Vatican
Vatican News
A man hangs his head and cries out, holding a body wrapped in a white sheet, while two men

The father of Alma Al Majayda, 3, killed in an Israeli airstrike, reacts while carrying her body during the child's funeral in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip Oct. 19, 2023, amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Islamist group Hamas. (OSV News photo/Mohammed Salem, Reuters)

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The Vatican, especially Pope Francis, must double its efforts and urge the international community to end the massacre of Palestinians killed in Gaza in the Israel-Hamas war, Palestine's ambassador to Denmark said.

Speaking to OSV News Oct. 18, Ambassador Manuel Sarkis Hassassian said that while he appreciates Francis' call for humanitarian corridors in Gaza to be guaranteed, the dire situation and the international community's silence about what he described as "war crimes" committed by Israel merits a much stronger statement.

"I mean, it cannot continue with this, with the international community blessing it, not doing anything to stop this," said Hassassian, who is Catholic. "The Vatican should be in that position, where it should plead to the international community, 'Please Europe, America: Stop this carnage because you are the only ones who can stop it.'"

Francis has called for a day of fasting, penance and prayer for peace in the world Oct. 27, saying that "war does not solve any problems, it only sows death and destruction. It increases hatred, multiplies revenge." "War erases the future," he said, lamenting the rising number of casualties and asking that "everything possible" be done to avoid "a humanitarian catastrophe."

The ambassador said that "a strong statement from the Vatican, I think, should move America and Europe to expedite the process of stopping this carnage. And this is the first step towards reconciliation or whatever in the distant future."

Israel declared war on Hamas following a deadly attack Oct. 7 by militants who launched an attack in southern Israel, killing civilians in cars and homes, and taking hostages to Gaza.

The attack drew widespread condemnation from the international community, with many world leaders calling for restraint and an end to further escalation of violence.

Hassassian criticized alleged double standards by countries, such as the United States, that have expressed outrage over the Hamas' attack and are not doing the same when Palestinian men, women and children are killed, especially after the Oct. 17 rocket strike of the Anglican-run al-Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza, which killed 500 people.

The attack prompted Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi and Jordan's King Abdullah II to cancel a summit with U.S. President Joe Biden. Israel denied its involvement in the attack and released several videos as proof that the blast was caused by a rocket fired by Palestinian Islamic Jihad militants. CNN reported that U.S. intelligence officials cited "an analysis of overhead imagery, intercepts and open-source information suggested that Israel is 'not responsible.'"

But the ambassador said the hospital attack "is a good example to the world community that Israel is being considered above international law, supported by the

United States, by Europe, by the international community."

"Nobody is looking at the narrative of the Palestinians being under occupation for the last 56 years, and the end result of this retaliation and the carnage that is taking place today in Gaza is a dishonor on the badge of the international community," Hassassian told OSV News. "And this will be registered in the annals of history as a shameful act, a war crime that has not been really condemned by the international community."

The ambassador said that Israel and its allies, like the United States, "are mixing Hamas with the Palestinian people" as if "we are all terrorists against Israel."

"Now Biden has come to the region to try to appease the Palestinians, the Saudis, the Egyptians, the Jordanians. They [the United States] are trying their utmost to open corridors of human assistance to Gaza, but they're not criticizing Israel. They're not putting pressure on Israel to stop," he said.

In a joint appearance with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Biden said Oct. 18, "I wanted to be here today for a simple reason. I wanted the people of Israel, the people of the world to know where the United States stands."

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"Americans are grieving with you," Biden said in Israel, adding the U.S. will "ensure that you have what you need to defend yourselves."

Given U.S. support for Israel's actions in Gaza, Hassassian said that it is ultimately a "green light from America to Israel to keep on bombarding until it decimates the infrastructure and the civilian buildings of the Palestinians."

This, he said, would place Palestinians in a situation where they would "have to accept the imposition of Israel's occupation of controlling Gaza, ceding the West Bank" and the forced expulsion of people "to Syria, to Sinai, to the Egyptian desert" in order to "solve the Palestinian question, once and for all."

"It is so unfortunate that we are paying the highest price, the Palestinians, for this carnage and for this horrendous plan of attack by Israel against the Palestinians," the ambassador said.

Biden said in Tel Aviv Oct. 18 he was "deeply saddened and outraged by the explosion at the hospital in Gaza yesterday."

Biden told reporters on a plane coming back from Israel that Egypt has agreed to open the Rafah border crossing to allow some aid into the Gaza Strip. Israel had blocked the delivery of food, medicine and water to civilians in the aftermath of Hamas's attack on Oct 7. The U.N. officials however said that it is still going to take some time to be able to deliver aid for the reason roads got damaged in the Gaza Strip.

Hassassian told OSV News that while he understands that Francis "wants to be fair" in expressing sympathy for both Israel and Palestine, the pope must also "understand that Christians in Jerusalem and in the West Bank are being targeted by the Israelis."

The pope's words, he added, have "political weight." However, as of yet, "there is no clear condemnation of state terrorism by Israel."

"We need a clear statement: 'Stop the carnage of war against the Palestinians; Open the corridors for humanitarian assistance! Israel, you went beyond proportionality in hitting the Palestinians as a reaction to what Hamas has done. We condemn violence on both sides, and we have to stop this carnage immediately and open the corridors and let the dust settle.' This is what I would like to hear from the pope," he said. At least 3,500 in Gaza have been killed as of Oct. 19, according to Palestinian officials.

On Oct. 18, the Israeli prime minister said that "Hamas murdered children in front of their parents and parents in front of their children. They burned people alive. They raped and murdered women. They beheaded soldiers. They searched for the secret hiding places where parents hid their children."

At least 1,400 Israelis were killed by Hamas, Netanyahu said, adding, "This is in a country of fewer than 10 million people. This would be equivalent to over 50,000 Americans murdered in a single day. That's 20 9/11s. That is why October 7th is another day that will live in infamy."

Hassassian said that while the Vatican cannot "play a mediating role" alone, the people of Palestine "open our hands and hearts for the Vatican to get involved in this process."

"The pope represents all Christians in the world," he told OSV News. "The pope is the symbol of peace, tranquility in the world. And he is our representative, of all Palestinians; let alone he represents God on earth."