

MIDDLE EAST

"Stop the barbarity in Gaza": Pope calls on International Community

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Yesterday at the Angelus, Pope Leo XIV spoke strongly and clearly (here is the [full text](#) of the passage on the conflict in the Middle East). He called for an immediate end to "the barbarity of war" and appealed to the international community to "observe

humanitarian law, as well as the prohibition of collective punishment, indiscriminate use of force, and forced displacement of the population."

Pope Leo XIV clearly condemns what the Israeli government is doing and planning in Gaza. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu evidently failed to convince the Pope of his reasons and good faith during Friday's hour-long phone call. The invitation to visit Israel seems like a desperate attempt to gain favor with the Holy See after Thursday's attack on the Catholic parish in Gaza, which killed three people and wounded many others.

The revision of events, that it was an error, has not convinced anyone. It was the Secretary of State, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, who made this sentiment explicit in a statement on Saturday, July 19, **on Tg2** (Italian national TV channel): "We will give them the time necessary to tell us what actually happened," said Parolin. "Was it truly a mistake, which can legitimately be doubted, or was there a deliberate intention to strike directly at a Christian church? Knowing how much Christians promote moderation in the Middle East, as well as in relations between Palestinians and Jews, this is a question that must be answered." (In the photo on the left, Cardinal Pizzaballa visits those wounded in the attack on the Catholic church in Gaza)

However, the Pope's remarks at yesterday's Angelus concerned not only the Christians hit by the Israeli army, to whom he dedicated words of encouragement, but also the war as a whole—a barbarity that must be stopped. The Israeli government's reaction, which includes a carpet bombing campaign that does not distinguish between civilian and military targets, is just as barbaric as the massacre carried out by Hamas terrorists on October 7, 2023.

In an interview with the Italian daily *Corriere della Sera*, Israeli Ambassador to Italy Jonathan Peled, while condemning the attack on the Catholic parish, said, "Terrorists are everywhere, even in public buildings such as schools and, unfortunately, places of worship. They use Palestinians as human shields. Our forces are fighting and responding to Hamas attacks. Sometimes they manage to hit the exact point from which these attacks originate, but other times, completely unintentionally, they do not hit the terrorists with precision."

While it is true that Hamas uses civilians as shields and exploits this fact for propaganda purposes, this in no way justifies the tens of thousands of civilians killed by Israel in the past twenty months of war. The issue of human shields has become an

excuse to indiscriminately target anyone, including women and children, with the aim of pushing the Palestinian population to leave.

In any case, Pope Leo XIV reaffirms "the permanent validity of moral law during armed conflicts," as stated in no. 2312 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church. This quote comes from the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, which states that "the fact that a war has unfortunately broken out does not make everything lawful for the parties in conflict." This includes the unscrupulous use of hunger as a weapon of war. The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church recalls that this violates "the principle of humanity, inscribed in the conscience of every person and people," which "entails the obligation to protect the civilian population from the effects of war" (no. 505).

The Pope rightly recalls that the international community must intervene to ensure that humanitarian law is respected and to prevent the collective punishment of a people, the indiscriminate use of force, and the forced displacement of the population. In essence, he is saying, "Stop Israel, stop the Netanyahu government." Furthermore, we must condemn the massacres of religious minorities in Syria that are being carried out in silence by the West.

This is not a partisan stance because condemnation of barbarism also applies to Hamas. Hatred and the desire to annihilate the enemy fill the hearts of various Palestinian factions as well. However, we cannot ignore Israel's blatant violations of international law. Its government is enslaved by the illusion that its security and right to exist depend solely on the use of force. For this reason, Israel has opened fronts of war not only in the Palestinian territories but also in Lebanon, Syria, Iran, and Yemen.

An effective ceasefire will only be possible under these conditions if the Israeli government changes its strategy and renounces the expansion of its territories, and if Hamas and its sponsors renounce the destruction of Israel and the Jewish people.