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## Muslim anger over papal comments grows

By BENJAMIN HARVEY, Associated Press Writer *Fri Sep 15, 7:18 PM ET*

Pakistan's legislature unanimously condemned Pope Benedict XVI. Lebanon's top Shiite cleric demanded an apology. And in Turkey, the ruling party likened the pontiff to Hitler and Mussolini and accused him of reviving the mentality of the Crusades.

Across the Islamic world Friday, Benedict's remarks on Islam and jihad in a speech in Germany unleashed a torrent of rage that many fear could burst into violent protests like those that followed publication of caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad.

By citing an obscure Medieval text that characterizes some of the teachings of Islam's founder as "evil and inhuman," Benedict inflamed Muslim passions and aggravated fears of a new outbreak of anti-Western protests.

The last outpouring of Islamic anger at the West came in February over the prophet cartoons first published in a Danish newspaper. The drawings sparked protests — some of them deadly — in almost every Muslim nation in the world.

Some experts said the perceived provocation by the spiritual leader of more than a billion Roman Catholics could leave even deeper scars.

"The declarations from the pope are more dangerous than the cartoons, because they come from the most important Christian authority in the world — the cartoons just came from an artist," said Diaa Rashwan, an analyst in Cairo, Egypt, who studies Islamic militancy.

On Friday, Pakistan's parliament adopted a resolution condemning Benedict for making what it called "derogatory" comments about Islam, and seeking an apology. Hours later, the Pakistani Foreign Ministry summoned the Vatican's ambassador to express regret over the pope's remarks Tuesday.

Notably, the strongest denunciations came from Turkey — a moderate democracy seeking European Union membership where Benedict is scheduled to visit in November as his first trip as pope to a Muslim country.

Salih Kapsuz, deputy leader of Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's Islamic-rooted party, said Benedict's remarks were either "the result of pitiful ignorance" about Islam and its prophet or, worse, a deliberate distortion.

"He has a dark mentality that comes from the darkness of the Middle Ages. He is a poor thing that has not benefited from the spirit of reform in the Christian world," Kapsuz told Turkish state media. "It looks like an effort to revive the mentality of the Crusades."

"Benedict, the author of such unfortunate and insolent remarks, is going down in history for his words," Kapsuz added. "He is going down in history in the same category as leaders such as Hitler and Mussolini."

Even Turkey's staunchly pro-secular opposition party demanded the pope apologize before his visit. Another party led a demonstration outside Ankara's largest mosque, and a group of about 50 people placed a black wreath outside the Vatican's diplomatic mission.

Vatican spokesman Federico Lombardi has tried to defuse anger, saying the pope did not intend to offend Muslim sensibilities and insisting Benedict respects Islam. In Pakistan, the Vatican envoy voiced regret at "the hurt caused to Muslims."

But Muslim leaders said outreach efforts by papal emissaries were not enough.

"We do not accept the apology through Vatican channels ... and ask him (Benedict) to offer a personal apology — not through his officials," Grand Ayatollah Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah, Lebanon's most senior Shiite cleric, told worshippers in Beirut.

Rashwan, the analyst, feared the official condemnations could be followed by widespread popular protests. Already there had been scattered demonstrations in several Muslim countries.

"What we have right now are public reactions to the pope's comments from political and religious figures, but I'm not optimistic concerning the reaction from the general public, especially since we have no correction from the Vatican," Rashwan said.

About 2,000 Palestinians angrily protested Friday night in Gaza City. Earlier, Palestinian Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh, of the Islamic militant group Hamas, said the pope had offended Muslims everywhere.

The pope quoted from a book recounting a conversation between 14th-century Byzantine Christian Emperor Manuel Paleologos II and a Persian scholar on the truths of Christianity and Islam.

"The emperor comes to speak about the issue of jihad, holy war," Benedict said. "He said, I quote, 'Show me just what Muhammad brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached.'"

The pope did not explicitly agree with nor repudiate the comment.

In Britain, the head of the Muslim Council, a body representing 400 Muslim groups, said the emperor's views quoted by the pope were bigoted.

"One would expect a religious leader such as the pope to act and speak with responsibility and repudiate the Byzantine emperor's views in the interests of truth and harmonious relations between the followers of Islam and Catholicism," said Muhammad Abdul Bari, the council's secretary-general.

Many Muslims accused Benedict of seeking to promote Judeo-Christian dominance over Islam.

Even Iraq's often divided Shiite and Sunni Arabs found unity in their anger over the remarks, with clerics from both communities criticizing Benedict.

"The pope and Vatican proved to be Zionists and that they are far from Christianity, which does not differ from Islam. Both religions call for forgiveness, love and brotherhood," Shiite cleric Sheik Abdul-Kareem al-Ghazi said during a sermon in Iraq's second-largest city, Basra.

Few in Turkey, especially, failed to pick up on Benedict's reference to Istanbul as Constantinople — the city's name more than 500 years ago — before it was conquered by Muslim Ottoman Turks.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel defended the German-born pope, saying his message had been misunderstood.

"It is an invitation to dialogue between religions and the pope has explicitly urged this dialogue, which I also endorse and see as urgently necessary," she said Friday. "What Benedict XVI makes clear is a decisive and uncompromising rejection of any use of violence in the name of religion."

In the United States, a Muslim group, the Council for American-Islamic Relations, asked for a meeting with a Vatican representative and urged more efforts at improving understanding between Muslims and Catholics.

"The proper response to the pope's inaccurate and divisive remarks is for Muslims and Catholics worldwide to increase dialogue and outreach efforts aimed at building better relations between Christianity and Islam," the group said.

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