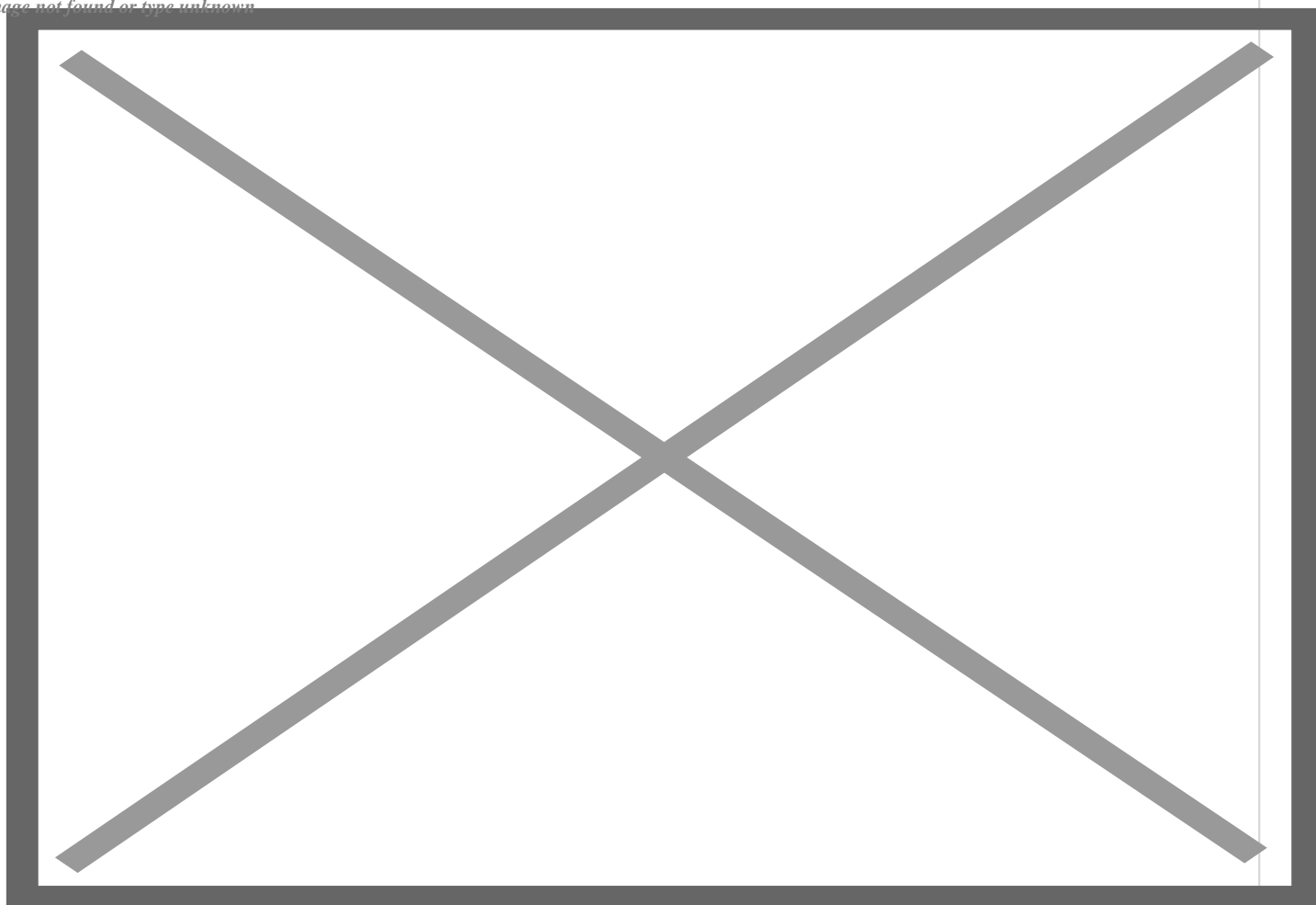


Organization of Islamic Cooperation calls for action in response to desecration of Quran

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Demonstrators burn the Swedish flag during a protest against the Quran desecration in Tehran, Iran [File: Majid Asgaripour/West Asia News Agency via Reuters]

Jeddah, July 3 (RHC)-- The 57-country-strong Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) said international law and other collective measures are needed to prevent future incidents involving the

desecration of the Quran. The grouping, whose populations are majority Muslim, issued the statement on Sunday during an extraordinary meeting in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia after the holy book was burned and defiled in Sweden.

“We must send constant reminders to the international community regarding the urgent application of international law, which clearly prohibits any advocacy of religious hatred,” OIC Secretary-General Hissein Brahim Taha said.

Last week, Salwan Momika, a 37-year-old Iraqi who fled to Sweden several years ago, tore up and lit pages of the Islamic holy book on fire. The desecration occurred on the first day of the Eid al-Adha holidays. The act angered OIC member Turkey, whose backing Sweden needs to gain entry to the NATO military alliance.

Swedish police granted permission for a protest to take place, saying freedom of expression is guaranteed under the country’s constitution. But after the burning, police charged Momika with agitation against an ethnic or national group.

The act outside the Stockholm Central Mosque prompted international condemnation, including large protests in Iraq and countries in the Middle East summoning Swedish ambassadors.

On Sunday, Iran said it will refrain from sending a new ambassador to Sweden in protest over the incident. The country’s foreign ministry summoned Sweden’s charge d’affaires on Thursday to condemn what it said was an insult to the most sacred Islamic sanctities.

“Although administrative procedures to appoint a new ambassador to Sweden have ended, the process of dispatching them has been held off due to the Swedish government’s issuing of a permit to desecrate the Holy Quran,” Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian tweeted.

In approving the permit for the protest by the Iraqi refugee, Swedish police said that while it “may have foreign policy consequences”, the security risks did not mean the application should be rejected.

The United States also condemned the burning but added that issuing the permit for the demonstration supported freedom of expression.

Turkey’s condemnation of the burning, meanwhile, carries weight. In late January, Ankara suspended talks with Sweden on its NATO application after a Danish far-right politician burned a copy of the Quran near the Turkish embassy in Stockholm.

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