

Did the Vatican Just Rebuke Trump Administration's New West Bank Settlement Policy?

In what appears to be a rare public rebuke of U.S. foreign policy, the Vatican issued a statement Wednesday (Nov. 20) reaffirming its support for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and calling on Israel to reside "within the borders recognized by the international community."

The communique follows this week's controversial announcement that the U.S. government is reversing its decades-old position that Israeli settlements in the West Bank are "inconsistent with international law." Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said on Monday that he instead preferred to refer to such settlements as "ill-advised," as former President Ronald Reagan once did.

The Vatican statement referred to "recent decisions that risk undermining further the Israeli-Palestinian peace process."

"The Holy See reiterates its position of a two-state solution for two peoples, as the only way to reach a complete solution to this age-old conflict."

The statement then makes a pointed reference to Israel's borders.

"The Holy See supports the right of the State of Israel to live in peace and security within the borders recognized by the international community," reads the statement, first reported by National Catholic Reporter.

It is unusual for the Vatican to publish a direct response to U.S. foreign policy, but the U.S. government's announcement

has triggered reactions from several faith communities.

President Donald Trump's evangelical supporters cheered the move. Other faith groups, including the Union for Reform Judaism, the National Council of Churches and the Council on American-Islamic Relations, published statements decrying the announcement, with many saying it will be an impediment to peace in the region.

Pope Francis has long made addressing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict a focus of his papacy, traveling to the region in May 2014. He prayed at the Israeli "separation wall" in Bethlehem during that trip, became the first pontiff to fly directly into the West Bank and referred to the occupied territories as the "State of Palestine" (a phrasing the Vatican adopted shortly before he was elected pope).

Francis convened a "prayer summit" at the Vatican with Israeli and Palestinian presidents later that year, once again calling for peace in the region. He worked to establish diplomatic relations with Palestinians, who opened an embassy at the Vatican in 2017. The Vatican has had diplomatic ties to Israel since 1993.

Pope Francis is currently not at the Vatican, but traveling abroad on a weeklong trip to Japan and Thailand. {eo}

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