

WORLD & NATION

Holy Land group confusion lingers

By Mark Pattison
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — Reports of a federal raid on a U.S.-based Muslim foundation has raised concerns from a Catholic-run Holy Land foundation.

Representatives of the Holy Land Foundation, a Catholic organization based in Washington with offices in Jerusalem, have complained that on the day of the Dec. 4 raid and the following day, President Bush identified the target of the raid as "Holy Land Foundation" and did not use the actual name of the raided charity. It is the Holy Land Foundation for Relief and Development, which has its headquarters in Richardson, Texas.

Federal officials raided the Texas group's offices in Richardson and elsewhere across the United States following a grand jury investigation and seized its assets, saying it was a front for Hamas, a Palestinian organization. The Texas group's officials have denied the assertions.

Denise Marie Scalzo, vice president for the Washington-based Holy Land Foundation, said confusion in people's minds about the groups has increased since the Sept. 11 terror attacks in the United States.

But "we've been going through this for quite some time," she told Catholic News Service Dec. 5 in a telephone interview from Jerusalem. "Time magazine did an article in 1995, but because there was nothing going on then, we turned a blind eye."

Christian Brother David Carroll, assistant to the secretary-general of the Catholic Near East Welfare Association, voiced his opinion that the Texas foundation must have gotten some public re-

lations assistance in choosing "Holy Land" as its name because Muslims consider Mecca to be their holy land. Muslims are expected to make a pilgrimage to Mecca, in Saudi Arabia, at least once in their lifetime, if possible.

The Catholic Near East Welfare Association is the largest Christian funder of Holy Land initiatives, according to Frank Butler of FADICA, an umbrella group for Catholic foundations.

Cardinal Anthony J. Bevilacqua of Philadelphia is honorary chairman of the Holy Land Foundation's board of directors. Bishop John J. Nevins of Venice, Fla., also sits on the charity's board.

Before the raid, Scalzo said, "we warned the FBI bureau in Dallas" about the difference between the two organizations. "The FBI didn't know that there was a Catholic organization," she added.

Scalzo said the British news agency Reuters already has published a correction, and she was pressing CNN to make a clarification of what she called Bush's "misrepresentation."

"I've been busy by the fax sending a lot of the stuff to the media in Jerusalem, the bureau chiefs ... concerning our name," said Franciscan Father Peter Vasko, the Holy Land Foundation's president, in a telephone interview from Jerusalem.

He said the New York Times News Service and Cox newspapers have published clarifications telling the two groups apart, and that ABC News issued an apology once it was made aware of the difference.

Not all media outlets have been as compliant, Father Vasko said.

"Time magazine we've had a very hard time with," the priest said, as well as *Newsweek*, which published an article in its Oct. 8 issue that caused confusion. "I still haven't heard from them. They

haven't done a retraction or correction at all," Father Vasko said.

The priest said he called the White House and talked to an assistant to a woman who does public relations for the Treasury Department. He said he told the assistant the difference between the Holy Land organizations "should be correctly outlined. ... The damage control for us is ridiculous."

At the organization's Jerusalem office, "we've had a barrage of people calling," Father Vasko said. "If they get us mixed up, that doesn't do any good for the Palestinian Christians."

Even the recipients of aid are confused, according to Father Vasko. "The local Palestinian Christians don't know the difference."

Based on information they read or hear in the Jerusalem media, he said, "they keep calling us up, 'Are we going to get our scholarship grants?'"

"Apparently they're a little mixed up also," he added.

Other Holy Land charitable concerns also may be subject to confusion. According to FADICA's Butler, 27 U.S.-based charities, including the raided Texas group, have the words "Holy Land" in their title.

NY teachers near contract

NEW YORK (CNS) — The Archdiocese of New York announced Dec. 10 that it had reached a tentative contract agreement with the union that represents lay teachers in parish elementary and high schools.

Members of the union, the Federation of Catholic Teachers, still had to vote on the agreement reached Dec. 7 by their president, Michelle Cody McDonald, with Paul Ward, archdiocesan deputy superintendent of schools, an announcement said.

The agreement calls for raises of 3, 3 and 5 percent for the three years of the contract, retroactive to Sept. 1, and no increases in teacher contributions to the health plan.

In another dispute, a strike that began Nov. 29 by the Lay Faculty Association, which represents teachers in the 10 archdiocesan high schools, remained unsettled as of Dec. 10, said archdiocesan spokesman Joseph Zwilling. He said the two sides were not in negotiations because the archdiocese wouldn't consider establishment of a second pension plan.

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