



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on March 21, 2012

## Saudi Arabia's Grand Mufti Calls for Destruction of Churches in Region

The Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia (left), the country's top Islamic cleric, has declared that it is "necessary to destroy all the churches of the region," placing Christian places of worship throughout the Arabian Peninsula in potential jeopardy. Since Christianity is already forbidden in Saudi Arabia and no churches exist there, the implications of the cleric's words were that the church ban should extend to other countries in the region, including Yemen, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates.



According to the Arabic Christian news site [Linga.org](#), Sheikh Abdul Aziz bin Abdullah made the controversial statement during a meeting with a delegation from the Kuwait-based [Society of the Revival of Islamic Heritage](#), in response to a query about Sharia law concerning the construction of churches in Islamic countries. As reported by the [Christian Post](#), the question was in reference "to a recent controversial statement by a Kuwaiti member of parliament who reportedly called for the 'removal' of churches. The MP reportedly specified later that he merely meant that no churches should be built in Kuwait."

According to [USCatholic.org](#), legislation was recently introduced in Kuwait's parliament that would mandate the removal of Christian churches from the country and impose strict Islamic law (Shariah). "Party officials said later the legislation would not remove the churches, but prohibit further construction of Christian churches and non-Muslim places of worship in the country," reported the Catholic news site.

In making the pronouncement, the mufti cited an Islamic tradition that on his deathbed the prophet Mohammed had decreed that "there are not to be two religions in the Arabian Peninsula" — which some observant Muslims have seen as an order to cleanse the area of Christian influence. The Saudi cleric emphasized that because Kuwait is part of the Arabian Peninsula, it would be necessary to destroy all churches in the country.

The *Christian Post* noted that although Christian worship is officially forbidden in Saudi Arabia, "a small minority of Christians is known to worship there, unofficially. According to one [2008 estimate](#), there were 800,000 Catholics living in Saudi Arabia at the time."

Over the past several months [International Christian Concern](#), an organization that monitors the persecution of Christians around the world, has been reporting on a group of 35 Christian men and women from Ethiopia who have been held against their will in Saudi Arabia since December 2011 after being arrested for holding a Christian prayer meeting in a private home.

According to one of those being held, the Christians have been pressured by Islamic "preachers" to convert to Islam. "The Muslim preacher vilified Christianity, denigrated the Bible, and told us that Islam



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is the only true religion,” the female detainee told ICC. “The preacher told us to convert to Islam. I was so offended with her false teachings that I left the meeting.”

The Saudi cleric’s comments have prompted concern by Christian leaders with congregations in the Arabian Peninsula. [Russian Orthodox Bishop Mark Golovkov of Yegoryevsk](#) said the statement was “alarming because the Persian Gulf countries are populated not only by numerous Muslims, but also Christians. They live side by side with Muslims in peace, they work and make a constructive contribution to the life of each country.”

Islamic watchdog groups also reacted to the declaration, noting that the Western media was strangely unresponsive to the Islamic leader’s words. “Considering the hysteria that besets the West whenever non-authoritative individuals offend Islam ... imagine what would happen if a Christian counterpart to the Grand Mufti ... were to declare that all mosques in Italy must be destroyed,” said Raymond Ibrahim of [Jihad Watch](#). “Imagine the nonstop Western media frenzy that would erupt, all the shrill screams of ‘intolerance’ and ‘bigot,’ demands for apologies if not resignation, nonstop hand-wringing by sensitive politicians, and worse.”

In an official editorial, the [Washington Times](#) noted that had the Pope himself made a similarly outlandish call for “the destruction of all the mosques in Europe, the uproar would be cataclysmic. Pundits would lambaste the church, the [White House](#) would rush out a statement of deep concern, and rioters in the Middle East would kill each other in their grief. But when the most influential leader in the Muslim world issues a fatwa to destroy Christian churches, the silence is deafening.”

The *Times* noted that Sheikh Abdul Aziz bin Abdullah “is not a small-time radical imam trying to stir up his followers with fiery hate speech. This was a considered, deliberate, and specific ruling from one of the most important leaders in the Muslim world. It does not just create a religious obligation for those over whom the mufti has direct authority; it is also a signal to others in the Muslim world that destroying churches is not only permitted but mandatory.”



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