

Cuba allows repair work to proceed on four Havana churches

SYDNEY, Australia – The Cuban government has given the go-ahead to renovations of four Catholic churches in Havana, using funds provided by the Australian office of Aid to the Church in Need.

In a March 23 statement, the organization based in Blacktown, near Sydney, called it an unprecedented breakthrough that the Cuban government agreed to allow major repairs to proceed. The statement called the decision “one of the best signals yet of improving links between Catholic leaders and Raul Castro’s year-old administration.”

Within weeks of the government’s approval, Aid to the Church in Need donated \$120,000 Australian dollars (\$83,350) for the work.

The buildings scheduled to be repaired include some of the capitol’s oldest structures, Spanish colonial churches dating to the mid-18th century, the organization said.

The statement quoted an unidentified spokesman for Aid to the Church in Need saying that approval of the repairs “shows that since Raul Castro replaced his brother, Fidel, as president, a new relationship is beginning to emerge with the church, one in which Catholics – and Christians in general – are no longer automatically seen as enemies of the state. Obviously there is a long way to go still, but this gives grounds for hope.”

In February 2008, the first new Catholic building constructed in Cuba in recent times was opened by the Vatican secretary of state, Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, in the Diocese of Guantanamo-Baracoa.

Aid to the Church in Need operates in 145 countries. It was created in 1979 and funds projects ranging from providing transportation for clergy and lay church workers to the construction of buildings and training of seminarians.