.

As she hosted an Iftar meal at the State Department in Washington Tuesday evening, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton welcomed the denunciation of the planned act, saying “I am heartened by the clear, unequivocal condemnation of this disrespectful, disgraceful act that has come from American religious leaders of all faiths, from evangelical Christians to Jewish rabbis, as well as secular U.S. leaders and opinion-makers. Our commitment to religious tolerance goes back to the very beginning of our nation. In 1790, George Washington wrote to a synagogue in Newport, Rhode Island, that this country will give ‘to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance.’”

The Embassy deeply regrets the decision of a few misguided individuals to violate the law, the fundamental principles of religious tolerance on which our nation was founded, and basic standards of decency in carrying out these actions. Ambassador Bleich said, “we join with leaders of all faiths in condemning this gratuitous and hateful act.”

Media enquiries: Chris Van Bebber 02 6214 5760 or VanBebberCA@state.gov