News



Mourners react next to the bodies of Palestinians killed in an Israeli airstrike, amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Islamist group Hamas, in Rafah, in the southern Gaza Strip, March 24, 2024. (OSV News/Mohammed Salem, Reuters)

by OSV News

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The president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and the chairman of the USCCB's Committee on International Justice and Peace called upon the faithful to renew prayers during Holy Week for an end to the Israel-Hamas war.

"As the Church enters Holy Week and Christ's suffering on the cross and his resurrection are made present to us so vividly, we are connected to the very source of hope. It is that hope that spurs us to call on Catholics here in the United States and all those of good will to renew their prayers for an end to the raging Israel-Hamas war," wrote Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio of the Archdiocese for the Military Services USA, USCCB president, and Bishop A. Elias Zaidan of the Maronite Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon, International Justice and Peace committee chairman, in a March 23 statement.

Israeli attacks in the Gaza Strip have killed more than 32,000 people, including more than 13,000 children, with an additional estimated 75,000 injured, in Israel's retaliation on the Palestinian territory following Hamas' Oct. 7 attack on communities along Israel's southern border. Hamas and other Palestinian militant groups have killed more than 1,100 people and injured more than 8,700, taking more than 240 hostages. A reported 130 hostages remain in Gaza, including at least 33 dead. With Israel restricting Gaza from access to resources, including food, many Gaza residents are facing catastrophic levels of hunger and imminent "famine."

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"Thousands of innocent people have died in this conflict, and thousands more have been displaced and face tremendous suffering," the bishops said in their statement. "This must stop.

As the Holy Father recently said, 'One cannot move forward in war. We must make every effort to negotiate, to negotiate, to end the war.' To move forward, a cease fire and a permanent cessation of war and violence is absolutely necessary. To move forward, those held hostage must be released and civilians must be protected. To move forward, humanitarian aid must reach those who are in such dire need."

Israel and Hamas have been engaged in mediated talks about a ceasefire and the release of prisoners and captives, with Hamas recently presenting a proposal for a truce. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the proposal was based on

"unrealistic demands" and he plans for Israeli forces to invade another area of the Gaza Strip to defeat Hamas, according to media reports.

"As Christians, we are rooted in the hope of the resurrection, and so we pray for a just and lasting peace in the Holy Land," the Catholic bishops wrote.

Holy Week began March 24 with Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord.