

Vatican, Israel end spat over terrorism: Sharon calls Benedict "friend of Israel"

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The Vatican and Israel have agreed to end a public feud over terrorism, with Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon calling Pope Benedict XVI "a true friend of Israel."

The fight erupted in July when the pope failed to include Israel on a list of countries that had been victims of terrorism. The Vatican rejected Israeli complaints, and suggested that Israel routinely breaks international law when it cracks down on Palestinian militants.

The public dispute had threatened to damage improved relations between Israel and the Vatican.

Israel's ambassador to the Vatican, Oded Ben Hur, delivered a letter to Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Angelo Sodano on August 23 that said Israel was ready to move on, according to the Associated Press.

"We definitely see this thing behind us and are looking forward to improving our relationship," Ben Hur said. The letter from Sharon called Benedict "a true friend of Israel, genuinely committed to advancing tolerance, understanding and reconciliation," AP reported.

Ben Hur said Sodano was pleased with the letter and indicated that the Holy See was ready to resume normal relations. Sodano said the omission of Israel was unintentional and the result of hasty preparation of remarks.

Both sides agreed to revive stalled talks over the Holy See's tax-exempt status in Israel. Israel's top two chief rabbis were scheduled to meet with the pope September 15 to mark the 40th anniversary of a document that overhauled the church's relationship with Jews. -*Religion News Service*