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Pope Francis greets visitors gathered in St. Peter’s Square for the recitation of the Angelus at the Vatican March 3, 2024. (CNS/Vatican Media)



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Pope Francis repeated his call for an immediate cease-fire in Gaza and said the international community has a "moral duty" to pursue disarmament worldwide.

After praying the Angelus in St. Peter's Square March 3, the pope encouraged "the continuation of negotiations for an immediate cease-fire in Gaza and in the entire region so that hostages may be freed immediately and return to their anxiously waiting loved ones and the civilian population can have safe access to urgently needed humanitarian aid."

"I carry daily in my heart, with sorrow, the suffering of the populations in Palestine and in Israel, due to the ongoing hostilities," he said, lamenting the "thousands of dead, wounded, displaced" and the immense destruction and suffering that "has terrible consequences on the small and the defenseless, who see their future compromised."

"I ask myself: Do we really think we can build a better world in this way?" he asked. "Do we really think we can achieve peace? Enough, please!"

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The pope repeatedly has called for an end to violence in the Holy Land since Oct. 7 when Hamas attacked Israel and Israel retaliated by invading Gaza.

He also asked people March 3 to not forget about the conflict in Ukraine, "where so many die every day."

Francis also drew attention to the celebration March 5 of the International Day for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Awareness. "How many resources are wasted on military spending that, as a result of the current situation, sadly continues to increase," he said. "I sincerely hope that the international community understands that disarmament is first and foremost a duty: disarmament is a moral duty."

Disarmament, he said, "requires the courage of all members of the great family of nations to move from a balance of fear to a balance of trust."

Francis has often taken aim against the arms industry. At his Nov. 23, 2023, general audience he said, "everyone loses" due to war except for arms manufacturers who "earn a lot from the death of others," and in his message on Christmas Day 2023 he criticized the vast amount of public spending on weapons.