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Pope Francis greets visitors gathered in St. Peter's Square to pray the **Angelus** at the Vatican Sept. 15, 2024. (CNS/Vatican Media)



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Pope Francis lamented the death of an Israeli-American hostage abducted by Hamas and called for the immediate release of all hostages being held in Gaza.

After praying the Angelus in St. Peter's Square Sept. 15, the pope recalled the many conflicts occurring around the globe, including in Ukraine, Myanmar and the Middle East, noting the "many innocent victims" of war.

"I think of the mothers who have lost their children in war, how many young lives cut short!" he said. "I think of Hersh Goldberg-Polin, found dead in September, along with five other hostages in Gaza."

Born in Oakland, California, Goldberg-Polin, 23, was among dozens of people abducted by Hamas during its deadly attack on a music festival in Israel Oct. 7. Israeli forces found him dead with five other hostages in an underground tunnel in Gaza Aug. 31.

The pope recalled that he met Goldberg-Polin's mother during a meeting with relatives of the hostages in November 2023. "I met his mother Rachel, who impressed me with her humanity. I accompany her in this moment," he said. "May the conflict in Palestine and Israel cease! May the violence cease! May hatred cease! Let the hostages be released, let the negotiations continue and let peaceful solutions be found!"

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Francis had met with 12 relatives of hostages abducted by Hamas during a meeting at the Vatican Nov. 22, 2023. On the same day, he met separately with a delegation of 10 Palestinians who had family members caught in the fighting in Gaza.

"They are suffering so much," the pope said during his general audience after the meetings, "and I heard how they both suffer."

U.S. President Joe Biden called Goldberg-Polin's death "tragic and reprehensible" in an Aug. 31 statement, adding that the United States was "working around the clock for a deal to secure the release of the remaining hostages."

Goldberg-Polin's parents had met regularly with U.S. officials in Washington, including the president, to press for the release of the hostages; they also spoke at the Democratic National Convention Aug. 21 calling for a deal that releases the hostages and "ends the suffering of the innocent civilians in Gaza."