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afgazad@gmail.com

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Afghans continue to denounce Quran burning

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Hundreds of people have taken to Afghanistan's streets in fresh protests against a Quran burning in the United States, as the UN vowed a deadly attack on its staff would not derail its work.

At least two person were killed and 20 others injured in Sunday's protests, local officials said.

Demonstrations occurred in the main southern city of Kandahar as well as Jalalabad, in the east, officials said, as anger sparked by the burning of Islam's holy book spread.

In Kandahar, one person was killed when protesters set fire to a gas cylinder causing an explosion. Protesters also attacked a police traffic booth, said Al Jazeera correspondent Hashem Ahelbarra.

"We are getting reports of demonstrators attacking the police," our correspondent said. "The burning of the Quran has spread fires of unrest and they are saying that they will take it to different cities attacking UN offices and military bases."

The protest in Jalalabad city was peaceful, with hundreds of people blocking a main highway for three hours.

They shouted for US troops to leave and burned an effigy of President Barack Obama before dispersing, according to an Associated Press photographer at the scene.

The Taliban said in a statement emailed to media outlets that the US and other Western countries have wrongly excused the burning a Quran by the pastor of a Florida church on March 20 as freedom of speech and that Afghans "cannot accept this un-Islamic act".

Attack on UN

Staffan de Mistura, the UN's special representative in Afghanistan said on Saturday that the deadly attack on a United Nations compound in northern Afghanistan will not affect the world body's presence or work in the country.

The attack "should not deter the UN presence, activities in this country in this delicate and particularly crucial period," the organisation's top diplomat said.

De Mistura flew to Mazar-i-Sharif to handle the aftermath of the attack, when protesters enraged by the burning of a Quran by a radical fundamentalist Christian in the US overran the mission and murdered seven foreign staff.

He told a small group of journalists in the Afghan capital on Saturday that international staff would be temporarily deployed to Kabul until office was rebuilt.

"Having discovered that the office was destroyed, I have decided to redeploy... temporarily to Kabul, 11 of our international staff who otherwise would not be able to operate, until we reconstitute a new office.

"This is not an evacuation," the envoy told reporters, saying staff would return as soon as a secure office was established in Mazar-i-Sharif.

Obama reaction

Meanwhile, Barack Obama, the US president, called the killings "outrageous".

"The desecration of any holy text, including the Quran, is an act of extreme intolerance and bigotry," Obama said in a statement on Saturday.

"However, to attack and kill innocent people in response is outrageous, and an affront to human decency and dignity."

Violent protests broke out on Friday and continued on Saturday over the actions of Terry Jones, the preacher who supervised the burning of the Quran in front of about 50 people at a church in Florida on March 20.

Unrepentant

In an interview with Reuters on Saturday, Jones was unrepentant and defiantly vowed to lead an anti-Islam protest outside the biggest mosque in the US later this month.

Government officials in Pakistan and Afghanistan have called for US authorities to arrest Jones. However, his public criticism of Islam and desecration of the Quran are allowed under US laws protecting free speech.

Jones defended the Quran burning and said the reaction in Afghanistan "shows exactly what we're talking about".

Two suicide attackers disguised as women blew themselves up and a third was gunned down on Saturday when they used force to try to enter a NATO base on the outskirts of Kabul, NATO and Afghan police said.

At least 10 people were killed and 83 others wounded in the southern Afghan city of Kandahar on Saturday.

Some protesters in Kandahar carried white Taliban flags and shouted slogans including "long live the Taliban" and "death to America."

The spokesman for the governor of Kandahar province said the protest was organised by the Taliban who used the Quran burning in Florida as an excuse to incite violence.

Taliban denied any role in the Mazar attack or Kandahar protests and analysts warned against underestimating the depth of anti-Western sentiment in much of Afghanistan, after years of military presence and many civilian casualties