

Israel stops distributing booklet claiming Vatican-Hezbollah ties

JERUSALEM (CNS) – Booklets claiming that the Vatican helped organize tours of the Auschwitz concentration camp for Hezbollah members to teach them how to wipe out Jews were distributed to Israeli soldiers for several months before Israeli military officials suspended the distribution.

Auschwitz, in southern Poland, was a Nazi extermination center during World War II. Hezbollah is a militant Islamic group in Lebanon.

The booklet in question was received as a donation and was distributed on good faith as a gift for soldiers, the Ha'aretz English daily newspaper reported July 19.

Titled "On Both Sides of the Border," the booklet was published by the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America with the cooperation of Safed Chief Rabbi Shmuel Eliahu, according to Ha'aretz.

When attention was focused on the contents of the booklet, its distribution was suspended immediately, the Israel Defense Forces said in an official statement following the newspaper's report.

The Israel Defense Forces did not respond to questions submitted by Catholic News Service.

The Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations in Israel also declined comment. Archbishop Antonio Franco, apostolic nuncio to Israel, was out of the country and could not be reached for comment.

The Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs had not received any complaints from the Vatican or the nunciature about the incident, spokesman Andy David said.

The booklet is purported to be the story of one Hezbollah fighter who had been close to Hezbollah leader Sheik Hassan Nasrallah and who converted to Judaism. It describes Hezbollah's supposed close relationship with the Vatican and European

leaders. The booklet describes an official visit to the concentration camp led by officials from the Vatican.

“We knew (the pope) identified with Hezbollah’s struggle,” the man is quoted as saying in the booklet, Ha’aretz reported.

The booklet does not specify to which pope he is referring.

“I think everyone knows this (claim) is bogus,” David said.