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Dutch Koran Film Angers Iran and Indonesia

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By Niclas Mika

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AMSTERDAM (Reuters) - Iran and Indonesia condemned on Friday a film by a Dutch lawmaker that accuses the Koran of inciting violence, and Dutch Muslim leaders urged restraint.

Islam critic Geert Wilders launched his movie on Thursday evening. Titled "Fitna," an Arabic term sometimes translated as "strife," it intersperses images of the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States and Islamist bombings with quotations from the Koran, Islam's holy book.

The film urges Muslims to tear out "hate-filled" verses from the Koran and starts and finishes with a cartoon of the Prophet Mohammad with a bomb under his turban, originally published in Danish newspapers, accompanied by the sound of ticking.

The image ignited violent protests around the world and a boycott of Danish products in 2006. Many Muslims regard any depiction of the Prophet as offensive.

Iran called the film heinous, blasphemous and anti-Islamic and called on European governments to block any further showing.

Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim nation and a former Dutch colony, also condemned the film.

"We are of the view that the film has a racist flavor and is an insult to Islam, hidden under the cover of freedom of expression," a Foreign Ministry spokesman said. "We call on Indonesian people not to be incited."

Dutch Muslim leaders appealed for calm and called on Muslims worldwide not to target Dutch interests. The Netherlands is home to about 1 million Muslims out of a population of 16 million.

"Our call to Muslims abroad is follow our strategy and don't frustrate it with any violent incidents," Mohammed Rabbae, a Dutch Moroccan leader, told journalists in an Amsterdam mosque.

"Looking for conflict there is looking for conflict with us," he said before an imam made a similar appeal in Arabic.

The Dutch Islamic Federation went to court on Friday to try to stop Wilders from comparing Islam to fascism, saying he incited hatred of Muslims.

"A substantial number of people will associate Islam only with violence," lawyer Ejder Kose said.

"INFLAMING HATRED"

Dutch authorities reported a calm night in contrast to the unrest that swept the country after the murder by a militant Islamist in 2004 of Dutch director Theo van Gogh, who made a film accusing Islam of condoning violence against women.

Dutch security officials raised the national risk level to "substantial" this month because of the Wilders film and perceptions of an increased al Qaeda threat.

Wilders has been under heavy guard because of Islamist death threats since the murder of director van Gogh. Support for his anti-immigration Freedom Party rose in anticipation of the film to about 10 percent of the vote.

The Dutch government has distanced itself from Wilders and tried to prevent the kind of backlash Denmark suffered over the Prophet cartoons.

Dutch exporters have expressed fears of a possible boycott, although trade with the Muslim world is small. There is also concern about 25,000 Dutch citizens living in Muslim countries.

Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende said in a televised speech on Thursday he rejected Wilders' views and was pleased by the initial restrained reactions of Dutch Muslim organizations.

The European Union supports the Dutch government's approach and believes the film serves no purpose other than "inflaming hatred," the Slovenian EU presidency said in a statement:

"The European Union and its member states apply the principle of the freedom of speech which is part of our values and traditions. However, it should be exercised in a spirit of respect for religious and other beliefs and convictions."

NATO has expressed concern the film could worsen security for foreign forces in Afghanistan, including 1,650 Dutch troops.

Before the film's release, demonstrators had taken to the streets from Afghanistan to Indonesia to burn Dutch and Danish flags. They were enraged after newspapers reprinted the Prophet cartoons in solidarity with the cartoonist, Kurt Westergaard, after three men were arrested on suspicion of plans to kill him.

(Additional reporting by Gilbert Kreijger in Rotterdam, Ahmad Pathoni and Telly Nathalia in Jakarta, Hashem Kalantari in Tehran, David Brunnstrom in Brussels, writing by Emma Thomasson, editing by Timothy Heritage)

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