

# Pope hopes church can play role in Mideast peace

---

AMMAN, Jordan (AP) - Pope Benedict XVI said Friday he hopes the Catholic church can play a role in the Middle East peace process as he began his first trip to the region with a stop in Jordan, where he hopes to improve frayed ties with Muslims.

The pope rankled many in the Muslim world with a 2006 speech in which he quoted a Medieval text that characterized some of the Prophet Muhammad's teachings as "evil and inhuman," particularly "his command to spread by the sword the faith."

The pope has already said he was "deeply sorry" over the reaction to his speech and that the passage he quoted did not reflect his own opinion. But his comments continue to fuel criticism by some Muslims.

Jordan's hard-line Muslim Brotherhood said Friday that its members would boycott the pope's visit because he did not issue a public apology ahead of time as they demanded.

Brotherhood spokesman Jamil Abu-Bakr said the absence of a public apology meant "obstacles and boundaries will remain and will overshadow any possible understanding between the pope and the Muslim world."

Vatican spokesman Federico Lombardi said the Vatican has made all possible clarifications, telling Associated Press Television News that "we cannot continue until the end of the world to repeat the same clarifications."

Despite the controversy, Benedict expressed hope his visit and the power of the Catholic church could help further peace efforts between Israelis and Palestinians. The pope will also visit Israel and the Palestinian territories during his weeklong tour.

"We are not a political power but a spiritual power that can contribute," Benedict told reporters on the plane before he landed in Amman.

The pope was met at the airport by Jordan's King Abdullah, Queen Rania and Muslim and Christian leaders. A Jordanian army band equipped with bagpipes and drums played the Vatican and Jordanian national anthems before the pope and the king inspected the honor guard.

Benedict's three-day stay in Jordan is his first visit to an Arab country as pope. During his time in the country, Benedict is scheduled to meet with Muslim religious leaders at Amman's largest mosque—his second visit to a Muslim place of worship since becoming pope in 2005. He prayed in Istanbul's famed Blue Mosque, a gesture that helped calm the outcry over his remarks.

He is also expected to meet with King Abdullah and Queen Rania, as well as Iraqi Christians driven from their homeland by violence.