Vatican
Vatican News



Vatican secretary of state, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, speaks during a plenary session at the COP28 U.N. Climate Summit Dec. 2, 2023, in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. Israel has formally complained after the Vatican No. 2 spoke of the “carnage” in Gaza and what he termed a disproportionate Israeli military operation following the Oct. 7 Hamas attacks. (AP/Rafiq Maqbool, File)

by Associated Press

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Israel has formally complained after a senior Vatican official spoke of "carnage" in Gaza and what he termed a disproportionate Israeli military operation following the Oct. 7 Hamas attacks.

The Israeli Embassy to the Holy See called the comments by Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Vatican secretary of state, "regrettable." In a statement Feb. 14, the embassy said Parolin hadn't considered what it called the relevant facts in judging the legitimacy of Israel's actions.

Speaking Feb. 13 at a reception, Parolin condemned the Oct. 7 Hamas attacks against Israel and all forms of antisemitism. But he questioned Israel's claim to be acting in self-defense by inflicting "carnage" on Gaza.

"Israel's right to self-defense has been invoked to justify that this operation is proportional, but with 30,000 dead, it's not," he said.

Israel has objected previously to the Vatican position on the war, including when Pope Francis spoke about "terrorism" without referring to Hamas. Francis, who speaks daily via videoconference to a Gaza parish housing Palestinian civilians, has since tried to be more balanced in his comments and recently wrote a letter to the Jewish people in which he reaffirmed the special relationship between Christians and Jews.

In its statement complaining about Parolin, the Israeli Embassy accused Hamas of turning the Gaza Strip into "the biggest terrorist base ever seen." It said Israeli armed forces were acting according to international law and said the proportion of Palestinian civilians to "terrorists" killed was less than in other conflicts in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan.

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In the Italian language statement originally emailed to Vatican journalists, the embassy used the term "deplorevole" or deplorable to describe Parolin's comments. On Thursday, the embassy clarified that its original statement was written in English and had referred to Parolin's comments as "regrettable."

In a front-page editorial Feb. 15 in the Vatican newspaper L'Osservatore Romano titled "Stop the Carnage," Vatican editorial director Andrea Tornielli doubled down on the Vatican position. Tornielli quoted a Rome-based Holocaust survivor, Edith Bruck, who has been highly critical of the Israeli government's response, which she has blamed for the rise in antisemitic acts against Jews around the world.

"No one can define what is happening in the Strip as 'collateral damage' from the fight against terrorism," Tornielli wrote. "The right of defense, the right of Israel to ensure justice for those responsible for the October massacre, cannot justify this carnage."

Friday's edition of the Vatican newspaper featured a front-page article reporting that a group of rabbis had written to Francis thanking him for his Feb. 2 letter to Israeli Jews. According to excerpts of the letter, the rabbis praised the commitment of the Catholic Church to transform its relationship with the Jewish people from one of rivalry and incomprehension into one of friendship.