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Soviet Jews ask for anti-semitism ban

MOSCOW (AP) — The umbrella organization of Soviet Jews called on the Soviet leadership Thursday to ban anti-Semitic political parties and organizations, which it said were "igniting ethnic hatred."

The resolution was adopted at the end of the first international conference on anti-Semitism ever held in the Soviet Union, at which speaker after speaker condemned an upsurge in anti-Semitism and government inaction.

The resolution said political parties and groups "which openly declare as their goal the forceful solution of the Jewish question" should be banned because they "ignite ethnic hatred and anti-Semitic feelings in the country, which is dangerous not only for the Soviet people but for the whole world."

The conference was sponsored by the Va'ad,

the confederation of Jewish organizations and communities, which backed Russian Federation President Boris Yeltsin and the pro-democracy forces in the Aug. 18-21 abortive coup against Soviet President Mikhail S. Gorbachev.

As the republics spin off from the crumbling Soviet Union in the aftermath of the coup, Jews are concerned they could face restrictions on emigration, said Va'ad co-chairman Iosif Zissels.

Va'ad urged that the laws of the Soviet Union and the republics on entry and exit from the country meet international standards.

Va'ad executive Roman Spector said the emigration of Jews — 700,000 have departed since the early 1960s — will continue because of growing Jewish consciousness and worsening political and economic conditions.

900 number brings Pope to your phone

VATICAN CITY (AP) — With some reluctance, the Vatican has made a concession to the phone-fettered, fax-happy 1990s. Now there's a telephone service that lets your fingers do the walking all the way to St. Peter's.

The program, nicknamed "Dial-a-Pope," permits callers around the world to dial a 900 number, or similar special-cost line, and hear a recording from one of John Paul II's recent speeches or sermons.

The Vatican receives at least 50 percent of the charge for each call to the service, officially called "Christian Messaging From the Vatican," organizers say.

Promoters claim the service could help build a fund-raising network, and bring the pope's message home — literally — to the 875 million Roman Catholics worldwide.

"We have invented the world's first electronic collection plate," boasts Michael Fahringer of the London-based Global Telecom Ltd., which runs the service.

The Rev. Arturo Martin, a top Vatican fundraiser, said the Holy See endorsed the service because of popular demand from the phoning faithful.

In addition, it wanted to curb a rash of unauthorized dial-a-pope lines, some featuring popes not known to the Vatican, he said.

"At least we know what it (the new service) is saying," he said.

But how much has it earned for the Vatican?

"That's a very good question — actually, nothing so far," said Martin, a Spanish Jesuit working to reduce the Holy See's \$90-million deficit. "So far, it's a failure."

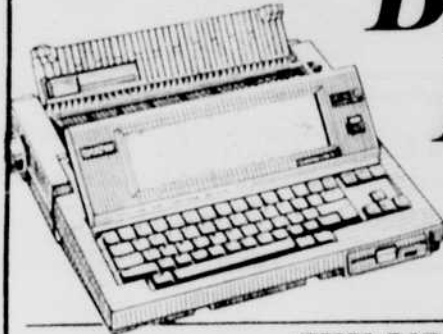
He said the church had received about \$5,000 from the service — "not even enough to cover the cost of the records" of papal speeches provided by the Vatican.

Nonetheless, Martin said, public reaction to the service has been "very positive."

The papal messages, which change each day, can be received worldwide, in English, Spanish, French and Italian. Fahringer noted the pontiff was available "at any time of day or night, in the comfort and privacy of your own home."

In the United States, callers reach the service by ringing 900-568-7733. The Spanish-language service is 900-568-7799. The cost is about \$4 a call.

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