

Pope faces growing calls for full apology

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VATICAN CITY: Pope Benedict faced a growing chorus of demands yesterday for an unequivocal apology for remarks seen as portraying Islam as a violent faith, despite attempts by Western leaders and churchmen to defuse the crisis.

Even US President George W. Bush got involved, saying on Monday the Pope had been "sincere" when he said sorry to Muslims, and that his words had been misunderstood.

But for many Muslims, the pope's attempt to explain himself on Sunday did not go far enough, and observers were waiting to see if he would speak about it again at his general audience at the Vatican today.

The pope enraged Muslims in a speech a week ago in Germany quoting 14th Century Byzantine Emperor Manuel II Palaeologus, who said everything the Prophet Muhammad brought was evil "such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached".

The leader of the world's 1.1 billion Roman Catholics said on Sunday he was "deeply sor-

ry" for the reaction caused — but stopped short of apologising for his words or retracting them.

After an al-Qaeda umbrella group in Iraq vowed war on "worshippers of the cross" on Monday, Italian media said an al-Qaeda group in Egypt called yesterday for the Pope to be punished by strict Islamic Shariah law for insulting their religion.

Vatican newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano* published the Pope's explanation in Arabic on its front page to try to clarify his meaning.

Pope Benedict also yesterday deplored the killing of an Italian nun in Somalia, and said he hoped her sacrifice could lead to respect among religions.

Gunmen shot dead Sister Leonella Sgorbati and her bodyguard on Sunday outside a children's hospital in north Mogadishu where she had worked since 2002.

The attack drew immediate speculation of links to Muslim anger over Pope Benedict's recent remarks on Islam, but no direct link has been proven.

In Ljubljana, Slovenian President Janez Drnovsek said yesterday that the pope was wrong to use Islam in his remarks about faith and violence.

"The pope was right to indicate the contradiction between faith and violence, but he erred in offering Islam as an example," Drnovsek wrote on his private web site.

The pontiff should have dredged up examples from Christianity, which was also fraught with historical cases of bloodshed in the name of religion, Drnovsek added.

In Baghdad, Parliament yesterday rejected the pope's explanation of his remarks on the Prophet Muhammad's teachings as not being clear enough, and demanded a "clear-cut apology".

It said that the pontiff needed to do more.

Parliament "demands the pope take practical steps to restoring self-respect to the Islamic world and its religion, and a clear-cut apology for what he said," the statement said.

It added that the demand

was aimed to ensure that similar remarks would not be made in the future and to create an "encouraging environment for openness and close relationship among religions, dropping all that would lead to hatred".

In Ankara, Turks yesterday demanded that Pope Benedict make amends before visiting the predominantly Muslim country in November.

"Either apologise, or do not come," read a banner carried by a group of protesters from a religious workers' union here — a sign that many Muslims feel the pope's expression of regret on Sunday was insufficient.

The protesters reportedly demanded that the Justice Ministry arrest the pope on his arrival here and face trial on charges of insulting Islam and causing hatred based on religious differences.

Inur Cevik, editor-in-chief of *The New Anatolian*, said that the pope must reach out to Muslims before visiting Turkey. — Agencies