



SWEDISH POLICE AUTHORIZE PROTEST BY MAN WHO PLANS TO BURN TORAH, BIBLE OUTSIDE ISRAELI EMBASSY - ASSOCIATED PRESS

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Photo: Supporters of Shiite Muslim leader Moqtada Sadr burn rainbow flags, during a demonstration in Sadr City, in response to the burning of Quran in Sweden

Stockholm police on Friday said they have authorized a protest this weekend by a man who has stated that he wants to burn the Torah and the Bible outside the Israeli Embassy in Stockholm.

Israeli officials called on the Swedish government to stop the protest, which is scheduled to take place Saturday outside the diplomatic mission.

Sweden recently faced strong criticism from Muslim countries for allowing protesters to burn the Quran at small anti-Islam demonstrations.

The man who filed the request for Saturday's protest, said he wanted to burn the Torah and the Bible outside the Israeli Embassy in response to a Quran-burning outside a Stockholm mosque last month by an Iraqi immigrant.

Stockholm police approved the protest in a decision obtained by The Associated Press, saying three people would participate in the demonstration outside the Israeli Embassy at 1 p.m. (1100 GMT) on Saturday.

The right to hold public demonstrations is strong in Sweden and protected by the constitution. Blasphemy laws were abandoned in the 1970s. Police give permissions based on whether they believe a public gathering can be held without major disruptions or risks to public safety.

Stockholm police stressed that distinction in an email to the AP, saying they "do not give permission for different actions. We give permission to hold a public meeting! That's an important difference."

Israeli officials called on Sweden to stop the event.

“As the President of the State of Israel, I condemned the burning of the Quran, sacred to Muslims world over, and I am now heartbroken that the same fate awaits a Jewish Bible, the eternal book of the Jewish people,” Isaac Herzog said in a statement.



Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen said that he was urging Swedish officials to “prevent this despicable event and not to allow the burning of a Torah scroll.”

Israel’s Chief Rabbi Yitzhak Yosef even implored Sweden’s figurehead king to intervene, condemning the planned event as well as the recent burning of the Quran in front of a mosque in Sweden.

“By preventing this event from occurring, you would send a powerful message to the world that Sweden stands firmly against religious intolerance and that such acts have no place in a civilized society,” he wrote.

The Council of Swedish Jewish Communities deplored the police decision to allow the protest, saying, “our tragic European history links the burning of Jewish books with pogroms, expulsions, inquisitions and the Holocaust.”

Last month, an Iraqi Christian immigrant burned a Quran outside a Stockholm mosque during the major Muslim holiday of Eid al-Adha, triggering widespread condemnation in the Islamic world. A similar protest by a far-right activist was held outside Turkey’s Embassy earlier this year, complicating Sweden’s efforts to convince Turkey to let it join NATO.

On Wednesday, the U.N.’s top human rights body overwhelmingly approved a measure calling on countries to do more to prevent religious hatred in the wake of the Quran-burnings. It was approved despite objections of Western countries who fear tougher steps by governments could trample freedom of expression.



Olsen reported from Copenhagen, Denmark. Associated Press reporters Julia Frankel and Sam McNeil in Jerusalem contributed to this report.