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Pope Francis speaks during his weekly general audience May 24, 2023, in St. Peter's Square a

Pope Francis speaks during his weekly general audience May 24, 2023, in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican. (CNS photo/Lola Gomez)

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Pope Francis condemned Hamas' terrorist attacks on Israel and pleaded with the militants to free their hostages unharmed, but he also expressed concern about Israel's tightening siege on Gaza and its impact on innocent civilians.

"I continue to follow with sorrow and apprehension what is happening in Israel and Palestine. So many people killed, and others injured," the pope said Oct. 11 at the end of his weekly general audience.

As the pope spoke, the Israeli Defense Forces website was reporting more than 1,200 Israelis killed by Hamas and more than 2,800 Israelis injured. At the same time, the Gaza Ministry of Health was reporting a death toll of more than 950 Palestinians and said 5,000 others were injured as Israel continued its airstrikes on Gaza.

The initial Hamas attack Oct. 7, the pope said, took place on the Jewish holiday of Simchat Torah, which marks the completion of the annual cycle of reading the Torah scroll. "I pray for all those families that saw a day of celebration be transformed into a day of mourning," the pope said.

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"And I ask that the hostages be released immediately," he continued. Israeli government officials have estimated that Hamas is holding some 150 Israeli hostages.

"One who is attacked has the right of self-defense," the pope said, "but I am very concerned about the total siege under which Palestinians are living in Gaza, where there also have been many innocent victims."

"Terrorism and extremism will not help reach a solution to the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, but only increase hatred, violence and vengeance and only make each other suffer," Francis said.