

Vatican and Palestinian leaders sign historic first legal treaty

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VATICAN CITY (RNS): The Vatican on Friday (June 26) signed a historic agreement recognizing the state of Palestine and calling for a two-state solution with Israel, a move criticized by the Israeli government as damaging the peace process.

The comprehensive agreement was signed at the Vatican by the Holy See's foreign minister, Archbishop Paul Gallagher, and his Palestinian counterpart, Riad al-Malki.

The accord is the result of years of negotiations and is the first legal treaty between Palestine and the Holy See, which was announced on May 13 ahead of the June 26 signing ceremony.

Under the agreement—containing 32 articles in eight chapters—the Holy See officially recognizes the state of Palestine and calls for a two-state solution through direct negotiations with Israel.

As part of the accord, the Vatican has thrown its support behind a peace deal based on the 1967 border, before Israel annexed large swaths of territory during the Six-Day War.

Speaking at the signing ceremony, Gallagher said he hoped “the much desired two-state solution may become a reality as soon as possible.”

“It is my hope that the present agreement may in some way be a stimulus to bringing a definitive end to the long-standing Israeli-Palestinian conflict,” he said, adding the new agreement could serve as “a model” for other Arab and Muslim-majority countries.

Al-Malki said the deal could not have been possible without the “personal dedication” of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and the blessing of Pope

Francis.

He hailed the agreement for acknowledging “the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, freedom and dignity in an independent state of their own, free from the shackles of occupation.”

“This agreement is the product of a number of years of detailed and exhaustive negotiations between both of our teams, in a spirit of friendship and partnership,” al-Malki added.

But the agreement sparked instant criticism from Israel, which in a statement expressed its “regret regarding the Vatican decision to officially recognize the Palestinian Authority as a state.”

“This hasty step damages the prospects for advancing a peace agreement, and harms the international effort to convince the PA to return to direct negotiations with Israel,” said Israeli foreign ministry spokesman Emmanuel Nahshon, quoted by AFP.

The June deal comes more than 15 years after the Vatican signed a basic agreement with the Palestine Liberation Organization representing the Palestinian people.