Film to be shown at 9/11 memorial museum sparks controversy



Dec. 16, 2004: In this artist rendering released by the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation, the Memorial Hall looking at the South Footprint is shown.AP

An interfaith advisory group of clergy members in New York is raising concerns over a documentary that will be shown at the National September 11 Memorial Museum when it opens next month, arguing the film is offensive to Muslims.

The film, "The Rise of Al Qaeda" refers to the 9/11 terrorists as Islamists and uses the term jihad, which has panel members worried the film will leave museum visitors with a prejudiced view of Islam, The New York Times reported.

"The screening of this film in its present state would greatly offend our local Muslim believers as well as any foreign Muslim visitor to the museum," Sheik Mostafa Elazabawy, the imam of Masjid Manhattan and member of the interfaith group, wrote in a letter to the museum's director.

"Unsophisticated visitors who do not understand the difference between Al Qaeda and Muslims may come away with a prejudiced view of Islam, leading to antagonism and even confrontation toward Muslim believers near the site."

According to The New York Times, the seven-minute film explains the historical roots of the attacks and the ideology of the terrorists. The film, which has been showed to several groups, features images of terrorist training camps other attacks.

Peter Gudaitis, who brought the panel together as the chief executive of an interfaith group, told the newspaper the museum rejected certain suggestions from the panel, such as making clear that the majority of Muslims are peaceful.

Museum officials defended the film, which was vetted past several scholars.

"From the very beginning, we had a very heavy responsibility to be true to the facts, to be objective, and in no way smear an entire religion when we are talking about a terrorist group," Joseph C. Daniels, president of the organization overseeing the memorial and museum, told The New York Times.

Despite the panel's concerns about the film, the group was pleased to see that the museum's exhibit space included photographs of Muslims who were among the attack's victims, mourners and recovery workers, according to the report.

The museum is scheduled to open May 21.