

Iran's president asks pope to join efforts against intolerance

VATICAN CITY – Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad told Pope Benedict XVI that he would like to work more closely with the Vatican in an effort to stop religious intolerance and the breakup of families.

The president also appealed to world religions to cooperate in the fight against secularism and materialism, Iranian news agencies reported.

The appeals came in a letter that was handed to the pope by Iranian Vice President for Parliamentary Affairs Sayyed Mohammad-Reza Mir-Tajeddini, during a brief meeting Oct. 6 at the Vatican.

Vatican spokesman Jesuit Father Federico Lombardi confirmed to Catholic News Service Oct. 7 that the letter was given to the pope and its contents already published by Iranian media outlets.

According to reports, the letter praised the pope and the Vatican for criticizing a U.S. pastor's threats to burn copies of the Quran on Sept. 11.

The Iranian president lamented people's disregard for religious teachings, which, he said, stemmed from ideologies such as "secularism, Western extremist humanism, and man's growing tendency toward material life."

Such ideologies have been on the rise, he said, and have "paved the way for the decline of human society."

"Therefore, close cooperation and interaction among divine religions to halt such destructive moves is an absolute necessity," his letter said.

Ahmadinejad called on religious believers to lead efforts in "establishing justice, uprooting oppression and overcoming discriminatory practices."

He also told the pope that Iran was willing to cooperate further with the Vatican in efforts to stop sacrilegious acts, the spread of religious intolerance and the

destabilization of the family.