

Online, a Violent View of Islam; Anti-Immigration Dutch Lawmaker Characterizes His Film as 'Tough Reality'

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Body

A **Dutch lawmaker** known for his outspoken opposition to immigration posted a graphic **film** depicting **Islam** as a religion of violence on a maverick video-sharing Web site Thursday night after government and religious officials spent weeks trying to prevent its release.

The 15-minute **film** splices verses from the Koran with videos of mutilated bombing victims, the World Trade Center attack, the beheading of a man by masked gunmen and an Afghan woman draped in a pleated blue burqa being shot in the head.

"It is not a provocation, it is **tough reality** -- a **reality** that some Muslims might not find comfortable," Geert Wilders, a member of the Netherlands' far-right Party for Freedom, told reporters after the Web site LiveLeak.com received so many hits within the first hour of posting the **film** that the video temporarily froze. "I think I have made a very decent **film**, within the boundaries of the law. This is a call for debate; that is how people should respond."

Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende had warned Wilders that the **film**, called "Fitna," the Arabic word for chaos or strife, could imperil the country's national interests and endanger its soldiers and other citizens abroad. In recent weeks, news that the **film** would soon be released set off **violent** protests in Afghanistan, Pakistan and other predominantly Muslim countries.

"We believe it serves no purpose other than to cause offense," Balkenende said at a news conference soon after the video was posted on the Internet. "But feeling offended should never be used as an excuse for aggression and threats."

European officials have expressed concern that the **film** could ignite the kind of worldwide demonstrations that followed the publication of cartoons in Danish newspapers in 2005 ridiculing the prophet Muhammad. In an

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audiotape released last week, Osama bin Laden warned Europeans that they faced "severe reckoning" if they continued to defame **Islam**'s holy prophet.

Mohamed Rabbae, chairman of the moderate National Moroccan Council in the Netherlands, appealed to Muslims to "react calmly and within law" after **viewing** the video.

"The pictures are horrible and very bloody," Rabbae said in an interview. "It is a **film** according to the ideology of Mr. Wilders -- he always tries to make a link between violence and the Koran."

Dutch television stations had refused to air the **film**, and Wilders was unable to find a venue to screen it in the Netherlands because of the prohibitively costly expense of security. The U.S. Internet provider that Wilders used to advertise the **film** suspended its Web site last week.

The U.N. Human Rights Council adopted a resolution Thursday deploring the use of the media to "incite acts of violence, xenophobia or related intolerance and discrimination towards **Islam**" or other religions.

But early Thursday evening, LiveLeak.com, a site based in the United Kingdom that specializes in running raw videos from the battlefields of Afghanistan, as well as crime footage from around the world, posted "Fitna."

"There was no legal reason to refuse Geert Wilders the right to post his **film** (Fitna) on LiveLeak.com and it is not our place to censor people based on an emotive response," the Web site said in a statement posted next to the video. "To many of us involved in LiveLeak.com some of the messages therein are personally offensive. . . . Our being offended is no reason to deny Mr. Wilders the right to have his **film** seen."

Within minutes of its release on the Internet, **Dutch** television aired clips from "Fitna," and the **film** dominated the nightly news.

Paul Scheffer, a professor of urban sociology at the University of Amsterdam, said that "in principle, criticism of the Koran or radical **Islam** is part of an open society. The problem with Wilders is he has linked that with limiting the freedom of Muslims in this country; he not only criticizes the Koran, he wants to ban the Koran."

Wilders's personal Web site carries a banner that declares, "Stop the Islamization of the Netherlands." The government has assigned bodyguards to protect Wilders because of death threats against him.

The Netherlands, like most other Western European nations, is in the midst of a divisive struggle over national identity in the face of large-scale immigration in recent decades. The debate has been particularly pronounced in the Netherlands, which has long enjoyed a reputation as a liberal, open society that allowed personal freedoms.

In 2004, **Dutch** filmmaker Theo Van Gogh was murdered in Amsterdam by an extremist after he released a short **film** criticizing **Islam**'s treatment of women.

On Friday, a **Dutch** court is scheduled to hear a petition by the **Dutch** Islamic Federation seeking a review of whether Wilders's **film** violates hate-speech laws.

The case was filed before Wilders's **film** was released and was based on numerous public remarks the **lawmaker** has made describing the prophet Muhammad as "a barbarian" and comparing the Koran to Hitler's "Mein Kampf."

Special correspondent Merel Boers in Amsterdam contributed to this report.

Graphic

IMAGE; Photos By Fred Ernst -- Associated Press; Protesters demonstrated last week in Amsterdam against the **film**, which was posted yesterday by a Web site in Britain after attempts to block its release.

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IMAGE; Geert Wilders titled his film "Fitna," the Arabic word for chaos or strife. The prime minister told him that it could endanger Dutch soldiers and citizens.

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