

'Road map' gets cautious optimism

John Thavis/CNS

VATICAN CITY — Church leaders reacted with cautious optimism at the reopening of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process following an important "road map" summit in Aqaba, Jordan.

At the summit June 4, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon expressed support for an eventual Palestinian state, and Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas renounced the armed intifada and pledged to curb militants.

The historic meeting marked "a first step on the long road to peace," Franciscan Father Giovanni Battistelli, custodian of the Holy Land, told the Italian Catholic news agency SIR.

The comments by the Israeli and Palestinian leaders, as well as by President George W. Bush, "represent a concrete sign of hope for the entire Holy Land," Father Battistelli said.

He praised Sharon's pledge to restore a normal life for Palestinians and improve their humanitarian conditions and said the Israeli leader's apparent commitment to ac-



Reuters/CNS

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, right, and Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas shake hands as U.S. President George W. Bush watches after making closing statements following their summit meeting in Aqaba, Jordan, June 4. Bush said both the Palestinians and Israelis must take immediate, tangible steps toward realizing his vision of two states living side by side in peace.

cepting territorial continuity of a Palestinian state was very important.

Father Battistelli said that despite the long road of negotiations that lies ahead the summit already has brought a more peaceful atmosphere to the Holy Land.

Cardinal Angelo Sodano, Vatican secretary of state, said the U.S.-backed "road map" peace plan marked a good beginning.

"Sacrifices will have to come from both sides. We have to believe in this, in the interests of the two populations," Cardinal Sodano told reporters June 5 in Croatia, where he was traveling with Pope

John Paul II.

Cardinal Sodano, who met earlier in the week with Secretary of State Colin Powell, said details of three main problems remain to be worked out.

The first is the issue of Palestinian borders, which must be contiguous, he said.

"A state certainly cannot exist like a piece of Swiss cheese with holes running through it," he said.

The second problem is the return of Palestinian refugees.

"Justice is the same throughout the world for someone who is chased out of his home. Even for me, if I were chased out of my home, I

would hope to come back or at least ask for reparation," he said.

The cardinal compared it to other historical refugee situations, as when Poles were forced to flee Ukraine. In these cases, "justice demands compensation," he said.

Cardinal Sodano said the third big problem is the status of Jerusalem. He said he had reiterated to Powell the Vatican's position that, given the city's importance for three monotheistic religions, there be an internationally guaranteed statute for Jerusalem.

Father Justo Lacunza Balda, head of the Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies, told Vatican Radio that the Aqaba summit had opened "a new horizon" for peace prospects in the Middle East.

He said he found the "road map" plan a realistic proposal and particularly important because it foresees a democratic Palestinian state at peace with Israel.

Father Lacunza acknowledged that opposition to the plan had already been expressed by some Israelis and Palestinians and said it would be important to listen to their voices in the weeks ahead.

But he said he believed most people in the region support the idea of turning the page and living in peace.

"I think the strong sentiment of the Arab-Islamic population and the Arab-Christian population is that finally we can arrive at a new start in peace negotiations," he said.

"The war and the violence, the deaths and the hatred, have done damage not only to Israelis and Palestinians, but also to the Arab and Islamic world, to Christians, Muslims and Jews," he said.

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McQuaid wins sectional; ND falls

The McQuaid Jesuit tennis team has captured its first Section 5 Class A championship in school history.

The McQuaid boys' team scored a 5-2 victory over Spencerport in the title match held June 3. Leading the Knights were Dan O'Rourke, who scored a victory at first singles; and Tim DiCesare and Chris Seeger, who triumphed at first doubles.

Meanwhile, the Elmira Notre Dame girls' softball team — which had already won the Section 4 Class C title — saw its season end on June 3 with a defeat in state quarterfinal play. Notre Dame lost a no-hitter, a shutout and the game by surrendering two last-inning runs in a 2-1 loss to Sandy Creek of Section 3.

ND, which had won its fifth con-

secutive Section 5 Class C title one day earlier, scored its lone run in the first inning. The Crusaders' star pitcher, Lindsay Knapp, rendered Sandy Creek hitless through six innings — but the Comets produced three straight hits to start the bottom of the seventh for the tying and winning runs.

— Mike Latona



Watch for it

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