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Retired missionaries call for end to inflammatory words against Islam

By Hannah Lodwick

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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 U.S. Christian leaders to quit making inflammatory statements about the faith of people who live in the region.

They mailed their admonition in a letter to former Southern Baptist Convention President Jerry Vines and Richard Land, executive director of the SBC Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission.

The letter noted Vines used "very strong language to deprecate the founder of Islam."

In a sermon he preached at the 2002 SBC Pastors' Conference, Vines called Mohammed, the founder of Islam, "a demon-possessed pedophile." He also implied Allah, the Islamic god, turns people into terrorists.

The missionaries' letter also cited Land's endorsement of President Bush's pro-Israel policies.

Both actions are particularly distressing to missionaries, the resolution said.

"Because of the deep and continued concern for all the peoples of the Middle East and North Africa, 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 resolution said.

The retirees represent more than 1,625 years of combined experience with the SBC International Mission Board. A group of current IMB workers in predominantly Muslim countries issued a similar call for restraint last January.

The retirees drafted their 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 did not respond to requests for comment. Likewise, the International Mission Board declined to comment, according to a spokesman.

News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Texas Baptist churches, in the BGCT, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and around the world.