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Pope meets with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas visits the Vatican, and discusses the need for a ceasefire in Gaza. Speaking to Vatican Media, he says that he asked the Pope to continue to promote recognition of the State of Palestine in the international community.

By Joseph Tulloch

Pope Francis held a 30-minute long meeting this morning with Mahmoud Abbas, President of the State of Palestine.

Speaking to Vatican Media's Roberto Cetera immediately afterwards, President Abbas described the meeting as "fruitful", adding that "every time I meet the Pope, it's like meeting

an old friend".

It was the pair's first face-to-face meeting in three years.

"I thanked the Holy Father for his constant words about peace in the Middle East", President Abbas said, "and for the solidarity he always expresses with the Palestinian civilians who are victims of the war in Gaza."

"I asked him to continue to promote the recognition of the State of Palestine in the international community," Abbas added. "If peace is to be achieved, there is no alternative to the two-state solution."

Statement from Holy See Press Office

A statement from the Holy See Press Office noted that, after his meeting with the Pope, President Abbas met with the Holy See's Secretary of State, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, and the Holy See's Secretary for Relations with States, Archbishop Paul Gallagher.

The statement said that the "very serious humanitarian situation in Gaza" was discussed at the meetings, as was the hope for "a ceasefire and the release of all hostages as soon as possible".



President Abbas meets with Cardinal Parolin

Another topic was "the Catholic Church's important contribution to Palestinian society", including its current humanitarian efforts in Gaza.

The Holy See Press Office statement also noted that the discussions had covered the necessity of implementing a two-state solution, not with violence but via “diplomacy and dialogue”, and the importance of a special status for Jerusalem, in order that it might be a “place of friendship for the three great monotheistic religions”.

Finally, the Catholic Church’s upcoming 2025 Holy Year was discussed, and hope was expressed that the Jubilee Year might lead to “the return of pilgrims to the Holy Land”.



President Abbas is escorted through the Vatican by Swiss Guards

Exchange of gifts

At the end of the Pope’s meeting with President Abbas, the pair exchanged gifts.

Pope Francis gave the Palestinian President several presents, including his message for the World Day of Peace and a bas-relief with the words “Peace is a fragile flower”.

President Abbas gave the Pope several gifts in return, including a painting depicting him with the Pope and one depicting the Pope during his visit to Bethlehem in 2014.

He also presented the Pope with an icon of Saint Porphyrius, the patron saint of Gaza – a gift from Patriarch Theophilus, the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem.



The exchange of gifts

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