

U.S. embassy condemns Quran burning at Fla. church

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(RNS) The U.S. ambassador to Pakistan called the burning of a Quran at a small Florida church "abhorrent" as Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari condemned the act as a "serious setback" to world harmony.

U.S. Ambassador Cameron P. Munter tried to distance the United States from the Sunday (March 20) event overseen by Pastor Terry Jones of Gainesville, who presided at a mock trial of the Quran in which the Islamic holy book was found guilty and set ablaze as punishment.

Last year, Jones' plans to burn a pile of Qurans on the anniversary of the 9/11 attacks sparked protests in Pakistan and neighboring Afghanistan. Jones called off that event after pressure from President Obama and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates.

"The deliberate destruction of any holy book is an abhorrent act," Munter said in a statement Tuesday (March 22). "The U.S. commitment to freedom of religion and freedom of expression goes back to the founding of our nation and is enshrined in the Constitution. We absolutely reject religious intolerance in any form."

Munter's statement came on the same day Zardari took up the issue in Pakistan's parliament and urged the United Nations to address the matter.

"We condemn this act in the strongest possible words," Zardari said.
"It is a serious setback to the efforts at promoting harmony among civilized communities throughout the world."