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More on Jewish relations

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On Wednesday, Vatican spokesperson Joaquin Navarro-Valls released a statement which is also likely to cause some consternation in Israel and among sectors of Jewish opinion. In the wake of Israeli bombings in Gaza and elsewhere that have resulted in civilian casualties, Navarro said:

"The Holy See is following with great apprehension and sorrow the episodes of growing, blind violence which are causing blood to flow in these days in the Holy Land. The Holy Father is close, especially in prayer, to the innocent victims, to their families and to the populations of this land, hostages to those who delude themselves that the ever more dramatic problems of the region can be solved with force or in unilateral fashion."

"The Holy See invites the international community to rapidly activate the necessary means for obligatory humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people, and associates itself with calls upon the responsible parties of both peoples that the required respect for human life will be demonstrated, especially unarmed civilians and children, and that the path of negotiation will be taken up anew with courage, the only path that can lead to the just and lasting peace to which everyone aspires."

While the statement is implicitly critical of violence on all sides, diplomatic sources said Wednesday that the denunciation of "unilateral" solutions refers, in part, to Israel's attempt to set the borders of a Palestinian state. The statement would thus represent the first major policy clash between the Vatican and the new Israeli government under Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, who vowed during Israeli elections to establish permanent borders for a Palestinian state by 2010.

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