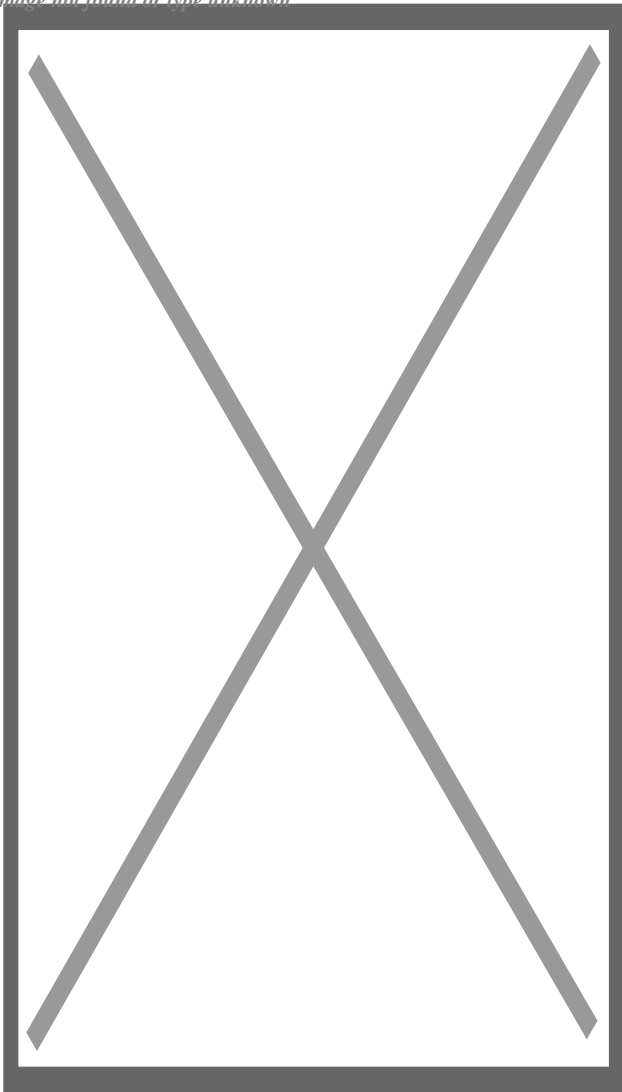


Pope Francis condemns desecration of Qur'an in Sweden

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Pope Francis, head of the Catholic Church (File photo)

Vatican City, July 3 (RHC)-- Pope Francis, head of the Catholic Church, has condemned a decision by Sweden to permit the desecration of a copy of the Qur'an outside a Stockholm mosque, expressing "anger and disgust" over the blasphemous move.

In an interview with UAE's Arabic-language newspaper al-Ittihad on Monday, the Pope rejected permitting Qur'an desecration under the pretext of "freedom of speech." "Any book considered holy should be respected to respect those who believe in it," he said, adding: "I feel angry and disgusted at these actions."

The pontiff went on to say that allowing such acts is unacceptable and condemned, stressing that freedom of speech should never be used as a means to offend others. "Our mission is to transform the religious sense into cooperation, fraternity, and tangible acts of goodness," he said.

On Wednesday, Salwan Momika, a 37-year-old Iraqi immigrant, stomped on the Qur'an before setting several pages alight in front of Stockholm's largest mosque. The insult to the Muslim holy book was made under the authorization and protection of the Swedish police.

The incident, coinciding with the start of the Muslim Eid al-Adha and the end of the annual pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia, drew the anger of Muslims from across the world. Following the incident, several thousand Iraqis gathered near the Swedish embassy in Baghdad in protest against the Qur'an burning and demanded the expulsion of the ambassador.

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) called for collective measures to prevent future incidents of Qur'an desecration on Sunday, after convening an emergency meeting of its executive committee to address the consequences of the sacrilegious act.

Following the call, Sweden condemned the desecration of Islam's holy book, calling it an "Islamophobic" act. Sweden has repeatedly permitted Qur'an burning in recent years. In January, a Swedish-Danish right-wing extremist burned a copy of the Qur'an near the Turkish embassy in Stockholm.

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