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Indonesia clerics threaten jihad



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The statement will worry the government considerably

By **BBC Jakarta correspondent Richard Galpin**

Indonesia's top Islamic organisation, the Council of Ulemas, has warned it will call for a jihad or holy war if the United States attacks Afghanistan.

The council called on Muslims worldwide to unite and mobilise against any US aggression in response to the suicide attacks in New York and Washington.

The call came in a strongly worded statement by the secretary-general of the council, which represents mainstream Islamic scholars and clerics across the country.

The statement condemned the recent suicide attacks, but criticised the arrogance of US plans to retaliate against Afghanistan.



Anti-US demonstrations are gathering pace

Attack on Islam

The Council of Ulemas, a respected organisation which the government listens to, said any military strikes would be seen as an attack on Islam itself.

The statement follows warnings last week by radical Islamic organisations in Indonesia that they would attack US facilities in the country in the event of a military strike on Afghanistan.



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Since then, there has been a series of small anti-American demonstrations in Jakarta, some outside the US embassy.

The ambassador has called on the police to provide extra security for all American citizens and organisations.

Backlash

Indonesian President Megawati Sukarnoputri met President George W Bush in Washington last week, pledging to join the global coalition against terrorism.


But this latest statement by the Council of Ulemas will be particularly worrying for her government.


It is confident it can use the security forces to control any backlash from the radical fringe groups.

But if large numbers of ordinary Muslims take to the streets in response to a call from the Council of Ulemas, the situation could become much more volatile.



The clerics have warned Megawati against supporting Bush

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