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Parolin signs scroll.

Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state under Pope Francis, signs the "rogito" or scroll describing the late pope's life, ministry and papacy April 25 during a prayer service in St. Peter's Basilica. (CNS/Vatican Media)

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The Hamas attack on Israel two years ago "was inhuman and indefensible," the Vatican secretary of state said, and Israel's two-year-long war on Gaza has had "disastrous and inhuman consequences."

"It is unacceptable and unjustifiable to reduce human beings to mere 'collateral damage'" in Israel's stated goal of destroying Hamas, said Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Vatican secretary of state.

The cardinal was interviewed by Vatican Media Oct. 6, the eve of the second anniversary of the terrorist attack on Israel and the start of Israel's massive attack on the Gaza Strip.

"We prayed, and continue to pray, and we continue to ask that this perverse spiral of hatred and violence, which risks dragging us into an abyss with no return, come to an end," the cardinal said.

As first Pope Francis and then Pope Leo have done nearly weekly, Parolin also called on Hamas to release the remaining hostages taken Oct. 7, 2023.

"I am deeply struck and saddened by the images of these people held prisoner in tunnels, starved," the cardinal said. "We cannot and must not forget them."

Hamas is believed to still have 20 hostages who are alive and the bodies of another 25 or so who died in captivity.

The cardinal told Vatican Media, he prays for the hostages' families each day and continues "to offer our full availability to do whatever is possible to reunite them with their loved ones alive and safe — or at least receive the bodies of those who were killed, so that they may be properly buried."

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And as Leo did at his Jubilee audience Oct. 4, Parolin condemned increasing signs of antisemitism around the world.

"We live in a world of fake news, of oversimplified narratives," he said. "This leads people who feed on these distortions to attribute responsibility for what is happening in Gaza to the Jewish people as a whole. But we know that is not true" since many Jews, in Israel and abroad, have protested the Israeli government's war on Gaza.

Many also object to how the government has promoted "settler expansionism, often violent," he said, which "seeks to make the creation of a Palestinian State impossible."

"No Jew should be attacked or discriminated against for being Jewish," Parolin said, "and no Palestinian should be attacked or discriminated against simply for being Palestinian, because, as is unfortunately sometimes said, they are 'potential terrorists.'"

Such a "perverse chain of hatred can only generate a spiral that leads nowhere good," the cardinal said, adding that "it is painful to see that we still fail to learn from history, even recent history, which remains a teacher of life."

Asked about U.S. President Donald Trump's proposed peace plan, Parolin said that "any plan that includes the Palestinian people in decisions about their own future and helps put an end to this slaughter — releasing hostages and halting the daily killing of hundreds of people — is to be welcomed and supported."

However, the cardinal expressed frustration at the international community's seeming inability to act.

"It's not enough to say that what is happening is unacceptable and then continue to allow it to happen," he said. "We must seriously ask ourselves about the legitimacy, for example, of continuing to supply weapons that are being used against civilians."

Parolin noted that the Holy See officially recognized the State of Palestine in 2015, continuing its decades-long support of "a Palestinian State that is independent, sovereign, democratic and viable, encompassing the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza."

The agreement signed with Palestinian officials "envisions this state not as opposed to others, but capable of living side by side with its neighbors in peace and security," the cardinal said.

The recognition of Palestine in late September by France, the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia was a positive development, Paroline said, "but we note with concern that Israeli declarations and decisions are moving in the opposite direction — that is, aiming to prevent the possible birth of a real Palestinian State once and for all."