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A woman wearing a waist-length hijab lifts her hands, palms raised, while sitting in front of a

Venus Maythem Abbas prays and reads the Quran during the holy month of Ramadan in Baghdad May 11, 2019. (CNS photo/Saba Kareem, Reuters)

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Any book that is considered sacred by its people must be respected out of respect for the human person who holds it sacred, Pope Francis said.

"Freedom of expression must never be used as an excuse to despise others, and allowing this must be rejected and condemned," he said in a recent interview with the Arabic-language newspaper, al-Ittihad, published in the United Arab Emirates. Vatican News published excerpts and a translation of the interview July 3.

The pope was responding to the latest act of protest in Sweden in which an individual burned pages from a copy of the Quran, Islam's holy book.

An Iraqi-born Swedish citizen had been granted a permit from Swedish police in accordance with laws protecting the right to freedom of expression, assembly and

demonstration. The individual stomped on a copy of the Quran outside of Stockholm's main mosque, then ripped out and burned several of its pages June 28, which marked the Muslim holy day of Eid al-Adha.

The Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs denounced the acts as Islamophopic and said in a statement July 2 that these acts "in no way reflect the views of the Swedish government."

A number of governments, organizations and leaders condemned the burning, including Francis, who said, "I feel indignant and disgusted by these actions."

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"Any book considered sacred by its people must be respected out of respect for its believers," he told the Emirati newspaper.

"Our task is to transform the religious sense into cooperation, into fraternity, into concrete good works," he said.

"Today we need builders of peace, not makers of weapons; today we need builders of peace, not instigators of conflict; we need firefighters, not arsonists; we need advocates of reconciliation, not people who threaten destruction," he added.

"Either we build the future together or there will be no future," the pope said.

Referring to the 2019 document, "Human fraternity: For world peace and living together," the pope said, "It is easy to talk about fraternity, but the true measure of brotherhood is what we actually do in a concrete way to help, support, nurture and welcome my brothers and sisters in humanity."

"Every good by its very nature must be for everyone indiscriminately. If I only do good to those who think or believe as I do, then my good is hypocrisy, because good knows no discrimination or exclusion," he said.