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01/31/2013

The Holy See negotiates with the "State of Palestine"

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ABU MAZEN WITH BENEDICT XVI

After the meetings in Israel, the Vatican delegation is working on an agreement with the "State of Palestine" as the Holy See referred to it today

ANDREA TORNIELLI VATICAN CITY

Following last Tuesday's bilateral meeting between a delegation from the Holy See and the State of Israel, on the status of the Catholic Church and its tax exemptions and property rights, the delegation went on to Ramallah yesterday, where it met with Palestinian leaders. In the statement published by the Vatican Press Office, reference is made to the "State of Palestine".

"Following the bilateral negotiations held in past years with the Palestine Liberation Organization (P.L.O)," the statement reads, "an official meeting took place in Ramallah on the 30th of January 2013, at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the State of Palestine."

Talks were headed by the Palestinian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Riyad al-Maliki and by the Under-Secretary for the Holy See's Relations with States, Mgr. Ettore Balestrero. The statement goes on to say that "the Parties exchanged views regarding the draft Agreement under discussion, especially the Preamble and Chapter I of the mentioned Agreement. The talks were held in open and cordial atmosphere, expression of the existing good relations between the Holy See and the State of Palestine."

The two delegations also "expressed the wish that negotiations be accelerated and brought to a speedy conclusion. It was thus agreed that a joint technical group will meet to follow-up." Finally, the Palestinians expressed their gratitude for "the

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THE VATICAN

Holy See's contribution of 100.000 euro towards the restoration of the roof of the Basilica of the Nativity in Bethlehem."

Readers will recall that last November, the Vatican had welcomed Palestine's admission to the UN as a positive thing: "the Holy See welcomes with favour the decision of the General Assembly by which Palestine has become a Non-member Observer State of the United Nations," a Vatican statement read. The Holy See has traditionally been in favour of two states for two peoples: Paul VI was of this mind, as was John Paul II, who received Yasser Arafat in the Vatican on a number of occasions.

Benedict XVI also pronounced himself in favour of the existence of two states, during his trip to Jordan, Israel and the Palestinian territories, in 2009: Israelis have the right to live in a secure state of their own and Palestinians have the right to a state with clearly defined borders and freedom of movement. When the Pope and his collaborators received the President of the Palestinian National Authority, Mahmoud Abbas, they had expressed the hope that the UN would encourage "the commitment of the international community to finding a fair and lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which may be reached only by resuming negotiations between the parties, in good faith and according due respect to the rights of both."

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