

## Dalai Lama sees Pope, says few Muslims "mischievous"



By Stephen Brown

Fri Oct 13, 12:33 PM ET

The Dalai Lama said after meeting Pope Benedict on Friday that "a few mischievous Muslims" should not be allowed to give the Islamic faith a bad name.

Muslims worldwide were offended by a speech by the Pope last month in which he quoted a Byzantine emperor who said the Prophet Mohammed spread Islam by the sword.

The backlash has been sometimes violent and hardliners declared war on the Pope.

The exiled spiritual leader of 6 million Tibetan Buddhists living under Chinese Communist rule said Benedict and his predecessor John Paul II, who died last year, shared with himself a vocation for "the promotion of religious harmony."

"Nowadays I often express that due to a few mischievous Muslims' acts we should not consider all Muslims as something bad. That is very unfair," the Dalai Lama told a news conference organized by a Rome university hosting him for a seminar.

"A few mischievous people you can find among fellows from all religions -- among Muslims and Christians and Jews and Buddhists. To generalize is not correct," he said.

The Vatican called the Dalai Lama's audience with the leader of the world's 1.1 billion Roman Catholics "strictly private" and "strictly religious."

To keep the visit low profile, his name did not appear on the list of people received by the Pope in the Vatican's daily bulletin, as those of most visitors, including religious leaders, usually do.

The Dalai Lama said he had not discussed with the Pope his quest for China to grant the homeland he has not seen since 1959 better human rights and more cultural and religious autonomy.

The Vatican already has difficult relations with China due to Beijing's refusal to let millions of Chinese Catholics belong to the Roman Catholic church under the authority of the Pope, obliging them to worship as part of a state-backed church.

Beijing has had no diplomatic relations with the Vatican since 1951, two years after the Communist Party took power.

The Vatican estimates that about 8 million Chinese Catholics worship in "underground churches" compared with some 5 million who belong to the state-controlled Church.

Beijing wants the Vatican to sever its ties with Taiwan, the self-ruled island Beijing says is a breakaway province, before talks on re-establishing ties can start.

Asked why he had not been invited to pay a call on Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi, who visited China last month to promote trade, the Dalai Lama said his visit "had no certain agenda for meeting with the Italian government."

"I always try to avoid causing people inconveniences," said the Dalai Lama, who has been based in India since 1959, after an abortive uprising against Chinese rule in Tibet.