Vatican

Vatican News



Pope Leo XIV gives his blessing during his weekly general audience in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican Sept. 17, 2025. (CNS/Lola Gomez)

Carol Glatz

View Author Profile

Catholic News Service

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

Vatican City — September 17, 2025
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

As tens of thousands of Palestinians were fleeing their homes as Israel launched a major new ground offensive in Gaza City, Pope Leo XIV expressed his "profound closeness to the Palestinian people in Gaza."

They "continue to live in fear and survive in unacceptable conditions, forced once again to leave their lands," he said to applause at the end of his weekly general audience in St. Peter's Square Sept. 17.

"Before the Almighty Lord who commanded, 'Thou shalt not kill,' and in the presence of all of human history, every person always has an inviolable dignity to be respected and protected," he said.

The pope renewed his appeal "for a ceasefire, the release of hostages, a negotiated diplomatic solution and full respect for international humanitarian law" while inviting everyone to join him "in heartfelt prayer that a dawn of peace and justice may soon arise."

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had said the long-planned operation to occupy Gaza City was aimed at Hamas' "last major stronghold." Heavy airstrikes hit portions of the city Sept. 16 as Israeli troops began a gradual push from the outskirts.

While many parts of Gaza City were already destroyed during the war in 2023, about a million Palestinians had still returned to their homes, often in the rubble or in bombed-out buildings, according to the BBC.

Advertisement

The Israel Defense Forces estimated 350,000 people had fled the city by Sept. 16, and more than half a million remain, the BBC reported. People were told to head south to a coastal part of the Gaza Strip.

Meanwhile, the U.N. Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory determined that Israel is responsible for the commission of genocide in Gaza.

"It is clear that there is an intent to destroy the Palestinians in Gaza through acts that meet the criteria set forth in the Genocide Convention," said Navi Pillay, commission chair, Sept. 16.

Danny Meron, Israel's Ambassador to the U.N. in Geneva, rejected the commission's findings, saying the report "falsely accuses Israel of genocidal intent," which cannot be substantiated, and it "promotes a narrative serving Hamas and its supporters in attempting to delegitimize and demonize the state of Israel."

The report urged Israel and all countries to fulfil their obligations under international law "to end the genocide" and punish those responsible.