

Vatican signs treaty with 'State of Palestine,' calls for two-state solution **Joshua J. McElwee, NCR, 26 June 2015**

The Vatican on Friday signed a comprehensive agreement formally recognizing the “State of Palestine,” following 15 years of negotiations on a bilateral accord that is said to provide juridical recognition for Catholic churches and call for a two-state solution with Israel on the basis of their borders in 1967.

Announcement of the agreement comes about a month after the Vatican had said the agreement was in its final stages, which, in turn, led to the Israeli foreign ministry expressing disappointment over the move.

The text of the accord is not yet available. Archbishop Paul Gallagher, the Vatican prelate who serves essentially as the pope’s foreign minister, said in a statement that it was his hope that the agreement “may in some way be a stimulus to bringing a definitive end to the long-standing Israeli-Palestinian conflict.”

“I also hope that the much desired two-State solution may become a reality as soon as possible,” said Gallagher, the secretary for the relations with states at the Vatican’s Secretariat of State.

Palestinian Foreign Minister Riad Al-Malki called the agreement “historic” and said “it would not have been possible” without both Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Pope Francis.

“For the first time, the Agreement includes an official recognition by the Holy See of Palestine as a State, in recognition of the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, freedom and dignity in an independent state of their own, free from the shackles of occupation,” said Al-Malki.

“It also supports the vision for peace and justice in the region in accordance with international law and based on two states, living side by side in peace and security, on the basis of the 1967 borders,” he said.

Gallagher said he is pleased that the agreement “that juridical recognition is clearly established and that guarantees have been given for the work of the Catholic Church and her institutions.”

“Catholics do not seek any privilege other than continued cooperation with their fellow-citizens for the good of society,” he said.

The archbishop praised the agreement as an example of Christian-Muslim dialogue and cooperation in what he called “the complex reality of the Middle East.”

While Friday’s agreement is the first between the Holy See and Palestine, the Vatican has been referring to Palestine as a state since February 2013 under the leadership of Pope Benedict XVI.

The Holy See first signed a basic agreement with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in 2000 and the two entities have been working on Friday’s accord, known as a comprehensive agreement, since.

The agreement’s reported recognition of Palestine’s borders with Israel in 1967 refers to the borders between the two entities before Israel captured a significant amount of territory in the Six-Day War of that year.

Among the disputed territories held by Israel after the war are the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, Golan Heights, and the Sinai Peninsula.

In his remarks Friday, Gallagher said achieving a two-State solution between Israel and Palestine will require “courageous decisions, but it will also offer a major contribution to peace and stability in the region.”

While the Vatican signed a fundamental agreement with Israel in 1993, a further agreement in 1997 was not confirmed by the Israeli parliament, known as the Knesset.

[Joshua J. McElwee is *NCR* Vatican correspondent. His email address is jmcelwee@ncronline.org. Follow him on Twitter: [@joshjmac](https://twitter.com/joshjmac).]