

**Retired missionaries ask SBC leaders to cease anti-Muslim statements**

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JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (ABP) — Ninety-five retired Southern Baptist missionaries who served in the Middle East and North Africa recently signed a resolution calling for Christian leaders in America to refrain from making inflammatory statements about the faith of the people in the mostly Muslim area.

The admonition was sent in a letter addressed to former Southern Baptist Convention president Jerry Vines and Richard Land, executive director of the SBC Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission. The letter noted Vines used "very strong language to deprecate the founder of Islam" and cited Land's endorsement of President Bush's pro-Israel policies. Both actions were particularly distressing to missionaries, the letter said.

"Because of the deep and continued concern for all the peoples of the Middle East and North Africa," the resolution said, "we, the retired missionaries of this area, urge Christian leaders in America to respect the faith, values and aspirations of all the peoples of the entire area, and to reflect this respect in their public and private statements."

The retirees, representing more than 1,625 years of combined experience with the SBC International Mission Board, sent the letter after Vines, pastor of First Baptist Church of Jacksonville, Fla., told a group of pastors last month that he stands by his June 2002 comment that Mohammed was a "demon-possessed pedophile."

A similar call for restraint was issued last January by a group of current IMB mission workers in Muslim countries.

The retirees drafted the latest statement during a reunion of IMB missionaries in Atlanta over the July 4 weekend. David King, the retiree who sent the message to Vines and Land, called the resolution "brief, but strong."

King served as a missionary in Lebanon and Northern Africa from 1960 to 1989. In his letter accompanying the statement, he told the two leaders, "The lack of such respect in your statements has done more harm to missions and the cause of Christ among the peoples of our area than you will ever know."

Vines and Land failed to return requests for comment. Likewise, the International Mission Board declined to comment, according to a spokesman.



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