

MIDDLE EAST

## Israeli attack on Gaza's only Catholic church, Pizzaballa's Appeal

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**Nicola  
Scopelliti**



Not content with the thousands of deaths already recorded in this conflict, the Israeli army is now targeting the Latin parish of the Holy Family in Gaza. The only Catholic Church in Gaza. The discreet structure houses just over 500 Christians and was

significantly damaged in the attack. Three people were killed and nine were injured, two of whom are in serious condition. Father Gabriel Romanelli, the current parish priest (pictured in the LaPresse photo), an Argentine from the Institute of the Incarnate Word, was also hospitalized with minor leg injuries. Cardinal Pier Battista Pizzaballa, Patriarch of Jerusalem of the Latins, reported the news of the cowardly attack, which took place yesterday morning shortly after 10 a.m. With tears in his eyes, he denounced the despicable attack and questioned the excessive violence and inhumanity against defenseless Christians.

**"We do not have complete information about what happened today in Gaza** because communications are very difficult," he said. "We need to understand what happened and what can be done, especially to protect our people and prevent these things from happening again," Pizzaballa concluded.

**"We are at the end of our tether. Stop him, Lord. Stop Cain's hand!"** was the reaction of Patriarch Emeritus Michel Sabbah to the brutal and unjustified attack on the parish as soon as he heard the news. He added: "The blood of your children from Gaza, Palestine, and the region cries out to you, Lord. Stop Cain, and let humanity return!"

**Stop Cain! But the images from the Strip show hungry people denied the sustenance they need to survive** and emaciated children who are almost skeletal. There are no more medicines to treat them. The few who still have some strength left dig through the rubble in search of food and in the hope of finding someone still alive. Hospitals have been reduced to piles of rubble. Hunger has long been used as a weapon of war. There is no drinking water in the entire Muslim enclave because indiscriminate bombing has polluted the springs. Humanitarian convoys are blocked beyond the border and not allowed to enter. The few that do get through are not enough to feed the more than two million inhabitants. We must also remember those killed while delivering aid. Meanwhile, the Israeli government has deprived the population of electricity.

**Stop Cain! "We appeal to all those who have the power to make decisions to put an end to this," said Patriarch Pizzaballa.** He is a disconsolate pastor who shares the suffering of his faithful. His words seem powerless. We appeal to the hope that only God can bring peace to that tormented land. However, the indifference of chancelleries around the world is evident.

**No one can deny it.** Yet, the great powers that have the ability to end this relentless slaughter remain silent. Governments offer only verbal condemnations and empty

statements that serve only to make headlines. Stop Cain! The Gaza Strip is not only a cemetery; it is also an open-air prison. Its inhabitants feel forgotten and abandoned. The small Gaza parish community prays and recites the rosary daily, asking heaven for help. However, Patriarch Pizzaballa and the Mother Church of Jerusalem are close to those who have found refuge in the parish. "You will never be abandoned. We will always be at your side," the patriarch said yesterday.

**"Pope Francis was deeply saddened to learn of the loss of life and injuries**

caused by the military attack on the Catholic Church of the Holy Family in Gaza," reads a telegram sent by the Holy Father and signed by Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Secretary of State, addressed to the parish priest, Father Gabriel Romanelli, and the entire parish community. The Pope also renewed his call for an immediate ceasefire and expressed his hope for "dialogue, reconciliation, and lasting peace in the region."

**This is the second time since October 7, 2023, that the Latin Church has been targeted** by the Israeli army. In December 2023, a sniper fired shots into the courtyard of the Catholic building. In that attack, two women—Nahida Khalil Anton and Samar Kamal Anton, a mother and daughter—were killed at point-blank range. A previous raid on the Orthodox parish of St. Basil, also by Israeli soldiers, resulted in eighteen deaths. The Israeli army has given the same irresponsible justification each time: "A mistake."

**While an IDF spokesman issued an evacuation warning in Arabic** for residents of Jabalia, a town in the northern Gaza Strip, specifying that Mawasi must also be evacuated immediately, the far-right Minister of National Security, Ben-Gvir, criticized Prime Minister Netanyahu for considering agreements with Hamas. "Netanyahu, it's not too late to come to your senses. Stop negotiating with the terrorist group, and order the army to occupy the entire Strip and urge residents to leave."