

Pact unleashes Mideast peace hopes

Vatican, Israel discuss relations

By Bill Pritchard
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — The pact signed by the Israelis and the Palestine Liberation Organization on Sept. 13 loosed a flood of hope that went beyond the immediate text, and has apparently given Christians in the Middle East the thought that a brighter future is possible for them.

The agreement, signed by the respective foreign ministers of the two entities on a sunny day on the south lawn of the White House, was limited in its immediate impact on Palestinian fortunes.

But it marked the opening of mutual recognition by the Israelis and the PLO, and opened the door to further peace moves.

Pope John Paul II called the signing a signal "of the desire for peace."

The agreement grants limited self-administration and local elections in some of the Israeli-occupied territory where Palestinians live. It also opens the way to economic development aid

for the Palestinian communities, something PLO leaders said is desperately needed. It also allows Israel to directly protect its citizens living in the territories.

There was no declaration of a Palestinian state, nor a resolution of the explosive question of the proprietorship of Jerusalem. Jerusalem will be the subject of further discussions, but at this point the Israelis say the city will remain their eternal capital.

There was also no specific guarantee of wider peace in the Middle East, but much interest in reaching an end to nearly five decades of Arab-Israeli tension was expressed in the region. Soon after the signing, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin went to Egypt, which has its separate peace with Israel, to campaign for normalized relations between his country and its long-time adversaries.

Although powerful factions within Israel and the PLO oppose even the modest agreement ratified in Washington, there seemed to be majority support for the pact among Israelis and Palestinians.

The agreement also gave hope to Catholic and other Christian leaders in the region that it will mark the beginning of the end of a Christian exodus

by offering strong hope for peace and eventual prosperity.

The agreement represents the birth of a "new reality and a new hope" in a land torn by conflict, said Latin-rite Patriarch Michel Sabbah of Jerusalem.

For peace to succeed, leaders on both sides must now educate their people away from deeply rooted hostility toward a "conversion of hearts," the patriarch said in a Sept. 10 telephone interview from Jerusalem with Catholic News Service in Rome.

Patriarch Sabbah said he was convinced that despite some opposition within the region, the agreement would ultimately be accepted without new violence.

In order to succeed, governments must "educate people and prepare them to enter this new period of history," he said. This will not be an easy task, since Palestinians and Israelis have been "raised in an atmosphere of hostility, of nonrecognition and even of hatred," he said.

"This psychology must be changed. There must be a total conversion of hearts in order to allow a new, true collaboration between the two peoples," he said.

An aide to Lebanon's Muslim leader said at an interreligious conference in Milan, Italy, Sept. 20 that opponents of the pact might find a convenient scapegoat in Mideast Christians. Mohammad Sammak, political adviser to the Grand Mufti of Lebanon, said some Muslims may see Christians and their support for the agreement as a "spearhead" of Western influence in the region.

Father Giuseppe Nazzaro, the Franciscan custodian of the holy places, said the start of Palestinian autonomy under the accord would open new prospects for local Christians. It is estimated that more than 80 percent of Palestinian Christians have left the area since 1948.

"I think that with the process that has just begun, this phenomenon can be healed," Father Nazzaro told the Italian newspaper *Avvenire* Sept. 15.

He said he also hoped the accord would bring the end of a campaign by Muslims over the last two years to purchase land from Palestinian Christians, which Muslims said is designed to "liberate it from Christian 'slavery.'"

The Middle East Council of Churches said the full liberation of the Palestinian people and some form of shared control over Jerusalem must follow the pact.

Gabriel Habib, general secretary of the council, said the agreement signed

Bishops get copies of new encyclical

By John Thavis
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — The heads of several bishops' conferences were presented advance copies of *Splendor Veritatis* ("The Splendor of the Truth"), Pope John Paul II's encyclical on moral theology, sources in Rome said.

The bishops, including representatives from Canada, Italy, France, the Netherlands and Germany, received the copies during meetings with Vatican officials Sept. 16-17, the sources said.

The Vatican had no comment on the meetings and would not confirm that the encyclical was handed out.

A Vatican source said the papal encyclical, several years in the making, was finished over the summer and was expected to be formally published in coming weeks.

Vatican officials have long said the encyclical would be a general treatise on moral theology rather than a treatment of specific moral issues. Italian news reports have said the document traces the development of the church's moral teaching, affirms its authority and discusses modern proposals for evaluating the morality of misguided human actions.

The reports said the document not only discusses the binding nature of the church's moral positions for individuals, but examines the social consequences of the church's moral teaching.

in Washington is "a sign of hope and a turning point in the history of the Middle East and particularly in the Palestinian-Israeli relationships."

The council is an association of Christian churches including the Eastern- and Latin-rite Catholic patriarchates of the region.

Vatican spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls, commenting on Vatican-Israeli relations last week, said talks were "moving ahead" in regular meetings. The talks are mainly geared toward solving problems related to the status of the church, its institutions and its properties in Israel and Israeli-administered territories, he said.

"We all hope that some day it can be announced that the problems have been overcome and therefore diplomatic relations can be established," he said.

Protesting escalating prices



AP/Wide World Photos

Belgrade continues to ration limited supplies

A disgruntled vendor at a vegetable market in downtown Belgrade, Yugoslavia, displays a strike sign Sept. 16 as she protests higher prices for renting stalls. City authorities have begun charging farmers an additional 5 percent of the estimated value of their goods, together with a fixed daily rate to rent each stall.

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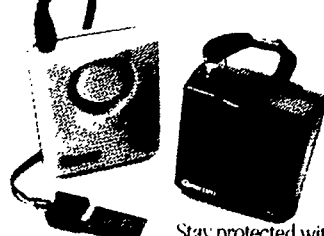
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