



Commemoration of the 25th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the State of Israel and the Holy See

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The following is the address given by Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin on June 15, 2019, on the occasion of the commemoration of the 25th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the State of Israel and the Holy See, which took place in the Major Temple in Rome.

H.E. Oren David, Ambassador of Israel to the Holy See,

Distinguished Chief Rabbi,

Distinguished Ambassadors and members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to speak on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the State of Israel and the Holy See. I thank, in a special way, Ambassador David for organizing this event and for the words he has just pronounced, emphasizing the good relations between us.

I cordially greet each of you, in particular Dr. Di Segni, Chief Rabbi of the Jewish Community of Rome, who is hosting us in the city's Major Temple. This Temple has seen in the last decades the presence of various Popes, starting from the visit of Saint John Paul II on 13 April 1986, a presence that constitutes the visible sign of the transformation of the relationship between Christians and Jews in the last fifty years. As Pope Francis recalled on 17 January 2016: *“Dear elder brothers and sisters, we should be truly grateful for everything that it has been possible to achieve over the last fifty years, because we have matured and our mutual understanding, trust and friendship have deepened”*.

In this context there is also the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Holy See and Israel, with the opening, on 15 June 1994, of the two diplomatic missions in Tel Aviv and the Vatican, following the Fundamental Agreement between the Holy See and the State of Israel, signed 30 December 1993.

This Agreement, in fact, entered into force on 10 March 1994, and opened a new phase in bilateral relations, initiating a significant path of cooperation. It took the form of the signing of the Agreement on the legal personality of the Church, whose application process is nearing conclusion, and has opened a long and delicate negotiation process within the Bilateral Permanent Working

Commission between the Holy See and the State of Israel to reach an agreement on financial matters, which we hope will soon be concluded.

On this anniversary, I would like to say a word of appreciation for the commitment made by the State of Israel to ensure the Catholic Church the freedom to carry out her mission and make her own contribution to Israeli society. Among the various activities of the Church, worthy of note are the Catholic schools, which, through education in fundamental values, dialogue and mutual respect, promote the creation of a more just and peaceful society.

We hope that consistency with the spirit of the fundamental Agreement for a renewed and fruitful collaboration with the Catholic Church in Israel may never be lacking, and that the country may proudly demonstrate the viability of its democracy, guaranteeing equal rights and equal opportunities for all, building a future of peace and harmony.

In these 25 years, there have been important papal visits to Israel and by the Israeli authorities in the Vatican, as well as numerous initiatives in favour of interreligious dialogue.

I would like to recall, in particular, the prayer meeting with the Israeli and Palestinian Presidents, which took place on 8 June 2014 in the Vatican, the fifth anniversary of which has just passed. As is known, the peace process and the future of the region are close to the heart of the Pope and the Holy See. In fact, on the occasion of this anniversary, the Holy Father invited all, believers and non-believers, to dedicate ‘a minute to peace’, a minute of prayer and reflection: all together for a more fraternal world!

The special nature of our relationships emerges precisely from the unique character of the Holy Land, so rich in history and faith and so dear to the hearts of believers, be they Jews, Christians or Muslims. Jerusalem, the city of peace, is its heart, a common heritage for all the faithful of the three great monotheistic religions and of the whole world. Our religious and political commitment favours the city’s vocation to be a place of reconciliation and encounter between religions, as well as a symbol of respect and peaceful cohabitation.

The Holy See and the State of Israel are called to join forces to promote religious freedom, religion and conscience, as an indispensable condition for protecting the dignity of every human being, and to work together to combat anti-Semitism. During these years, the Holy See and the State of Israel have shown joint responsibility in this struggle, a commitment reaffirmed by the Fundamental Agreement, which must continue to combat all forms of religious intolerance and to promote mutual understanding between nations, tolerance between communities and respect for human dignity and life.

In his speech to the participants in the *International Conference on the Responsibility of States, Institutions and Individuals to Fight Anti-Semitism Hate Crimes*, held in the Vatican on 29 January 2018, the Holy Father Francis recalled that “*to build our history, which will either be together or will not be at all, we need a common memory, living and faithful, that should not remain imprisoned in resentment but, though riven by the night of pain, should open up to the hope of a new dawn. The Church desires to extend her hand. She wishes to remember and to walk together. On this journey, ‘the Church, mindful of the patrimony she shares with the Jews and moved not by political reasons but by the Gospel’s spiritual love, decries hatred, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism, directed against Jews at any time and by anyone’ (Vatican Council II, Declaration Nostra aetate, 4)*”.

This anniversary, in addition to making us appreciate the path we have travelled together, helps us reinvigorate our commitment to the concrete promotion of a renewed friendship. With these hopes I invoke the blessing of the Almighty on our common journey.

Thank you.

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