

We respect the pope, says Iranian president

NS7 - 20/9/2006

CARACAS: Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad on Monday expressed respect for Pope Benedict XVI and said the pontiff had "modified" his remarks that offended Muslims worldwide.

"We respect the pope and all those interested in peace and justice," Ahmadinejad said before leaving Venezuela.

"I understand that he has modified the remarks he made."

On Sunday, the leader of the world's 1.1 billion Roman Catholics said he was "deeply sorry" for the offence caused by his remarks made in Germany last week in which he quoted an obscure medieval text that criticised some teachings of the Prophet Muhammad as "evil and inhuman".

The hardline Iranian president struck a more conciliatory tone than that expressed by a government spokesman earlier on Monday and the country's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

In Teheran, the Iranian government said the pope had not

been sufficiently contrite and called on the 79-year-old pontiff to admit he had made a mistake.

Khamenei blamed the pope's remarks on an alleged United States-Israeli conspiracy that he claimed was designed to sow conflict between religions.

At the end of a two-day visit to Venezuela, Ahmadinejad also said there was a contradiction between the Christian values of Western nations and the wars those countries have waged. — AFP