

28 March 2008 - Government's reaction to Wilders' film

Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende has reacted to the film Fitna that MP Geert Wilders has released on the internet today.

Prime minister Jan Peter Balkenende:

"On behalf of the Dutch government, I would like to respond to the online film by Mr Wilders.

The film shows images of violent acts and holds Islam and the Koran responsible for them. The government condemns such acts and those who commit them.

The film equates Islam with violence. We reject this interpretation. The vast majority of Muslims reject extremism and violence. In fact, the victims are often also Muslims.

We therefore regret that Mr Wilders has released this film. We believe it serves no purpose other than to cause offence. But feeling offended must never be used as an excuse for aggression and threats. The government is heartened by the initial restrained reactions of Dutch Muslim organisations.

Muslims, Christians and people of other convictions can easily live together in peace. The problem is not religion, but misuse of religion to sow hatred and intolerance. That is why we are calling for respect for everyone's deepest convictions.

We are aware of the concerns and the sentiments about this film in the international Muslim community. We have recently spoken with many people at home and abroad to promote mutual understanding. We will continue to follow this course.

The Dutch government stands for a society in which freedom and respect go hand in hand. Such a society demands dedication and commitment. We oppose extremism. Anyone who breaks the law is dealt with firmly. Let us solve problems by working together. Let us reach out to others and build confidence and trust. Let us conquer prejudice. We shall surely succeed."