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# Dutch bishop: Call God 'Allah' to ease relations

## Roman Catholic leader stokes already heated debate on religion

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**AP** Associated Press

updated 8:29 a.m. PT, Wed., Aug 15, 2007

AMSTERDAM - A Roman Catholic Bishop in the Netherlands has proposed people of all faiths refer to God as Allah to foster understanding, stoking an already heated debate on religious tolerance in a country with one million Muslims.

Bishop Tiny Muskens, from the southern diocese of Breda, told Dutch television on Monday that God did not mind what he was named and that in Indonesia, where Muskens spent eight years, priests used the word "Allah" while celebrating Mass.

"Allah is a very beautiful word for God. Shouldn't we all say that from now on we will name God Allah? ... What does God care what we call him? It is our problem."

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A survey in the Netherlands' biggest-selling newspaper De Telegraaf on Wednesday found 92 percent of the more than 4,000 people polled disagreed with the bishop's view, which also drew ridicule.

"Sure. Lets call God Allah. Lets then call a church a mosque and pray five times a day. Ramadan sounds like fun," Welmoet Koppenhol wrote in a letter to the newspaper.

Gerrit de Fijter, chairman of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, told the paper he welcomed any attempt to "create more dialogue", but added: "Calling God 'Allah' does no justice to Western identity. I see no benefit in it."

A spokesman from the union of Moroccan mosques in Amsterdam said Muslims had not asked for such a gesture.

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### Religious tensions on the rise

Signs of tension had already surfaced in the last two weeks after the head of a committee for former Muslims was attacked and populist anti-immigration politician Geert Wilders called for the Koran to be banned.

Bishop Muskens, who will shortly retire, has raised eyebrows in the past with suggestions that those who are hungry may steal bread and that condoms should be permissible in the fight against HIV and AIDS.

Some Dutch Muslims welcomed his comments as a valuable gesture of support coming just days after Wilders branded the Quran a "fascist

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book" in the vein of Adolf Hitler's "Mein Kampf" which legitimizes violence.

Wilders, whose new party won nine seats out of the 150 in parliament in last November's elections, is well known for his firebrand remarks on Islam.

He said an attack by two Moroccans and a Somali on the head of a Dutch group for "ex-Muslims" had spurred him to write.


Issues of immigration and integration had faded from the Dutch political agenda over the last year, after a period of unprecedented social tension sparked by the 2004 murder of Theo Van Gogh, a filmmaker critical of Islam, by a Muslim militant.

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