

Middle East

“For an end to the spiral of hatred and violence”



Cardinal Pietro Parolin. (Picture ma)

The Secretary of State of the Holy See Cardinal Pietro Parolin spoke to the Vatican media on the second anniversary of Hamas’ “shameful and inhuman” attack on Israel on 7 October 2023, which led to the destruction of the Gaza Strip. He called for the release of hostages and an end to the violence.

Interview with Cardinal Pietro Parolin by Roberto Paglialonga and Andrea Tornielli – Vatican City

Your Eminence, we are entering the third year since the tragic 7 October attack. How do you remember that moment, and what did it mean, in your view, for the State of Israel and Jewish communities around the world?

Cardinal Pietro Parolin: I repeat what I said back then: the terrorist attack carried out by Hamas and other militias against thousands of Israelis and migrants living there, many of them civilians, who were preparing to celebrate Simchat Torah, the conclusion of the week-long Sukkot festival, was inhuman and indefensible. The brutal violence against children, women, young people, the elderly – there can be no justification for it. It was a shameful and, I repeat, inhuman massacre.

The Holy See immediately expressed its total and firm condemnation, calling for the immediate release of the hostages and showing closeness to the families affected by the terrorist attack. We prayed, and continue to pray, and we continue to ask that this perverse spiral of hatred and violence, which risks dragging us into an abyss with no return, come to an end.

What would you like to say to the families of the Israeli hostages still in Hamas custody?

Sadly, two years have passed. Some of them are dead, others were released after lengthy negotiations. I am deeply struck and saddened by the images of these people held prisoner in tunnels, starved. We cannot and must not forget them. I recall that Pope Francis, in the last year and a half of his life, made no fewer than 21 public appeals for the release of the hostages and met with some of their families. His successor, Pope Leo XIV, has continued to make these appeals. I express my closeness to them all, praying daily for their suffering, and continue to offer our full availability to do whatever is possible to reunite them with their loved ones alive and safe – or at least receive the bodies of those who were killed, so that they may be properly buried.

On the first anniversary of the 7 October attack, Pope Francis spoke of “the shameful incapacity of the international community and the most powerful nations to silence the weapons and put an end to the tragedy of war”. What is needed for peace?

Today, the situation in Gaza is even more serious and tragic than it was a year ago, following a devastating war that has claimed tens of thousands of lives. We need to recover a sense of reason, abandon the blind logic of hatred and revenge, and reject violence as a solution. Those who are attacked have a right to defend themselves, but even legitimate defence must respect the principle of proportionality. Unfortunately, the resulting war has brought about disastrous and inhuman consequences ... I am struck and deeply afflicted by the daily death toll in Palestine – dozens, sometimes hundreds, every day – so many children whose only “fault” seems to be having been born there. We risk becoming desensitized to this carnage! People killed while trying to find a piece of bread, buried under the rubble of their homes, bombed in hospitals, in tent camps, displaced and forced to move from one end of that narrow, overcrowded territory to another... It is unacceptable and unjustifiable to reduce human beings to mere “collateral damage”.

How should we view the rise in antisemitic incidents in many parts of the world in recent months? They are a sad and equally unjustifiable consequence. We live in a world of fake news, of oversimplified narratives. This leads people who feed on these distortions to attribute responsibility for what is happening in Gaza to the Jewish people as a whole. But we know that is not true. Many strong dissenting voices have also been raised within the Jewish world against how the current Israeli government has operated and continues to operate in Gaza and the rest of Palestine, where, let us not forget, settler expansionism, often violent, seeks to make the creation of a Palestinian State impossible. We've seen the public testimony of the hostages' families.

Antisemitism is a cancer that must be fought and eradicated. We need people of good will, educators who help us understand, and above all, help us discern. We must not forget what happened in the heart of Europe with the Shoah, and we must dedicate all our strength to ensuring that this evil does not rise again. At the same time, we must ensure that acts of inhumanity and violations of humanitarian law are never justified: no Jew should be attacked or discriminated against for being Jewish, and no Palestinian should be attacked or discriminated against simply for being Palestinian, because, as is unfortunately sometimes said, they are "potential terrorists". The perverse chain of hatred can only generate a spiral that leads nowhere good. It is painful to see that we still fail to learn from history, even recent history, which remains a teacher of life.

You have spoken of an untenable situation and mentioned the many interests that are preventing the war from ending. What are those interests?

It seems evident that the war waged by the Israeli army to defeat Hamas militants fails to take into account that it is operating in the midst of a largely defenceless population, brought to the brink of exhaustion, in an area strewn with houses and buildings reduced to rubble. A simple look at aerial images is enough to understand what Gaza looks like today. It is equally clear that the international community is, unfortunately, powerless and that the countries truly capable of exerting influence have so far failed to act to stop the ongoing massacre. I can only repeat the very clear words spoken by Pope Leo XIV on July 20: "I renew my appeal to the in-



'Priests Against Genocide,' a group representing more than 1,200 priests from 34 countries, gathered in Rome to pray for an end to the massacre in Palestine's Gaza. (Screenshot <https://t.co/zC4Dyw6O44>)

ternational community to observe humanitarian law and to respect the obligation to protect civilians, as well as the prohibition of collective punishment, the indiscriminate use of force and the forced displacement of the population." These are words that are still waiting to be welcomed and understood.

What, then, can the international community do?

Certainly much more than what it is doing now. It's not enough to say that what is happening is unacceptable and then continue to allow it to happen. We must seriously ask ourselves about the legitimacy, for example, of continuing to supply weapons that are being used against civilians. Sadly, as we have seen, the United Nations has not been able to stop what is happening. But there are international actors that could, and should, do more to end this tragedy, and we must find a way to give the United Nations a more effective role in ending the many fratricidal wars ongoing around the world.

What do you think of the plan proposed by President Trump to reach a ceasefire and end the war?

Any plan that includes the Palestinian people in decisions about their own future and helps put an end to this slaughter – releasing hostages and halting the daily killing of hundreds of people – is to be welcomed and supported. The Holy Father too has expressed the hope that the parties will accept the plan and that a genuine peace process can finally begin.

How do you view the positions taken by civil society, including in Israel, against the Israeli government's policies of war and in favour of peace?

Even though these initiatives sometimes risk being misrepresented in the media due to the violence of a few extremists, I am positively impressed by the turnout in demonstrations and the commitment of many young people. It shows we are not condemned to indifference. We must take seriously this desire for peace, this willingness to be involved... Our future, and the future of the world, depends on it.

Some, even in the Church, say that faced with all this, we must above all pray, and not take to the streets, so as not to play into the hands of the violent ...

I am a baptized person, a believer, a priest: for me, constant prayer before God – that He may help us, assist us, intervene to end all this by supporting the efforts of men and women of goodwill – is essential, daily, fundamental. Pope Leo has once again invited us to pray the Rosary for peace on 11 October. But I also want to stress that Christian faith is either incarnate, or it is not faith at all... We follow a God who became Man, took on our humanity, and showed us that we cannot be indifferent to what happens around us, even what is far from us. That is why prayer is never enough – but neither is concrete action, the awakening of conscience, peace initiatives, awareness-raising, even if it means appearing “out of touch” or taking risks. There is a silent majority, including many young people, that refuses to surrender to this inhumanity. They too are called to pray. To think that our role as Christians is only to shut ourselves away in sacristies – I find that deeply mistaken. Prayer must also lead to action, to witness, to concrete choices.

Pope Leo never tires of calling for peace. What can the Holy See do in this situation? What contribution can you, and the entire Church, make?

The Holy See – sometimes misunderstood – continues to call for peace, to invite dialogue, to use the words “negotiation” and “discussion”, and it does so out of deep realism: the alternative to diplomacy is endless war, the abyss of hatred and the self-destruction of the world. We must cry out forcefully: let us stop before it is too late. And we must act, do everything possible so that it is not too late. Everything possible.

Why is the recognition of the State of Palestine important at this stage?

The Holy See officially recognized the State of Palestine ten years ago, with the Global Agreement between the Holy See and the State of Palestine. The Preamble to that international agreement fully supports a just, comprehensive, and peaceful resolution of the Palestinian issue in all its aspects, in accordance with international law and all relevant UN resolutions. At the same time, it supports a Palestinian State that is independent, sovereign, democratic, and viable, encompassing the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza. That agreement envisions this State not as opposed to others, but capable of living side by side with its neighbours in peace and security.

We are pleased that many countries around the world have recognized the State of Palestine. But we but note with concern that Israeli declarations and decisions are moving in the opposite direction – that is, aiming to prevent the possible birth of a real Palestinian State once and for all. This solution, the creation of a Palestinian State, seems even more valid today in light of the events of the last two years. It is the path of two peoples in two States, which the Holy See has supported from the beginning. The fate of both peoples and both States is intertwined.

How is the Christian community on the ground doing, after the brutal attack on the Holy Family parish, and why do they have an important role to play in the Middle East?

The Christians of Gaza, as we have seen, have also come under attack ... I am moved by the thought of these people who are determined to stay, who pray daily for peace and for the victims. It is an increasingly precarious situation. We try to stay close to them in every way, through the efforts of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem and Caritas. We are grateful to the

governments and institutions working to get aid through and to allow the severely wounded to receive care. The role of Christians in the Middle East has been – and remains – fundamental, even as their numbers dwindle. I want to stress

that they fully share in the fate of the tormented Palestinian people and suffer with them.

Source: <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2025-10/parolin-october-7-gaza-human-beings-not-collateral-damage.html>; 7 October 2025