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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: VATICAN ARCHIVES - POPE ORDERS PARTIAL OPENING FOR
NAZI GERMANY AND WORLD WAR II DOCUMENTS

¶1. POPE JOHN PAUL II HAS ORDERED THE PARTIAL OPENING OF THE VATICAN ARCHIVES FOR MATERIAL RELATING TO THE PERIOD LEADING TO AND DURING WORLD WAR II. IN A FEBRUARY 15 STATEMENT THE VATICAN'S CHIEF ARCHIVIST SAID THAT FROM THE BEGINNING OF 2003 MATERIAL FROM PIUS XI'S PONTIFICATE HELD BY THE VATICAN FOREIGN MINISTRY PERTAINING TO BAVARIA (1922- 1939) AND GERMANY (1922-1939), AND IN THE VATICAN SECRET UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 02 VATICA 00819 190632Z ARCHIVE FROM THE APOSTOLIC NUNCIATURE IN MUNICH (1922-1934) AND BERLIN (1922-1930) WOULD BE MADE AVAILABLE TO RESEARCHERS. THE COMPLETE RELEASE OF ALL DOCUMENTATION RELATING TO PIUS XI'S PONTIFICATE IS STILL SOME THREE YEARS AWAY WHEN ACCORDING TO THE VATICAN STATEMENT, MATERIAL ON VATICAN-GERMANY ISSUES DURING THE PONTIFICATE OF PIUS XII (1939-1958) WILL ALSO BE RELEASED.

¶2. ARCHIVAL MATERIAL RELATING TO PRISONERS DURING WORLD WAR II WILL ALSO BE AVAILABLE FROM 2003. THE VATICAN STATEMENT POINTED OUT THAT THE RELEASE OF THIS DOCUMENTATION WOULD "REVEAL TO HISTORIANS THE GREAT WORKS OF CHARITY AND ASSISTANCE CARRIED OUT BY PIUS XII ON BEHALF OF THE NUMEROUS PRISONERS AND OTHER WAR VICTIMS, FROM WHATEVER NATION, RELIGION AND RACE."

¶3. THE VATICAN STATEMENT HIGHLIGHTED THAT THIS EXTRAORDINARY DEPARTURE FROM NORMAL VATICAN ARCHIVE PROCEDURES WAS EXPRESSLY ORDERED BY POPE JOHN PAUL II, IN THE HOPE THAT THE GESTURE WOULD "CONTRIBUTE TO THE END OF UNJUST AND UNWELCOME SPECULATION."

¶4. COMMENT: THE DECISION TO PARTIALLY OPEN THE VATICAN ARCHIVES RELATING TO VATICAN-GERMAN RELATIONS DURING THE LEAD UP TO WORLD WAR II AND DURING THE WAR ITSELF APPEARS TO BE AN ATTEMPT BY THE POPE TO SILENCE ACCUSATIONS OF ANTI-SEMITISM LEVELED AGAINST HIS PREDECESSOR PIUS XII. IT MAY ALSO HERALD RENEWED VATICAN INTEREST IN BEATIFYING PIUS XII - FREE FROM THE PALL OF SCANDAL AND

DERISION. THE DECISION BY POPE JOHN PAUL II TO DISPENSE WITH STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES IN THIS CASE COMES AFTER YEARS OF VATICAN UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 03 VATICA 00819 190632Z PROTESTATIONS THAT THIS MATERIAL COULD NOT BE RELEASED BECAUSE IT WAS NOT YET PROPERLY CATALOGUED. IN ADDITION, THE GENERAL ARGUMENT WAS FORWARDED THAT MUCH ARCHIVAL MATERIAL WAS "SENSITIVE" AND MIGHT EMBARRASS LIVING PERSONS, AND THUS SHOULD NOT BE RELEASED UNTIL AFTER A PROPER PERIOD OF TIME - CURRENTLY 70 YEARS. TODAY'S DECISION SHOWS THAT WHEN THE POPE IS CONCERNED ENOUGH ABOUT CHURCH INTERESTS, HE WILL DO AWAY WITH THE VATICAN'S STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES IN ORDER TO FURTHER THOSE INTERESTS. THE DECISION SHOWS THAT WHATEVER THE POPE WANTS, DOES IN FACT HAPPEN. END COMMENT. NICHOLSON