

Sabbah says accord requires real change

By John Thavis
Catholic News Service

ROME — Jerusalem Latin-rite Patriarch Michel Sabbah said the success of a new Israeli-PLO autonomy accord depends on whether real changes occur in the lives of Palestinians.

The agreement, signed May 4 in Cairo, Egypt, will be effective if it frees Palestinians from "the daily situation of instability and sufferings: daily confrontations with armed soldiers, security measures, the closure of Jerusalem and political prisoners," said a statement from the Jerusalem patriarchate.

The statement said the church supports every step toward peace, but recognizes that the limited autonomy accord will be met with some doubts. "The Palestinian people are waiting. The agreements, despite details already given, introduce us to the unknown," it said.

It encouraged Palestinians to give peace a chance to consolidate in the Israeli-occupied territories and called on Israel to take further steps toward establishing justice for local residents.

"These agreements must be supported by a total change in the Israeli position in the rest of the territories. The Palestinian people must not be kept in direct contact with armed Israeli soldiers," the statement said.

"The reopening of Jerusalem for the

Palestinians will have a decisive effect on their welcoming the new agreements," the statement said.

The accord, a 200-page document signed by Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat, creates Palestinian self-rule in the Gaza strip and the West Bank city of Jericho.

It represented the long-awaited implementation of an historic agreement of principles the two leaders signed in Washington last September, and is considered the first step toward greater Palestinian autonomy in the West Bank.

The patriarchate's statement said the leaders who worked out the autonomy accord deserve support in the face of internal opposition on both sides. "We welcome President Arafat and wish him success in his new responsibility," it said.

The statement said that despite opposition to the accord on the Israeli side, the peace agreements can ultimately bring security to the Jewish state. But "this security will depend upon justice being done to the Palestinians," it added.

Palestinians need to be able to "decide for themselves their fate, present and future," it said.

As an immediate consequence of the agreement, about 1,000 Palestinian police officers were to move into the new self-rule areas. Israel was to evacuate its military bases in the areas, but would re-

tain responsibility for Jewish settlements, external security and foreign relations.

The head of the U.S. bishops' Committee on International Policy hailed the accord as "a welcome event which we greet with great satisfaction."

In a May 5 statement, Bishop Daniel P. Reilly of Norwich, Conn., said, "The beginning of Palestinian self-rule must be seen to offer security to Israelis and the opportunity for the Jewish people to live in peace the life to which they have so long aspired in the land of Israel."

He added, "We earnestly hope that the Palestinian people will chose for themselves a representative form of government with guarantees for the human rights of all persons."

Bishop Reilly called on the U.S. government, private agencies, individual investors and international lending institutions to cooperate in making Palestinian autonomy successful.

"We appeal to all Israelis and Palestinians from this moment forward to seize every opportunity to build relations of trust and mutual understanding between their two peoples," Bishop Reilly said.

Church leaders sought change in policy on Haitian refugees

By Patricia Zapor
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — The national director of Catholic refugee-assistance programs is encouraged by the Clinton administration's decision to stop sending Haitians home without asylum hearings.

Jesuit Father Richard Ryscavage, executive director of the U.S. Catholic Conference's Migration and Refugee Services, said Clinton's plan "will, at a minimum, place the United States in compliance with its international obligation for the protection of refugees."

Just days before President Clinton announced Haitians would be screened for asylum eligibility at sea or in a third country, 33 U.S. bishops and the heads of 262 Catholic religious communities had sent him a letter asking for an end to the repatriation policy.

Clinton said May 8 that Haitians would no longer be intercepted at sea and sent back home without hearings, a policy instituted under then-President Bush and continued by Clinton despite campaign promises to reverse it.

In a May 9 statement, Father Ryscavage said that given the deterioration of Haiti's political and security situation, "it is crucial that the United States lead the way in protecting the rights of refugees to fairly present their claims."



AP/Wide World Photos

Prayerful listener

A woman religious prays in St. Peter's Square Sunday, May 1, while listening to a radio broadcast of a homily Pope John Paul II delivered from his hospital room.

Pro-lifers applaud New York ruling

NEW YORK (CNS) — Pro-life forces claimed a major victory May 5 when New York state's highest court ruled that a state program of prenatal assistance does not have to include payment for abortion.

Jane Hope, a New York woman, was supported by the New York Civil Liberties Union, in arguing that the program violated the New York state Constitution. The case, brought against the State Commissioners of Social Services and of Health, is called *Hope vs. Perales*.

In a 6-0 decision released in Albany, the State Court of Appeals rejected the challenge to the constitutionality of the program and held that it "does not penalize the exercise of the right of choice." The decision reversed the trial-court ruling and the affirmation of that ruling by the Appellate Division.

Kathy Lawson, director of New York State Right to Life, said, "We are pleased

that the court did not allow pro-abortion extremists to increase the number of abortions paid for, which would surely have raised the already high number of abortions in the state."

Attorney Mary Spaulding Balch, state legislative director for the National Right to Life Committee, welcomed the decision as "a victory for unborn children, their mothers and for the taxpayers of New York."

Bishop Thomas V. Daily of Brooklyn said the appeals court "ruled wisely" in the case. "It was difficult to comprehend" how a program "designed to reduce infant mortality and to insure healthier babies could have been used to justify the destruction of preborn life through abortion," he said.

The Prenatal Care Assistance Program, known as PCAP, was instituted by the New York Legislature to implement a 1987 federal program

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