

TABLE OF CONTENTS

This PDF clearly shows before and after news reports from Europe. In each case we acted quickly in order to alert the appropriate ministry via various contacts. Since the Vatican representative was copied on all work we performed the last two entries are the letters of thanks from Fr. David Jaeger, legal representative for the Holy See in Israel.

Article dealing with the lack of progress with the Fundamental Agreements

9 March, 2004

ISRAEL – VATICAN

Israel – Holy See: no apparent fruit after 10 years of diplomatic relations

Fr. David Jaeger, expert in Israel-Holy See agreements, says 10 years ago the Church took a courageous step in initiating diplomatic relations with Israel. Now Israel must show the same courage in returning to the bargaining table.

Jerusalem (AsiaNews) – Tomorrow marks the 10th anniversary since the “Fundamental Agreement between the Holy See and the State of Israel” went into effect.

Thanks to this agreement, the Holy See has accepted Israel’s request to conduct diplomatic relations with the Vatican. Yet such relations are only the first step in a series of agreements which would have guaranteed the Church’s freedom and rights in Israeli territory. However 10 years after the historic accord was struck the Church in Israel is disappointed, disconcerted and worried.

In effect Israel has never transformed the Fundamental Agreement into law and hence Israeli judges state they cannot recognize it in a court of law. Likewise the only other agreement reached so far was (on the state recognition of legal status of ecclesiastical authorities in 1997), was not passed into state law.

However the most serious matter occurred on Aug. 28 2003, when the entire Israeli diplomatic delegation withdrew from all negotiations with the Holy See, while talks were underway to reach an extremely important agreement on safeguarding Church property and its tax exemption status. The pact was scheduled to be concluded by the 10th anniversary of the Fundamental Agreement.

Last July Israel’s foreign minister, Silvan Shalom, heralded the signing of the accord “within 3 months”. Yet since then Israel has refused to return to the bargaining table with the Vatican, despite its explicit commitment as part of the Fundamental Agreement established 10 years earlier.

Meanwhile, while lacking laws regulating its relations with the State of Israel, the Church finds itself if ever greater difficulty. With such stumbling blocks in their way, such as the absence of traditional exemptions from state taxes, Catholic organizations and institutions (e.g. St. Joseph’s Hospital in Jerusalem, among others) find themselves being dragged to court. Moreover, without such agreements in order, Church personnel are denied entry visas and stay permits for Israel.

Anxiety about the future has gotten worse due to the absolute silence the Israeli government has kept over its reasons for cutting diplomatic relations with the Holy See. And this is evidenced in various daily problems, like when Israeli troops invaded Jerusalem convents in order to build parts of the “Wall of Separation” (or “security barrier”, as the government prefers to call it).

AsiaNews asked the opinion of Fr. David-Maria A. Jaeger, Franciscan priest and one of the greatest legal expert in Holy See-Israeli agreements:

“The State must understand that it has an absolute legal obligation to return to the bargaining table. Its commitment to do so is part of a solemn international agreement signed and ratified by the State of Israel –otherwise Israel would be defined as defaulting (on the original pact). As for the rest, the rules governing Church-State relations interest the State just as much as they do the Church. If the State wants the rules respected, it must not act like a defaulter. Israel cannot continue cutting itself off from negotiations for too much longer. The Catholic Church made an historic and courageous step, and with great foresight, in accepting to normalize its official relationship with the State of Israel. In return the Church’s legal status in Israel was promised to be normalized as well. I don’t think our interlocutors want to make this historical enterprise fail. The negotiations themselves were undertaken in an atmosphere of reciprocal trust and good will. And if the (Israeli) government accepts taking up talks again I foresee both parties obtaining good results.”

Fr. Jaeger says the reasons behind the stall in diplomatic relations are “unexplainable”. He stresses that Diaspora Jews have asked the government to reconsider its move and to take up talks again. “For me the 10th anniversary since the Fundamental Agreement went into effect brings back memories of great hope and urges us to continue having it,” Fr. Jaeger concluded. “Yet certainly this anniversary cannot be filled with a festive spirit.”

Articles showing the re-opening of the Fundamental agreement talks

Reopening of Israeli-Vatican Talks Is Possible

JERUSALEM, **MAY 7, 2004** ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- The superior of the Custody of the Holy Land says that the reopening of talks between Israel and the Holy See would encourage pilgrimages and improve the situation of Christians.

Franciscan Father Giovanni Battistelli was reacting to Israeli press reports that said talks are under way on such issues as the granting of visas to priests and religious, and the restitution of the Cenacle.

"If the news published by Israeli newspapers is confirmed, of the opening of negotiations between Israel and the Holy See, it would certainly help the renewal of pilgrimages in the Holy Land and improve the conditions of Christians," Father Battistelli said.

In statements published by the Italian bishops' news agency SIR, the custodian said: "I hope the negotiations can begin again as soon as possible."

He also hopes that the "room of the Cenacle," located on Mount Zion in Jerusalem and surrounded by rabbinical seminaries, will be restored to the Catholic Church.

The Tel Aviv newspaper Maariv quoted a source at the Foreign Affairs Ministry who said the government might start on a new path with the Holy See.

According to the newspaper, U.S. President George W. Bush, who faces an election this year, asked Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon last month "to accelerate the transactions."

ZE04050724

[email this article](#)

National Catholic Reporter

The Independent Newsweekly

 [Sign Up Here For Weekly E-mail](#)

 [Archives](#) | [NCRonline.org](#)

The Word From Rome

Home

May 14, 2004

Vol. 3, No. 38

As I have noted before, relations between the Vatican and Israel have been at a low ebb since last August, when Israel broke off negotiations over unresolved issues from the 1993 "Fundamental Agreement" with the Vatican, including the tax status and legal personality of church institutions. In the meantime, another dispute arose over visas and residency permits for Christian clergy. All this compounds broader differences between Israel and the Holy See over the politics of the Middle East.

Now, however, there are signs of rapprochement.

On May 4, Israel's Ambassador to the Holy See, Oded Ben-Hur, met with Archbishop Giovanni Lajolo, the Vatican's foreign minister, to formally propose the resumption of negotiations on implementation of the Fundamental Agreement.

In a May 11 interview, Ben-Hur told *NCR* that he has worked behind the scenes for several months with officials on both sides to sketch out the broad outlines of an agreement. Several weeks ago, Ben-Hur arranged a meeting with Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's chief of staff and several officials from key ministries, and a representative of the Vatican.

From this collective behind-the-scenes work, Ben-Hur said, has emerged "a real breakthrough" in Israeli policy vis-à-vis Christians.

"It took new legislation, it took wavering of taxes, it took seeing the question of property in a different way by both sides," Ben-Hur said. "It took a lot of thinking on a political level that is different than before. This has now happened, and is in the process of being finalized."

The heart of the matter, Ben-Hur said, is willingness on both sides to compromise. He offered two examples.

First, the Vatican has accepted the principle of equality before the law when it comes to taxation, meaning that religious institutions will have to pay some taxes. At the same time, Israel has relaxed reporting requirements for foreign contributions in recognition of the unique financial character of religious groups.

Second, Ben-Hur said, both sides had long lists of properties that belong to the other, but to which they had some historical claim. Both sides have agreed to drop many of these claims, he said, accepting that it would be nearly impossible to restore the properties in any case.

Ben-Hur said the negotiations should resume in June or July, and he hopes that all the outstanding issues can be resolved before the end of 2004.

I spoke with a senior Vatican official May 12, who expressed caution.

"This is without doubt a positive step," he said. "But now we have to wait for facts. The proof will be in the results."

In another sign that the Israeli-Vatican "big chill" may be thawing, Ben-Hur will send four rectors of pontifical universities to an "academic fair" in Jerusalem June 1-4. Fr. Giuseppe Cavallotto of the Urbaniana, Jesuit Fr. Franco Imoda of the Gregorian, Opus Dei Fr. Mariano Fazio of Holy Cross, and Bishop Salvatore Fisichella of the Lateran will meet with their opposite numbers from Hebrew University, Tel Aviv University, and Bar-Ilan University. The idea is to identify ways in which the universities can collaborate.

"After about a year here, I realized that while most of the pontifical universities have courses on Biblical topics, what is missing is the link that would connect them to Israel today," Ben-Hur told me. "The new thought of Israel ... Zionism, political Israel, who we are, what is Judaism today? They are predominantly concentrated on Judaic studies of some 2,000 years ago, and I want to make this leap forward."

Beyond their meetings, the rectors will visit Yad Vashem, the Wailing Wall, some Christian holy sites, and perhaps will be received by high officials in the government. Aside from airfare, the costs of the trip are being covered entirely by the Israeli Foreign Ministry.

Ben-Hur said he is also in the process of creating a "Catholic Friends of Israel" association in Italy, and has been encouraged by the support he's received from a number of Catholic bishops.



8 July, 2004

VATICAN - ISRAEL

By 2004, full relations between Israel and Vatican: ambassador gives his word

by Bernardo Cervellera

In an exclusive interview with AsiaNews, His Excellency Oded Ben Hur explains the reasons for his optimism



Rome (AsiaNews) - Negotiations between Israel and the Vatican will reach a positive conclusion "by the end of 2004"; talks that took place July 5 in Jerusalem were not productive "because it was still too early", as explained by the Israeli Ambassador to the Holy See, Mr. Oded Ben Hur, in an interview with *AsiaNews*. He says he is "profoundly optimistic" about the process: "Technical difficulties exist, as do resistances, but we hope the accords will be concluded by the end of 2004, at the most in early 2005". Ambassador Ben Hur's optimism is based on a particular certainty: "that the government [lead by Sharon, Editor's note] is absolutely determined to conclude the accords by the end of the year".

The Fundamental Agreement between the Holy See and Israel, signed 10 years ago, was to lead to series of concordats that were to ensure the rights and freedom of the Church in Israeli territory. In all these years, however, Israel omitted to enact the Fundamental Agreement under state law.

On August 2003, without explanation, Israel withdrew its delegation entirely from negotiations when the two parties were working on provisions protecting Church properties and tax exemptions.

On July 5, negotiations began again, but the meeting, after only 3 hours, was adjourned to the beginning of September. Various observers complained that, after a year's wait, the meeting ended without producing any results. Ambassador Ben Hur specifies that "the meeting of July 5 should not be judged negatively. That date was part of the protocol and showed that relations are going ahead after last year's stall."

Ecclesiastical sources had told *AsiaNews* that the meeting was to be "a fully-fledged negotiation and not a pro forma meeting". Ambassador Ben Hur remains nevertheless optimistic: "There is no doubt that, with the next appointment of September 5th, there will be much more substance on the table. The July 5th meeting produced nothing because it was still too early. It was only last May that we revived Israeli/Holy See relations.

Beh Hur explains that last May he brought together various Vatican and Israeli figures to convince them to continue discussions. Among

those invited were representatives of the Foreign and Finance Ministries, along with Avigdor Itzhaki and Illan Cohen, respectively Sharon's out-going and in-coming chief of staff. "The difference between last August [2003, when negotiations stalled, Editor's note] and now is the involvement of the Sharon government. To have contributed to bringing about this more direct involvement is a source of satisfaction for me". Pressure from the United States was indeed a factor behind the July 5th meeting, which he defines as "an occasion to break the ice", adding that "however, of importance was also all the work carried out behind the scenes carried out by Israeli and Vatican figures together with me."

The Israeli diplomat says that the process must be viewed with "great patience". And he justifies the slow pace of work in these past months: difficulties in finding legal terms; the need to review traditional laws and modernize them, to find ways to "enhance relations with the Catholic community", without diminishing "caution toward the various religions in Jerusalem". In any case, Ben Hur affirms that "the representatives of various Ministries have done enough preparatory work by now on legal infrastructure," thanks to which "the accord will not only be ratified, but implemented."

Yet there are even deeper roots to the reasons for such a slow pace. According to Ambassador Ben Hur, in these past years, Israel had given little value to these accords with the Vatican, explaining that he has been seeking for some time "a greater appreciation for the importance of Israel/Vatican relations. In Israel, people do not realize how things are, they think that relations exist and take them for granted. Instead, we cannot ignore the Catholic world which makes up at least one fifth of humanity. On the other hand, it gets difficult to draw the Israeli government's attention when there are daily conflicts, the fight against terrorism, relations with the United States and Europe, economic problems. Israel is a small state and we do not have a lot of personnel to assign to such studies."

As proof of the Israeli governments interest toward Christians, Ambassador Ben Hur recalls that last February, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon launched a full study on the importance of Christians and on relations between Israel and the Christian world, creating a committee which consists of academic and political figures. "It is a

gradual process,” Ben Hur says, “this decision was perhaps not appreciated by all Israeli, but it is going forward. I’m counting on a bit of patience in limiting criticism and being more open and positive.

Copyright © 2003 AsiaNews
All rights reserved



Welcome to the State of Israel

Information on entry into territories under the control of the Palestinian Authority

1. We would like to bring to your attention, that entry into the territories under the control of the Palestinian Authority, in the Gaza Strip, Judea and Samaria (Area A), is forbidden without the attainment of prior written authorization.
2. Entry into the aforementioned territories, without prior authorization, may result in legal measures being taken against you, including deportation and refusal of future re-entry into the State of Israel.
3. Those interested in entering the Gaza Strip via the "Erez" crossing are required to fill out a form requesting entry (into the territories controlled by the Palestinian Authority) and to submit it to the Foreign Relations Office in the Coordination & Liaison Administration in the Gaza Strip, situated at "Erez" crossing.
4. Requests will be processed with the utmost effort to authorize them within 5 working days.
5. Additional information can be obtained at the Foreign Relations Office in the Coordination & Liaison Administration in the Gaza Strip reachable by telephone (08-674-1556) or by facsimile (08-689-2613).
6. The submission of a request to authorize entry into the above mentioned areas does not constitute permission to do so, until written authorization has been received.

مرحباً بكم في دولة إسرائيل

الدخول إلى المناطق التي تخضع لمسؤولية السلطة الوطنية الفلسطينية

1. تسهلاً لإقامتكم في إسرائيل نسترعي انتباهكم إلى منع الدخول بدون إذن إلى مناطق السلطة الوطنية الفلسطينية في قطاع غزة والأراضي الواقعة تحت مسؤولية السلطة الوطنية الفلسطينية في منطقة يهودا والسامرة (الضفة الغربية) - مناطق (أ).
2. إن دخول المناطق المذكورة بدون إذن من شأنه تعريض المخالفين للملاحقة القضائية بما فيها الإبعاد عن دولة إسرائيل ومنع إمكان العودة إليها مستقبلاً.
3. على الراغبين في دخول منطقة قطاع غزة عن طريق معبر (إيرز) تعبئة نموذج طلب الدخول إلى مناطق السلطة الوطنية وتقديمه إلى مكتب الأجانب الكائن بمقر الارتباط في منطقة قطاع غزة.
4. وسيتم الاعتناء بالطلب والسعي المرء عليه خلال 5 أيام عمل.
5. للحصول على مزيد من التفاصيل يرجى الاتصال بمكتب الأجانب في مقر الارتباط على الهاتف رقم 08-6741556 أو على الفاكس رقم 08-6892613.
6. لا يجوز اعتبار مجرد تقديم طلب تنسيق المرور إذاً بدخول المنطقة إذ يجب انتظار ورود الرد على الطلب خطياً.

Ben-Gourion Handout

Asia News Article dealing with the Handout



22 January, 2004

ISRAEL - PALESTINE

Pilgrims: A not so big “Welcome” to Bethlehem, Jericho and Emmaus.



Jerusalem (AsiaNews) – There are obstacles placed in the way of pilgrims wanting to visit the Holy Land. Over the past few days Israeli border officials have been passing a leaflet in English and Arabic to travelers arriving in Israel and Palestine. Written in large print is a great big “Welcome to the State of Israel”. However the leaflet specifies that “entry into the territories under the control of the Palestinian Authority” (i.e. Gaza, Judea and Samaria) “is forbidden”. This means that it is impossible for pilgrims to reach Bethlehem, Jericho, Emmaus and Qumran, traditional destinations for all Christian pilgrims

A written request is necessary to enter these territories, while waiting for the authorization from the Israeli military government, which promises to respond within 5 working days.

The request itself does not authorize any entry. Only a written response from the military government’s Foreign Relations Office constitutes a valid authorization.

Anyone daring to enter these territories without authorization risks serious sanctions: “legal measures” and even “deportation and refusal of future re-entry into the State of Israel”.

Special instructions are given for those requesting entry into the Gaza Strip. The request must be submitted directly to the Foreign Relations Office, located in the “Erez” crossing, recently the stage of a suicide attack.

To make further inquiries, the leaflet gives the Office’s telephone numbers: 08-674-1556; fax: 08-689-2613).

Below we attach the original text of the “Information” leaflet:

Welcome to the State of Israel

Information on entry into territories under the control of the Palestinian Authority

1. We would like to bring to your attention, that entry into the territories under the control of the Palestinian Authority, in the Gaza Strip, Judea and Samaria (Area A), is forbidden without the attainment of prior written authorization.
2. Entry into the aforementioned territories, without prior authorization, may result in legal measures being taken against you, including deportation and refusal of future re-entry into the State of Israel.
3. Those interested in entering the Gaza Strip via the "Erez" crossing are required to fill out a form requesting entry (into the territories controlled by the Palestinian Authority) and to submit it to the Foreign Relations Office in the Coordination & Liaison Administration in the Gaza Strip, situated at "Erez" crossing.
4. Requests will be processed with the utmost effort to authorize them within 5 working days.
5. Additional information can be obtained at the Foreign Relations Office in the Coordination & Liaison Administration in the Gaza Strip reachable by telephone (08-674-1556) or by facsimile (08-689-2613).
6. The submission of a request to authorize entry into the above mentioned areas does not constitute permission to do so, until written authorization has been received.

(same text follows in Arabic)

Copyright © 2003 AsiaNews

All rights reserved

Article After intervention on the Handout



19 February, 2004

ISRAEL - PALESTINE - VATICAN

Pilgrims no longer limited to travel through Judea and Samaria



Rome (AsiaNews) –There are no longer problems and obstacles for pilgrims wanting to reach Bethlehem and the Occupied Territories. Israel's ambassador to the Holy See, Oded Ben Hur, told *AsiaNews* today that the Tel Aviv airport no longer passes out leaflets stating that visits to the Occupied Territories are limited and that it has "returned to previous procedures".

Last Jan. 22 *AsiaNews* reported that Tel Aviv airport military personnel handed out leaflets to pilgrims wanting to travel to the Occupied Territories (Bethlehem, Jericho, Emmaus, Qumran, etc.), informing them they needed special authorization to visit these places.

Military authorities were given the final authority to grant permission or not. Israeli sources confidentially told *AsiaNews* the procedure risked stopping tourism in the Holy Land.

The Ministry of Tourism, worried about the procedure's consequences on the flow of tourism (which was already tested by problems with terrorism and Israeli-Palestinian tension), attempted to put the brakes on requiring such special authorizations.

Yesterday, Feb. 18. the Israeli tourism minister, Raphael Ben Hour, issued a statement in Hebrew, asking "to get rid of the leaflet informing tourists that their travel to Palestinian Authority territories , in Judea and Samaria, was prohibited."

In the statement he said "instructions have been given to border police to stop passing out the leaflet ...at Ben Gurion airport" so that "tourist travel to Judea and Samaria will be permitted according to the rule and norms" of the past. In his statement he makes no mention of Gaza, which has been placed under tight control following the latest terrorist attacks."

During a telephone call with *AsiaNews*, Ambassador Oded Ben Hur said "all this (the leaflet and its stipulated travel restrictions) was a mistake and we have corrected it."

Vatican News Service dealing with the Visa Issue

Israel's Visa Denials Portend Woes for Church Institutions

Religious Running Into Bureaucratic Roadblock

ROME, **MARCH 25, 2004** ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Catholic religious living in Israel and in the Occupied Territories are facing a hard time because of the authorities' systematic refusal to grant visas, the Italian press reported.

The result: the Church in the Holy Land might not have enough personnel to run the "shrines, parishes, hospitals and schools," the Rome newspaper *Il Tempo* reported.

On March 17, for example, two women religious of the Most Holy Rosary congregation were detained. Two days earlier, a Franciscan friar was also blocked, the newspaper said.

Priests and religious who have been in the Holy Land for a long time are having serious problems, as the office of the Interior Ministry is not renewing their permits, the newspaper said.

"Lack of visas is also becoming a humanitarian problem," *Il Tempo* noted. "Some religious have to leave Israel urgently to take care of parents on their deathbed. But they cannot leave the country as they run the risk of not being able to return."

"The new Interior Minister and other governmental figures in the past have calmed the situation and promised ecclesiastical authorities to resolve it, but have failed to do so" now, the newspaper said.

The refusal of visas raises question about the Fundamental Agreement between the Holy See and the state of Israel, signed 10 years ago. The agreement gives the Church the right to deploy its own personnel and institutions, *Il Tempo* explained.

"What is ironic is that these situations never happened before, when there were no such agreements," the newspaper noted.

According to estimates, quoted by the newspaper, there are about 100 ecclesiastics and religious living in an "illegal" situation, as their visas have not been renewed.

Franciscan Father David Jaeger, a spokesman of the Holy Land Custody, told AsiaNews: "We are dealing with a very serious problem indeed, one which is getting worse by the day."

"Promises made by top-ranking government officials have not been kept so far," he said. "They won't let us know their reasons behind the new policy. There are no official channels of dialogue to bring about a resolution to the situation."

ZE04032602

Il Tempo Article in Italian dealing with the Visa Issue

Israele, religiosi trattati come clandestini

Sono almeno un centinaio i sacerdoti e le suore privati del permesso di soggiorno dal ministero degli interni di Tel Aviv

GERUSALEMME — In 56 anni di vita dello stato di Israele non vi era mai stata una crisi del genere: personale ecclesiastico e religioso, privato senza motivo dei permessi di soggiorno. Il fenomeno riguarda molte decine di sacerdoti, religiosi e religiose, condannati a vivere in condizioni di clandestinità, soggetti a essere fermati per strada come immigrati illegali. Solo la scorsa settimana, il 17 marzo, due suore del Santissimo Rosario sono state fermate dalla polizia; due giorni prima un frate francescano è stato bloccato. Il punto è che queste persone si trovano da anni in Israele o nei territori occupati. Ma le loro domande di rinnovo del permesso di soggiorno o il rilascio del permesso di soggiorno per i nuovi arrivati, giacciono senza risposta negli uffici del ministero degli Interni.

Il visto diventa anche un problema umanitario: alcuni religiosi hanno l'urgenza di uscire da Israele per stare accanto ai loro genitori sul letto di morte. Ma essi non possono lasciare il paese perché rischiano di non potervi rientrare.

La politica di non rilasciare i visti al personale ecclesiastico era cominciata durante il governo precedente, quando al dicastero degli Interni vi era un ministro del partito fondamentalista Shas. Un anno fa, con l'arrivo di un esponente del partito laico liberale Shinui, si sperava che le cose sarebbero cambiate. Il nuovo ministro degli Interni e altri esponenti governativi hanno dato molte assicurazioni e promesse alle autorità ecclesiastiche, ma non se n'è realizzata nessuna.

Il blocco dei visti mette in questione anche l'Accordo fondamentale fra la Santa Sede e Israele, di cui si celebra il decennale. L'Accordo riconosce il diritto della Chiesa di dispiegare il proprio personale e le proprie istituzioni. L'ironia è che queste situazioni non si erano mai verificate prima, quando non vi erano gli Accordi.

Secondo le stime di alcuni religiosi, vi sono almeno 100 persone "illegali", ma il numero aumenta sempre di più: ogni giorno scadono i visti e non vengono rinnovati. Si tratta soprattutto di persone entrate regolarmente e che avrebbero bisogno del rinnovo.

Questo coinvolge non solo il personale in Israele, ma anche quello nei territori occupati, perché per andare nelle zone controllate dall'Autorità Palestinese, occorre in ogni caso fare scalo in Israele.

In passato la trafila burocratica era snella: i sacerdoti erano assegnati alla Chiesa al servizio della Terra Santa e ogni 2-3 anni scattava il rinnovo automatico del visto.

Da parte delle autorità israeliane c'è completo silenzio, che qualcuno definisce "un muro di gomma". I religiosi dapprima supponevano si trattasse di semplici disguidi burocratici.

Ma ormai il fenomeno è troppo massiccio, dura da troppo tempo e riguarda troppe persone. Ormai la Chiesa di Terra Santa rischia di non avere il personale sufficiente per far funzionare santuari, parrocchie, ospedali, scuole. E tutto questo silenziosamente, senza che le autorità israeliane si pronuncino, senza annunciare nuove regole o nuove esigenze.

I responsabili della Chiesa, i vescovi di Terra Santa e dall'estero si sono rivolti diverse volte alle autorità israeliane, ma hanno ottenuto solo vaghe promesse finite nel nulla. All'inizio del 2003 le autorità governative hanno promesso di deliberare nuove procedure, ma nulla di questo è risultato vero.

Padre David Jaeger, francescano, portavoce della Custodia di Terra Santa commenta: «È una situazione allucinante e kafkiana. Il problema è gravissimo e peggiora di giorno in giorno. Le promesse fatte dalle alte cariche del governo finora non sono state mantenute. Non ci danno a

sapere le ragioni di questa nuova politica, non vi sono canali istituzionali di dialogo capaci di veicolare una risoluzione della situazione. È tempo che la Chiesa in Terrasanta si appelli alla solidarietà della Chiesa nel mondo. I governanti del paese devono avere chiaro che la situazione interessa l'intera chiesa cattolica nel mondo».

[Print](#)

Article Showing the Easing of the Visa issue

Israelis Aiming to Ease Visa Delays for Religious and Priests

Ambassador to Holy See Says Solution Is Imminent

ROME, **APRIL 19, 2004** ([Zenit.org](#)).- An Israeli commission is reviewing the bureaucratic bottleneck that causes delays in the issuance of visas to religious and priests in the Holy Land.

Last month, the Italian press reported on the increasingly difficult situation that Catholic religious face in Israel and in the Occupied Territories due to the authorities' systematic refusal to renew their visas.

According to a report April 13, the Israeli Embassy to the Holy See sent AsiaNews an official note stating that the "directors and officials of different Ministries ... together with the ambassador of Israel to the Holy See, have made evident the need to resolve in a brief period of time the complex and delicate situation."

"Immediately after Easter procedures will be accelerated to unblock the accumulation of dispatches," the note states.

According to the text sent by the Israeli diplomatic headquarters to the Holy See, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon himself requested the establishment of an Inter-Ministerial Commission to "review the criteria, rules and necessary times ... as well as a review of the whole bureaucratic mechanism" which has led to the delay in the issuance of visas.

The commission already held meetings on several occasions in February.

The last meeting took place April 5 at the Ministry of the Interior. There was a debate on the new procedure that eases bureaucratic practices, shortens security controls, and revises the categories of visas -- including for priests, volunteers, temporary workers and scholarship holders.

Oded Ben Hur, Israel's ambassador to the Holy See, told AsiaNews last week that the effects of the modification of the procedure might be felt "in seven to 10 days."

The note also stressed that "great importance" that the Israeli government attaches "to the strengthening of good relations between Israel and the Christian world and, in particular, with Catholics and the Holy See" and affirmed that "the apostolic nuncio in Israel will be informed of all decisions and deliberations in regard to the visas."

Ecclesiastical sources in Jerusalem, contacted by AsiaNews, said: "We hope that this time the promises -- reiterated other times over the last two years -- will be fulfilled."
ZE04041905

[email this article](#)

Letters of thanks from Fr. David Jaeger (legal representative for the Holy See in Israel)

-

From: David Jaeger

Date: Monday, May 03, 2004 09:14:30 AM

To: Gray Krupp

Subject: Pave the Way

Mr. Gary KRUPP, KCSG
Pave the Way Foundation
New York

Dear Mr. Krupp,

Pleas allow me to send you this further message expressing heartfelt - and growing - appreciation for your unique role, with the Pave the Way Foundation, in "rescuing" and building up the relationship between the Catholic Church and the Jewish People, specifically the State of Israel. I apologise for the e-mail format, but am travelling, and will be for a while, and have not wished to delay discharging this obligation. After decades of growth in friendship between Catholics and Jews, the Fundamental Agreement between the Holy See and the State of Israel (1993) was expected to consolidate these achievements and show the road to further progress. In recent times though, serious difficulties have emerged, repeatedly, and there has been a need for brave persons and organisations to step into the breach, to heal rifts, and to help put the relationship once more on a positive track. While I keep in touch on this with a great number of persons and entities, I can and must say that your role has been precisely unique. I do not think I can thank you enough. Just in recent months you were able to be decisively instrumental in resolving quickly a truly major problem before it got out of control when you intervned to have the Israeli government withdraw what was, in effect, a warning to pilgrims not to viist Bethlehem. It was a move not meant to have that effect, but which would have had it, and would have provoked a major clash, had it not been especially for your timely and

fruitful intercession. All sides owe you thanks!

It is also my sense that your intercession is having a very significant effect towards resolving an even larger crisis, the two year old problem of visas denied in large numbers to Church personnel in the Holy Land. I cannot say that it is resolved yet, but things have definitely taken a turn for the better, and you are a very significant part of that. Most of all though, I am grateful for your grasp of the need for negotiations between the State of Israel and the Holy See to resume, after Israel walked out on them on August 28 last. As all concerned acknowledge, only serious and sustained suasion from influential individuals and bodies in the United States, can achieve a purposeful return by Israel to the negotiating table. You have already proved your ability at such suasion, and I hope you keep at it! For Israel to continue to stay away, would cast a pall over the entire historic relationship and endanger the achievements of the Fundamental Agreement, by suggesting to Catholics that it was not sincerely meant, and was all in vain anyway, with consequences possibly reaching far into the future that I prefer not to contemplate. I refuse to contemplate them because I am not giving up. And it is comforting to know that Pave the Way is not giving up either!

Quite recently I have the sense that the goal is achievable. I have been to Israel recently and have met people close to the Prime Minister. We need just that extra (mighty) "push" from the U.S. for the Israeli delegation to be sent back to the table, and for a reasonable bilateral agreement to come out of it. You know better than I just how important that would be to the cementing of the friendship between the Catholic Church and the Jewish People, so necessary at this time.

With great respect for your skill and devotion, and with the deepest gratitude, I am,

Yours truly,

(The Rev. Dr.) David-Maria A. Jaeger, O.F.M.

(The Official Spokesman of the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land)



PONTIFICIO ATENEO ANTONIANUM

Mr. Gary KRUPP, KCSG
Pave the Way Foundation
New York

via facsimile

Rome, 13 June 2004

Dear Mr. Krupp,

Once more I feel impelled by events - this time happily positive developments - to express my profound gratitude and appreciation for the unique contribution you have been making, with the Pave the Way Foundation, to securing onward progress in building up the relationship between the Catholic Church and the Jewish People.

It should please you to learn that, thanks in a truly significant measure to your efforts, the Government of Israel has now resolved to return to the negotiations with the Holy See, from which the Israeli delegation pulled out on 28 August last year. The talks are set to resume on 5 July, and it is hoped to have made substantial progress by the middle of September.

Levy

When the Government of Israel withdrew from the negotiations last August it was a crisis of unprecedented seriousness, with possible dire consequences for the entire edifice that both sides had been constructing with such shared determination since the Fundamental Agreement of 1993. For some of us, on both sides, it was a time of tremendous anxiety, and even despondency, but you held fast to the hopes we all share, refused to give up, moved heaven and earth, as the saying goes, to help bring about the healing of the relationship. Your unrivalled, unparalleled access to officials and others on both sides, has been crucial to the enterprise. And it has got results!

Please allow me to insist on the uniqueness of the role of Pave the Way. There are, of course, many organisations devoted to advancing Catholic-Jewish dialogue and friendship. None, however, has equally grasped the indispensable requirement of a healthy relationship between the Church and the State in Israel as



PONTIFICIO ATENEO ANTONIANUM

a condition of possibility, and a powerful stimulus, for that continuous growth in friendship between the Catholic Church and Jewish People that the Fundamental Agreement called for. A rules-based relationship between Church and State in Israel is the essential requirement for avoiding friction, and increasing cooperation, there and everywhere else. To allow that relationship to fail might have had reverberations well beyond Israeli territory itself. It was a prospect none of us cared to contemplate, and now - thanks to your extraordinary dedication and ability - may indeed never have to consider.

On the verge of the resumption of the negotiations, with prospects for their ultimate success as yet somewhat uncertain, I respectfully urge Pave the Way not simply to rest on its well-deserved laurels, but to continue to work mightily for the talks to conclude positively, for new Agreements to be forged, for the way ahead to become truly paved. Thus my words of thanks and praise for the Pave the Way Foundation come together with an appeal, an appeal for you to stay the course, to maintain - and increase - the effort to mobilise both Jews and Catholics to support the sincere shared striving for concord and prophetic working together, starting from Israel, and centred on Israel.

With renewed assurances of my highest consideration,

Yours sincerely,

(The Rev. Dr.) David-Maria A. Jaeger, O.F.M.

(The Official Spokesman of the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land)