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Vatican, PLO resume talks

by Carol Glatz by Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY -- The Vatican and the Palestine Liberation Organization have resumed diplomatic talks and agreed to establish a working group dedicated to drafting a comprehensive agreement between the two parties.

The talks are aimed at establishing "a comprehensive international agreement regulating and promoting the presence and activities of the Catholic Church in the Palestinian territories, so strengthening the special relations between the Holy See and the PLO," said a joint statement released by the Vatican Dec. 9.

The statement was issued at the end of initial talks, which were held Dec. 7 "in a cordial atmosphere" at the headquarters of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in the West Bank town of Ramallah.

The joint statement said the talks were designed to elaborate ways to implement the "Basic Agreement" between the Vatican and the PLO, an agreement signed in 2000 spelling out principles for guaranteeing church rights and religious freedom in territories administered by the Palestinian Authority.

The talks in Ramallah were co-chaired by Msgr. Ettore Balestrero, the Vatican undersecretary for relations with states, and Ziad al-Bandak, the Palestinian presidential adviser for Christian relations.

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