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Pope Leo XIV holds his weekly general audience in St. Peter's Square, at the Vatican July 30, 2025. (AP Photo/Andrew Medichini)

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Pope Leo XIV called for a renewed commitment to diplomacy to resolve conflicts as he marked the 50th anniversary of the Helsinki Accords, the landmark Cold War-era agreement that ushered in a new era of security and human rights.

At the end of his general audience on July 30, history's first U.S.-born pope said that Aug. 1 marks the anniversary of the conclusion of the 35-nation summit in Finland that resulted in the Helsinki Final Act, which years later helped give birth to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Renewing his appeal for peace in the world, Leo said: "Today, more than ever, it is imperative to cherish the spirit of Helsinki, persevere in dialogue, strengthen cooperation and make diplomacy the preferred way to prevent and resolve conflicts."

At the height of the Cold War detente in the 1970s, Finnish President Urho Kekkonen hosted a U.S.-Soviet summit where U.S. President Gerald Ford, Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev and others signed a watershed commitment to peace, East-West contacts, European security and human rights.

Leo said the agreement had "inaugurated a new geopolitical season, favoring a rapprochement between East and West. It marked a renewed interest in human rights with particular attention to religious freedom, considered one of the fundamentals of the nascent architecture of cooperation from Vancouver to Vladivostok."

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With Russia's war raging in Ukraine, Leo recalled that the Holy See had sent a delegation to the Finnish summit headed by future secretary of state Archbishop Agostino Casaroli, best known for promoting and pursuing a policy of Ostpolitik, or openness and dialogue with Eastern Europe.

In other comments July 30, Leo also expressed horror at the "brutal" attack on a Catholic Church in eastern Congo by rebels backed by the Islamic State. At least 38 people, including 15 women and nine children, were killed in the church as they worshipped during a prayer vigil last weekend.

"While I entrust the victims to God's loving mercy, I pray for the wounded and for Christians who around the world continue to suffer violence and persecution, exhorting all those with responsibility at the local and international level to collaborate to prevent similar tragedies," he said.

Wednesday's general audience marked the resumption of Leo's weekly encounter with the faithful following a weeks-long summer break. St. Peter's Square was particularly full, given the arrival of tens of thousands of pilgrims in town for a weeklong Holy Year celebration for young Catholics.