

Ties to Israel beyond Vatican panel's scope

By Tracy Early
Catholic News Service

NEW YORK — The president of the Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews said Feb. 13 that Vatican diplomatic relations with Israel — an issue strongly pressed by many Jews — could not be addressed in the dialogue conducted by the commission.

Cardinal Edward I. Cassidy said his commission had no competence to discuss diplomatic relations, and that the question was one to be resolved by the Vatican Secretariat of State and the Israeli government.

He suggested that the absence of relations thus far has been due to Israel's reluctance to deal with questions the Secretariat of State has said must be answered before diplomatic ties will be possible.

Cardinal Cassidy made his comments in an interview following a lecture at New York at Union Theological Seminary, an independent ecumenical institution where, he was told, a Catholic "caucus" had recently been formed.

Earlier in the day, he was the luncheon guest of the International Jewish

Committee on Interreligious Consultations, the principal dialogue partner of his commission.

Cardinal Cassidy, who succeeded Cardinal Johannes Willebrands as president in 1989, said he was making his first visit to the consultation group and having his first conversations with its new chairman, Edgar M. Bronfman, who is also chairman of the World Jewish Congress.

Archbishop William H. Keeler of Baltimore, the bishops' representative for Jewish-Catholic relations, also attended the luncheon.

Members of the consultation group have accepted the fact that the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews could not discuss diplomatic relations with Israel, Cardinal Cassidy reported, and the issue did not come up at the luncheon.

At a press briefing shortly after he became chairman, Bronfman said the Vatican's failure to establish relations with Israel when it had relations with many "horrendous states" was "insulting," and that it likely would be the most important item on the agenda if the consultation group were to meet with Pope John Paul II.

The joint dialogue group of the Jew-



MOTHER'S GRIEF — Women join the grieving mother (second from right) of one of eight policemen killed by Moslem fundamentalists in Algiers, Algeria on Feb. 10. Islamic fundamentalists called on their followers to defy the military-backed government's call for a state of emergency.

ish body and the Vatican commission, the International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee, will meet in Baltimore May 4-7.

Three main themes, Cardinal Cassidy said, will be education and formation for Catholic-Jewish relations, new threats of anti-Semitism and continuing reflection on the Holocaust.

Cardinal Cassidy said the discussion of education will involve all types and levels, but that "formation" primarily refers to seminarians.

New threats of anti-Semitism are


found particularly in the former Soviet Union and other parts of Eastern Europe, but not exclusively there, he said.

Cardinal Cassidy said work on an official Catholic document on the Holocaust and anti-Semitism was going forward, and that the dialogue session in Baltimore would help the commission determine whether it was "on the right track."

He declined to estimate how long it would take to get the document ready for release.

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