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Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, speaks at the conference "New Documents

Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, speaks at the conference "New Documents from the Pontificate of Pope Pius XII" as Rabbi Riccardo Di Segni listens at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, Oct. 9. (CNS/Lola Gomez)

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Terrorism, violence, barbarism and extremism undermine the legitimate aspirations of Palestinians and Israelis, said Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state.

"War is always the defeat of dignity and an occasion for not reaching any solution," he said, hoping that all weapons would be silenced and reason prevail so that there can be pause to reflect on the right way to achieve peace in Israel and Palestine.

The cardinal made his remarks Oct. 9 ahead of his prepared speech at Rome's Pontifical Gregorian University for a conference on the latest research into the Vatican archives of the period of Pope Pius XII's pontificate before, during and after World War II.

More than 1,200 people were believed to have been killed and thousands more wounded since Hamas attacked Israel from the Gaza Strip Oct. 7 and the Israeli government formally declared war.

The conference held a moment of silence. The attendees included Raphael Schutz, Israel's ambassador to the Holy See, Rome's Chief Rabbi Riccardo Di Segni; and a large number of Jewish scholars, including historian Deborah Lipstadt, the U.S. special envoy to monitor and combat antisemitism.

"I would have never thought to begin today my speech with the dutiful, sad obligation to share and convey the sorrow that the Holy Father expressed yesterday about what is happening in Israel," Parolin said, referring to the pope's remarks Oct. 8 after praying the Angelus.

"In Israel, many Israeli brothers and sisters were awakened by a terrible and despicable attack. We are close to the families of the victims, to the thousands of wounded, to those who are missing and kidnapped and now in great danger," the cardinal said.

"The Holy See is following with deep and grave concern the war that has been provoked, in which also many Palestinians in Gaza are losing their lives and many are displaced and wounded. Our closeness and prayers also go to their families and all civilians totally innocent," he added.

"Unfortunately, terrorism, violence, barbarism and extremism undermine the legitimate aspirations of Palestinians and Israelis," he said.

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Meanwhile, Israel's Embassy to the Holy See said in a written statement Oct. 9 that the massacre is "a catastrophe of Biblical dimensions," condemning the death of entire families and children who "were executed in cold blood" by Hamas and Islamic jihad militants.

The embassy repeated what it had said Oct. 7 about the "immorality of using linguistic ambiguity in such circumstances" and underlined the need to condemn

"the hideous crime," name the perpetrators and acknowledge "Israel's basic right to defend itself against the atrocity."

For this reason, "it is extremely disappointing and frustrating to read the text published by 'the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem'" from Oct. 7, which the embassy said, demonstrates this "immoral linguistic ambiguity" by not being clear about "what happened, who were the aggressors and who the victims."

"It is especially unbelievable that such a sterile document was signed by people of faith," the embassy added.

It mentioned the Oct 9-11 conference happening at the Gregorian University "on the documents from the pontificate of Pope Pius XII and their meaning for Jewish-Christian relations. Apparently, few decades later there are those who still did not learn the lesson of the recent dark past."

Speaking to reporters outside the university, Cardinal Parolin said that, as Pope Pius taught, "peace is the fruit of justice."

As long as there is not a just solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, he said, "these things will always be in danger of happening again and again with greater ferocity."