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Zawahri: Libya group joins al-Qaeda

Ayman al-Zawahri, al-Qaeda's second-in-command, has announced a Libyan group has joined the organisation.

"Today, with grace from God, the Muslim nation witnesses a blessed step," Zawahri said in a recording posted on the internet on Saturday.

"Honourable members of the fighting Islamic group in Libya announce that they are joining the al-Qaeda group to continue the march of their brothers," al-Zawahri said in the statement produced by as-Sahab, the al-Qaeda's media arm.

He urged mujahideen in North Africa to topple the leaders of Libya, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco.

"O nation of jihad, support your sons so that we defeat our enemies and rid our homeland of their slaves," he said, naming the leaders of the four North African Arab nations.

Al-Zawahri presented another speaker whom he identified as Abu al-Laith, suggesting he was the leader of al-Qaeda's Libyan wing.

"We announce we are joining al-Qaeda as loyal soldiers," Abu al-Laith said.



In 2006, al-Qaeda's as-Sahab released 58 videos compared to 16 in 2005 [AFP]

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The Fighting Islamic Group first announced its presence in 1995, vowing to overthrow Muammar Gaddafi, the Libyan leader.

Its members have clashed with government forces for years and several of its leaders have been arrested in Libya and abroad.

In 2001, the group was added to a UN list of individuals and institutions "belonging to or associated with al-Qaeda".

Enemy of Islam

Al-Zawahri described Gaddafi as an enemy of Islam and criticised him for abandoning his "weapons and equipment to ... crusader masters".

The statements were in reference to the Libyan leader's decision to drop his country's mass destruction weapons programme.

Libya ended years of international isolation in 2003 when it promised to give up nuclear, chemical and biological weapons and accepted responsibility for the Lockerbie bombing in 1988.

Al-Zawahri also urged members of Fatah, the Palestinian movement, backed by Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian president, to abandon his secular line and join Islamic-led fighters, in an apparent reference to Hamas and the Islamic Jihad.

"I urge ... Fatah and al-Aqsa [Martyrs] Brigades to confront their leadership which turned their organisation into a branch of the CIA and the Mossad," al-Zawahri said.

The 28-minute recording carried the date of the Islamic lunar month and was posted on Saturday on an Islamic website.

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