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Pope Francis greets people joining him for the recitation of the Angelus prayer in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican Dec. 1, 2024. (CNS/Vatican Media)

Carol Glatz

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Pope Francis praised a new ceasefire reached in Lebanon, prayed for Israeli hostages and Palestinians in Gaza, and appealed to world leaders to help put an end to the war in Ukraine.

After praying the Angelus with visitors in St. Peter's Square Dec. 1, the pope highlighted the devastating conflicts underway in the Middle East and Ukraine, and he encouraged all people to pray and work for peace.

"When one renounces the use of weapons and engages in dialogue, a good path is taken," he said.

"As we prepare for Christmas, as we await the birth of the King of Peace, let these peoples be given concrete hope," he said on the first day of Advent.

"The quest for peace is the responsibility not of a few, but of all. If habituation and indifference to the horrors of war prevail, the whole, entire human family is defeated," he said.

A 60-day ceasefire deal between Israel and the Lebanon-based militant group, Hezbollah, went into effect Nov. 27. It also requires Israeli troops to pull out of Lebanon and Hezbollah to pull away from the southern border.

The cross-border bombing and fighting, which began more than a year ago, has forced more than 1.2 million Lebanese and 50,000 Israelis from their homes and left more than 3,700 people dead in Lebanon and more than 130 people dead in Israel, according to The Associated Press. The conflict began when Hezbollah launched rocket attacks against Israel in support of Hamas' attack on southern Israel in October 2023.

Francis said he welcomed the ceasefire agreement "and I hope that it may be respected by all parties" so that all those displaced could return home "soon and safely."

He also made "an urgent call to all Lebanese politicians, so that the president of the republic may be elected immediately, and the institutions return to their normal functioning, so as to proceed to the necessary reforms and assure the country of its role as an example of peaceful coexistence between different religions."

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Former President Michel Aoun's term ended in October 2022. The Lebanese parliament has failed to elect his successor.

Francis said he hoped the "glimmer of peace" represented by the agreement between Israel and Hezbollah "may lead to a ceasefire on all fronts, especially in Gaza. I very much have at heart the liberation of the Israelis who are still held hostage and access to humanitarian aid for the stricken Palestinian population."

The pope also called for prayers for Syria, "where unfortunately war has flared up again, claiming many victims."

And the pope expressed his ongoing concern and sorrow for the conflict in Ukraine.

"For almost three years we have witnessed a terrible sequence of deaths, injuries, violence and destruction," he said. "Children, women, the elderly and the weak are the first victims" and winter will only exacerbate the difficulties facing millions of displaced persons.

"I renew once again my appeal to the international community and to every man and woman of goodwill, to make every effort to stop this war, and to make dialogue, fraternity and reconciliation prevail. Let there be a renewed commitment at every level," he said.