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24Oct89 CUBA: FIDEL CASTRO SAYS HE WOULD WELCOME PAPAL VISIT TO CUBA.

By Lionel Martin

HAVANA, Oct 24, Reuter - In another sign of friendlier relations between the Catholic Church and the Cuban government, Cuban President Fidel Castro said on Monday he would welcome a visit to Cuba by Pope John Paul II.

The Cuban leader made his remark at a reception given by the Papal Nuncio in Havana on Monday night commemorating John Paul's 11th anniversary as Pope.

"A visit by the Pope would be a very agreeable event," Castro told journalists.

The Archbishop of Havana said that Castro's attendance at the celebration for the Pope should be seen in the light of improved Church-State relations in Cuba.

Catholic Church sources said the Pope would not be able to visit Cuba before January 1991.

Castro also expressed hope that Mother Teresa of Calcutta would speedily recover from her current illness. Castro met Mother Teresa when she visited Cuba several years ago.

During the evening Castro held a long private conversation with the Papal Nuncio, Faustino Sainz Munoz, Jaime Ortega, the Archbishop of Havana, Monsignor Carlos Manuel de Cespedes, secretary of the Cuban Catholic Episcopal Conference and several Cuban bishops. He also spoke to Dr. Jose Miller, the leader of Cuba's small Jewish Community.

Since 1987 the Church has received Cuban government permission to set up its own publishing house, to bring in foreign priests and nuns who are nurses.

Church sources said only 15 foreign priests received permission to work in Cuba over a period of two decades. But since 1987 more than 50 foreign priests have been admitted.

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