

# Christians join fight against cockfighting

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(RNS/ENInews) Christian leaders are teaming with animal rights advocates to fight against cockfighting, calling the practice of watching and betting on roosters who fight to the death antithetical to biblical values.

"Christians should stand up and speak out against this barbaric practice, which horrendously abuses God's creatures," said Richard Land, president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission.

Concern about cockfighting is focused on the state of South Carolina, where critics of the practice are trying to strengthen state laws against it. Though cockfighting is illegal in all 50 states, it remains a misdemeanor in 11 of them, including South Carolina.

The Humane Society of the United States describes cockfighting as "a lucrative crime, with gambling winnings offsetting even the maximum misdemeanor fines." The group is working with such groups as the South Carolina-based Palmetto Family Council to toughen legislation against what some describe as a "blood sport."

Oran Smith, the Palmetto Family Council's executive director, said South Carolina is increasingly attracting people interested in watching cockfighting and betting on the outcome.

"As a matter of state pride, we must strengthen our laws now," he said.

Smith's organization has produced a video that has drawn praise from the Humane Society. "Wonton cruelty toward animals is frankly unbiblical and un-Christian," Smith says in the video.

In the video, Land says humans are called to "respect every living thing ... Cockfighting is a pornography of violence. People who watch it are going to be brutalized by it."