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SUBJECT: VATICAN: NO TO AHMADINEJAD PAPAL AUDIENCE

CLASSIFIED BY: Rafael P. Foley, ADCM, Embassy Vatican.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Holy See Undersecretary for Relations with States Monsignor Pietro Parolin told Ambassador that Pope Benedict would not receive Iranian President Ahmadinejad during his visit to Rome. The reason given for denying Ahmadinejad's request were related to the large number of visiting heads of state in Rome for the FAO World Food Security Summit and the limited time available to meet all the leaders who requested an audience. End Summary.

No Private Papal Audience for Ahmadinejad

¶2. (C) Ambassador, accompanied by the Deputy Chief of Mission, met May 31 with Monsignor Pietro Parolin, the Holy See's Undersecretary for Relations with States (Deputy FM equivalent) to discourage the Holy See from granting Iranian President Ahmadinejad a Papal audience during his visit to Rome for the FAO summit. Parolin said the Holy See always finds it difficult to say no to a request for an audience from a head of state, and that the Holy See's preference is always for dialogue. Nevertheless, he confirmed that Pope Benedict would not see Ahmadinejad during his stay in Rome, but the reason given will be "technical", having to do with the fact that so many heads of state wanted to see the Pope in the brief period during the FAO Summit. Not being able to accommodate them all, but not wanting to show favoritism, the Pope decided not to see any of the leaders. Parolin also confirmed that there would not be any group meeting with the visiting heads of state. Asked about the possibility of a future papal audience for Ahmadinejad, Parolin said the Holy See's impression is that he may find it difficult (for internal reasons) to get permission to leave the country for such a visit.

Holy See Press Office Affirms "No" Decision

¶4. (C) On Tuesday, June 3, the Holy See's Press Office released a statement confirming that contrary to "certain journalistic suppositions" circulating in the media, Pope Benedict would be unable to agree to meet with any of the requests for private audiences he received from heads of state who were visiting Rome for the FAO Summit. The reason provided was "the number of requests, the limited time available, and prior commitments." The statement indicated that Cardinal Secretary of State Bertone

had written each leader personally informing them of the Holy Father's disappointment at the impossibility of meeting on this occasion and reaffirming his willingness to receive them on a future occasion. The statement also mentioned that this has been the Holy See's practice since April 2006.

GLENDON