Vatican

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A woman and child walk among debris in the Nuseirat refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip, June 9, 2024, aftermath of Israeli strikes at the area, where Israeli hostages were rescued, amid the Israel-Hamas conflict. (OSV News/Abed Khaled, Reuters)

Junno Arocho Esteves

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Gaza Strip — June 10, 2024
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Pope Francis once again renewed his call for a cease-fire in Gaza following the rescue of four hostages that led to what officials in Gaza said was the killing of more than 270 Palestinians in an Israeli rescue operation that one European Union diplomat deemed a "massacre."

Addressing pilgrims gathered in St. Peter’s Square June 9, the pope recalled the recent commemoration of the invocation of peace held at the Vatican 10 years ago, saying the historic meeting "showed that joining hands is possible, and that it takes courage to make peace, far more courage than to wage war."

"I encourage the ongoing negotiations between the parties, even though they are not easy, and I hope that the proposals for peace, a ceasefire on all fronts, and the freeing of hostages will be accepted immediately for the good of Palestinians and Israelis," he said.

Francis also expressed hopes for an emergency meeting on the humanitarian situation in Gaza, which will be held June 11 near the Dead Sea. Jordan's King Abdullah II convened the meeting, which will be co-hosted by Egypt and the United Nations.

"I encourage the international community to act urgently, by all means, to come to the aid of the people of Gaza, exhausted by the war. Humanitarian aid must be able to reach those in need, and no one can prevent it," the pope said.

The pope's appeal for peace came as more details were made public in the aftermath of a rescue operation in Gaza that freed four hostages: Noa Argamani, 26; Almog Meir Jan, 22; Andrey Kozlov, 27; and Shlomi Ziv, 41. All four were kidnapped at the Nova music festival during the Oct. 7 Hamas attack.

According to Gaza's Health Ministry, an estimated 274 people, including 64 children

and 57 women, were killed and an estimated 700 wounded during the June 8 raid, The Associated Press reported. Israeli Defense Forces issued its own report on casualties from the raid, saying that "less than 100" people were killed.

Eyewitnesses told AP that Israeli fighter jets bombed areas of the Nuseirat refugee camp. However, Israeli military officials said that the use of such force was due to their troops being under fire.

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The Reuters news agency reported that a Telegram account run by Hamas' al-Qassam Brigades claimed that three hostages, including a U.S. citizen, were killed during the Israeli military operation. A spokesman for the Israeli military denied the claim, calling it a "blatant lie."

Nevertheless, while Israelis celebrated the return of several hostages, concerns were raised regarding the Israeli military’s tactics throughout the war in Gaza that has led to the deaths of nearly 37,000 Palestinians.

In several tweets posted to his X account June 8, Josep Borrell, the EU’s high representative for foreign affairs and security policy, said he shared "the relief" of the hostages' families and called for the release of all hostages.

However, Borrell wrote, the reports on "another massacre of civilians are appalling. We condemn this in the strongest terms."

"The bloodbath must end immediately," he said.

The rescue operation came amid growing divisions within Israel regarding Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's strategy in Gaza. Centrist politician and member of Israel’s war cabinet Benny Gantz resigned from his post June 9, making good on a threat to leave if Netanyahu did not come up with a plan to return hostages and a post-war Gaza strategy.

In a televised news conference announcing his departure, Gantz accused the Israeli prime minister of "preventing us from advancing toward true victory."

"That is why we are leaving the emergency government today, with a heavy heart, but with a whole heart," he said.