

Baptists warned of Islamophobia

by [Chris Herlinger](#) in the [September 7, 2010](#) issue

Christians and Muslims need to recognize that they are "spiritual siblings," said speakers at a recent global Baptist congress in Hawaii, even as they warned fellow Baptists against the signs of Islamophobia displayed in Western countries.

"The vilification of Christianity by Muslim extremists in order to justify militant jihad and the need to convert an 'immoral' West to Islam is alive and well," Nabil Costa, executive director of the Lebanese Baptist Society in Beirut, Lebanon, said during the five-day Baptist World Congress that ended August 1 in Honolulu. But he went on to say that in "the same way, political and media voices in the West have used longstanding prejudice against Islam in order to paint a vile picture of a religion that is part of an 'axis of evil' and bent on the destruction of a so-called free world."

As reported by [EthicsDaily.com](#), a Web site of the Baptist Center for Ethics, both Costa and Robert Sellers, a missions professor at the Logsdon School of Theology in Abilene, Texas, warned of a widespread demonization of Islam that has taken root in some evangelical churches.

The two were speaking at a workshop on interfaith relations during the 20th world congress of the Baptist World Alliance, whose constituency includes more than 37 million baptized believers. Sellers urged Baptists to counter a growing culture of Islamophobia. "Baptists have clearly responded to Muslims in several ways, not all of them positive. Without a doubt, one way—reacting with fear and stereotyping—is unproductive and patently unkind," he said.

Newspapers and news services have reported angry protests against U.S. Muslim groups around the country in recent weeks, often by small groups, but also in the form of angry words from some evangelical church leaders.

"Defaming the Prophet Muhammad, speaking ill of Islam or portraying Muslims collectively as if they were all extremist or terrorist individuals is wrong, unloving and deceitful. I trust that none of us wishes to sin against our neighbors by spreading fear and stereotypes," Sellers stated.

Costa warned against Christians engaging in religious hubris and urged that both Christians and the U.S. government act with humility in their relations with predominantly Muslim communities and countries. Costa praised President Obama's outreach to Muslim countries.

Improving Christian-Muslim relations has been discussed at meetings for the last three years by the BWA, which is based in Falls Church, Virginia. The BWA is a fellowship of 216 Baptist conventions and groupings; it does not include the large Southern Baptist Convention, which withdrew its membership over several issues in the last decade. —Chris Herlinger, ENI