

Saudi king urges talks among 3 religions

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Associated Press

Published on: 03/26/08

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia — The Saudi king has made a plea for dialogue among Muslims, Christians and Jews.

The message from King Abdullah comes at a time of stalled peace initiatives and escalating tensions in the region. Muslims have been angered by cartoons published in European papers seen as insulting the Prophet Muhammad and by the pope's baptizing on Easter of a Muslim journalist who had converted to Catholicism.

"The idea is to ask representatives of all monotheistic religions to sit together with their brothers in faith and sincerity to all religions as we all believe in the same God," the king told delegates at a seminar on "Culture and the Respect of Religions."

The specifics of Abdullah's initiative — and who would participate — remained unclear, in particular whether Israeli religious leaders would be invited. But the call was significant. The Saudi monarch is the custodian of Islam's two holiest shrines in Mecca and Medina, a position that lends his words special importance and influence.

The White House welcomed the gesture.

"... Of course, when you have someone like the king of Saudi Arabia, and all of his stature, that is recommending such a dialogue, it can only give us hope that there would be further recognition of everyone's right to freedom and freedom of expression and religion," presidential spokeswoman Dana Perino said Tuesday.

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