Vatican

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Archbishop Paul Gallagher, Vatican secretary for Relations with States and International Organizations, addresses the 78th session of the United Nations General Assembly at U.N. headquarters in New York City Sept. 26, 2023. In remarks during a high-level meeting at the U.N. Sept. 22, 2025, marking the 30th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Gallagher said women throughout the world remain at high risk from poverty, violence and lack of access to health care, Gallagher said. (OSV News/Cia Pak, United Nations)

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United Nations — October 1, 2025
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As the world grapples with "mounting challenges," the global community must "recommit to the foundational pillars" of peace, justice and truth, learning from history and building a more equitable future, a top Vatican diplomat told the United Nations.

Archbishop Paul Gallagher, who serves as the Vatican's secretary for relations with states and international organizations, shared his thoughts Sept. 29 while addressing the U.N. General Assembly, amid the opening of its 80th session at its New York headquarters.

The theme of this year's general debate is "Better Together: Eighty Years and More for Peace, Development and Human Rights," which Gallagher said "highlights the

ongoing importance of multilateral cooperation in addressing global issues.

With the U.N. marking eight decades since its 1945 establishment, the body's "core values of fostering international peace, development and universal human rights" are "all the more important in an increasingly fragmented world," said the archbishop.

He described the U.N.'s 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights — which affirmed human beings' inherent dignity and inalienable rights — as "one of the most important achievements" of the global body.

At the same time, the archbishop highlighted the fraying of that legacy amid a rise in isolationism, which "leads to unpredictable instability."

Citing "escalating geopolitical tensions, a raging climate crisis, widening inequalities and rising poverty," he called for "renewed global solidarity," since "unity fosters responsible resilience and shared progress."

"The United Nations must adapt itself to a transformed world and maintain its effectiveness in the face of emerging threats such as environmental degradation and technological disruption, which no single country can tackle alone," said Gallagher.

Rooted in "mutual respect" and "a proper understanding of the human person," peace also requires "a context characterized by respect for justice," and "the rejection of hatred and vengeance in favor of dialogue and reconciliation," he said.

Gallagher specifically addressed several active wars and conflicts, such as those in Ukraine, "one of the most profound and painful"; the Middle East, where he urged "a just and lasting peace between Israel and Palestine based on a two-state solution, in accordance with international law and all relevant United Nations resolutions"; Syria, now in transition after the fall of the Assad regime; Democratic Republic of the Congo, long home to "one of the world's most complex multidimensional crises"; Sudan, "a source of grave concern" for its "fratricidal conflict," and South Sudan, where the Vatican is "monitoring developments closely."

Even emerging democracies in Africa continue to face "significant obstacles" such as "authoritarianism, arbitrary constitutional reforms, and endemic corruption," he cautioned.

Gallagher called on the international community to "prioritize diplomacy over division, redirecting resources from instruments of war to initiatives that promote justice, dialogue and the uplifting of the poor and of those most in need."

He reiterated the Holy See's proposal for a global fund — "sustained by a fraction" of nations' military expenditures — for the poverty and hunger eradication, sustainable development and climate challenge responses, all of which are "indispensable foundations of lasting peace."

The arms race erodes the trust needed to secure peace, he said, pointing out that "global military expenditures," which in 2024 reached "an unprecedented $2.72 trillion," work to perpetuate "cycles of violence and division diverting resources from the urgent needs of the poor and those in vulnerable situations."

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Gallagher said that disarmament is "a moral imperative" based on "the recognition of the sacredness of human life and the interconnectedness of the human family."

He repeated ongoing calls from the Vatican to reduce weapon stockpiles, uphold disarmament treaties, and end the use of nuclear weapons.

Another "cornerstone of peace" is "freedom of thought, conscience and religion," said Archbishop Gallagher, adding, "yet persecution of religious minorities, particularly Christians, persists globally."

In particular, he referred to the more than 380 million Christians throughout the world that are "subjected to severe persecution, including physical violence, imprisonment, forced displacement, and martyrdom."

"Data show that Christians are the most persecuted group globally, yet the international community seems to be turning a blind eye to their plight," he said.

True freedom of religion is "not simply freedom from persecution," he said, but rather "a freedom to profess one's faith either alone or in a community with others, in public or private, in teaching, practice, worship and observance."

In addition, said the archbishop, "religious freedom encompasses other freedoms, including freedom of thought, conscience, expression, assembly and association."

Religious freedom — "a shared journey towards mutual respect, justice, and peace" — also "goes hand in hand with interreligious dialogue," with nations responsible for the former, and religions themselves for the latter, he said.

Gallagher said that the Holy See "is at the forefront of religious dialogue." He noted that the Catholic Church is marking the 60th anniversary of "Nostra Aetate," the Second Vatican Council's declaration on the relation of the Catholic Church to other non-Christian religions.

That declaration, said the archbishop, was "a transformative call to reject prejudice and embrace the universal dignity of every human person, created in the image and likeness of God."

While pioneering "a new era of understanding" — particularly in Catholic-Jewish relations — the declaration has also "inspired countless initiatives for dialogue, reconciliation, and cooperation" on issues such as "poverty, migration and climate change," he said.

Justice and the rule of law — including respect for international humanitarian law that "safeguards human dignity amid armed conflicts" — are essential to human flourishing, said Gallagher. He urged the "full implementation of and respect for the Geneva Conventions," as well as the "punishment of violators."

In his address, Gallagher also stressed the need to ensure the rights of workers, migrants and refugees, while addressing the challenges of global debt, climate crises and the need for "clear ethical guidelines and regulatory frameworks" regarding artificial intelligence, in order to protect human dignity as AI technology rapidly evolves.

"Clear and unambiguous language" is crucial for "true relationships and dialogue," he said, lamenting efforts to "reinterpret the fundamental human rights contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights" that "often also distort the view of human nature."

The 80th session of the U.N. General Assembly is a moment for "a recommitment to the original principles enshrined in the U.N. Charter, which remain as relevant today as ever," said Gallagher.

"This anniversary provides an opportunity to reinforce the United Nations' position as a beacon of hope," he said, "and a force for good in addressing humanity's most

urgent needs."