

Pope Francis: Anti-Semitism contradicts Christianity

Exchanges of goodwill between Peres and Pope take place in Vatican; 'Come to Israel to restore faith in peace,' president says

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President Shimon Peres met on Tuesday with Pope Francis at the Vatican to discuss Middle East tensions, the prospect of peace in the region and the threat of anti-Semitism.

Francis I, or Jorge Mario Bergoglio, of Argentina, 76, was elected in March as the leader of the troubled Roman Catholic Church. He is known for his tolerant views and sympathy toward the Jews. He told Peres that anti-Semitism was in contradiction to the true spirit of Christianity. "As a Pope, I will not abide by any manifestations of anti-Semitism," he said.

Peres, who congratulated Francis on his recent election to the august post, has apprised the Pope of his ambition of Middle East peace, singling out the Arab League peace initiative as a positive development. "It's good they returned to peace initiatives at this time. It's very important they again support the two-state solution," the president said.



Peres with Pope Francis at the Vatican (Photo: Kobi Gideon, GPO)

The announcement on the willingness for "minor changes" to the 1967 borders, was made by Qatari Prime Minister Sheik Hamad Bin Jassem Al Thani, at the end of a day of discussions in Washington with senior governmental officials, including US Vice President Joe Biden, Secretary of State John Kerry and Arab League Secretary-General Nabil al-Arabi.



'Restore faith in peace' (Photo: Kobi Gideon, GPO)

Peres has also reiterated his stance that Mahmoud Abbas is a suitable partner for peace talks. At the close of the meeting he has extended an invitation to Pope Francis to visit Israel, saying "your arrival will be greeted with enthusiasm and love by all Israel's residents of all races and religions. Your arrival would restore faith in the possibility of peace."

The pontiff expressed his gratitude to the Israeli president saying he would try to come as soon as possible, adding "I learned optimism from you; you are an inspiration to me."



Bible presented to Pope (Photo: Yosef Avi Yair Angel)

Peres gave the Pope a Bible, inscribed "To his Holiness Pope Francis, 'So that you may prosper in all you do and wherever you go' (1 Kings 2:3).

Peres, on an official visit to the Vatican, has also convened with the Italian Prime Minister Enrico Letta. Peres spoke with Letta on the tightening of sanctions on Iran and clarified that the danger of chemical weapons in Syria hovers over Europe and not only over Israel.