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Supreme Court to review pastor's hate crime case

AP (12.05.2005) / HRWF Int. (17.05.2005) - Email: info@hrwf.net - Website: <http://www.hrwf.org> - Sweden's Supreme Court said Monday it will review the acquittal of Pentecostal pastor Ake Green, who faced criminal charges over a sermon on homosexuality.

An appeals court in February threw out a hate crimes conviction against Green, saying it's not illegal to preach a personal interpretation of the Bible.

But Sweden's chief prosecutor Fredrik Wersaell appealed to the Supreme Court, contending that Green violated Sweden's tough 2003 hate crimes law.

A lower court gained international attention last year when it punished Green with a 30-day prison sentence, which was then suspended pending appeal. He was the first clergyman convicted under Sweden's hate crimes law.

Green, 63, had told his congregation on the small southeastern island of Oland that homosexuals are "a deep cancer tumor on all of society" and warned that Sweden risked a natural disaster because of leniency toward gays.

"Homosexuality is something sick," Green said, comparing it to pedophilia and bestiality. He said gays were likely to rape children and animals.

When he was acquitted, Green told The Associated Press he wasn't worried about spending a month in jail but about "freedom to preach God's word."

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Swedish Muslims march against anti-Prophet priest

Islam Online (25.04.2005) / HRWF Int. (26.04.2005) - Email: info@hrwf.net - Website: <http://www.hrwf.org> - After vowing to take him to court, several hundred Muslims demonstrated Sunday, April 24, outside a Pentecostal church in Stockholm against a preacher who made improper remarks about Prophet Mohammed (PBUH).

Police said about 400 Muslim protesters, including women and children, gathered in front of the Philadelphia Church, the main site of the Pentecostal movement in Sweden, reported Agence France-Presse (AFP).

In March at this church, Runar Sogaard, a 37-year-old Norwegian preacher living in Sweden, made comments about several religions including Islam.

"Mohammed, he is not God, he was a confused pedophile... Read the story of what Mohammed did. He married girls at age nine, 11," Sogaard said in a sermon which was sold on a CD by his followers.

A statement signed by "Muslims of Sweden" called his remarks "immature and ridiculous," noting that at the time when the prophet lived girls were married at very young ages.

With reports that Sogaard received death threats after his provocative remarks, a top Muslim scholar in the country urged his law-abiding fellow Swedish Muslims not to take the law into their own hands.

"We beg those who threatened Sogaard, in the name of Islam, to let Swedish law judge between him and us," said Hassan Moussa, the head of Sweden's council of imams.

After Sogaard's sermon was reported in the Swedish press, the preacher tried to justify his remarks.

"I made humorous descriptions of different religions, including Christianity," he said in a television interview last week.

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Norwegian preacher kindles religious strife

Aftenposten (22.04.2005)/HRWF Int. (26.04.2005) Email: info@hrwf.net - Website: <http://www.hrwf.org> - Celebrity Pentecostal preacher Runar Sogaard is under protection by Swedish police after receiving death threats. A high-profile sermon where Sogaard called the prophet Mohammed "a confused pedophile" has triggered fears of religious war.

Sogaard, 37, enjoys celebrity status in Sweden after his marriage to recording star and Eurovision song contest winner Carola, even though they are now divorced.

"Even if I see Runar while he has major police protection I will shoot him to death," a radical Islamist told Swedish newspaper Expressen.

Persons connected to the Kurdish group Ansar al-Islam claim to have received a fatwa, a decree from a Muslim religious leader, to kill Sogaard.

Muslim organizations have called Sogaard's sermon, which is on sale on CD at the Stockholm Karisma Center's web site, a hateful attack on Islam and fear the type of violent conflict that scarred the Netherlands after filmmaker Theo van Gogh was killed by an Islamic extremist for a controversial film.

Islam expert Jan Hjärpe at the University of Lund told Expressen that such an assassination is a real risk, and he wondered if conflict was the motive for the sermon.

It was a statement from an odd man in an odd sect but the effect is stronger antagonism between different groups. It becomes a pure religious polemic and is extremely unpleasant," Hjärpe told the newspaper.

Hjärpe saw the incident as a type of beginning of a religious war in Sweden. "It (Søgaard's sermon) has power and influence. It seems to have been Runar's intention to provoke and promote antagonism," Hjärpe said.

Søgaard said he fears for his life and understands that he has angered the wrong people. He received police protection after questioning by Swedish police.

Imam Hassan Moussa, head of Sweden's imam council, demanded that Christian communities repudiate Søgaard's remarks, and promised that Sweden would avoid the ugly scenes experienced in Holland.

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