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Rabbi di Segni said in response, "We know well that the climate of these last decades is remarkably changed and today as never before, vistas of constructive encounters in equal dignity are opened. This has been possible thanks to the great initiatives of Pope John XXIII, but no Pope has ever contributed so much as John Paul II." He added, "The revealed witness of the One God and the duty to pursue holiness inspires our actions and imposes responsibilities upon us before all. For this, the collaboration between Jews and Christians, is necessary for us and for the world; it is a fertile sign of peace and blessing."

Rabbi di Segni, who is a medical doctor, was installed as Chief Rabbi of Rome in February 2002, succeeding former Chief Rabbi Elio Toaff, who retired in 2001 at age 86 after holding the position for 50 years. There has been a Jewish community in Rome for more than 2,000 years, making it the oldest continuous Jewish settlement in Europe. Today, Rome's 15,000 Jews make it the largest Jewish community in Italy, which has about 35,000 Jews in all.

F.S.