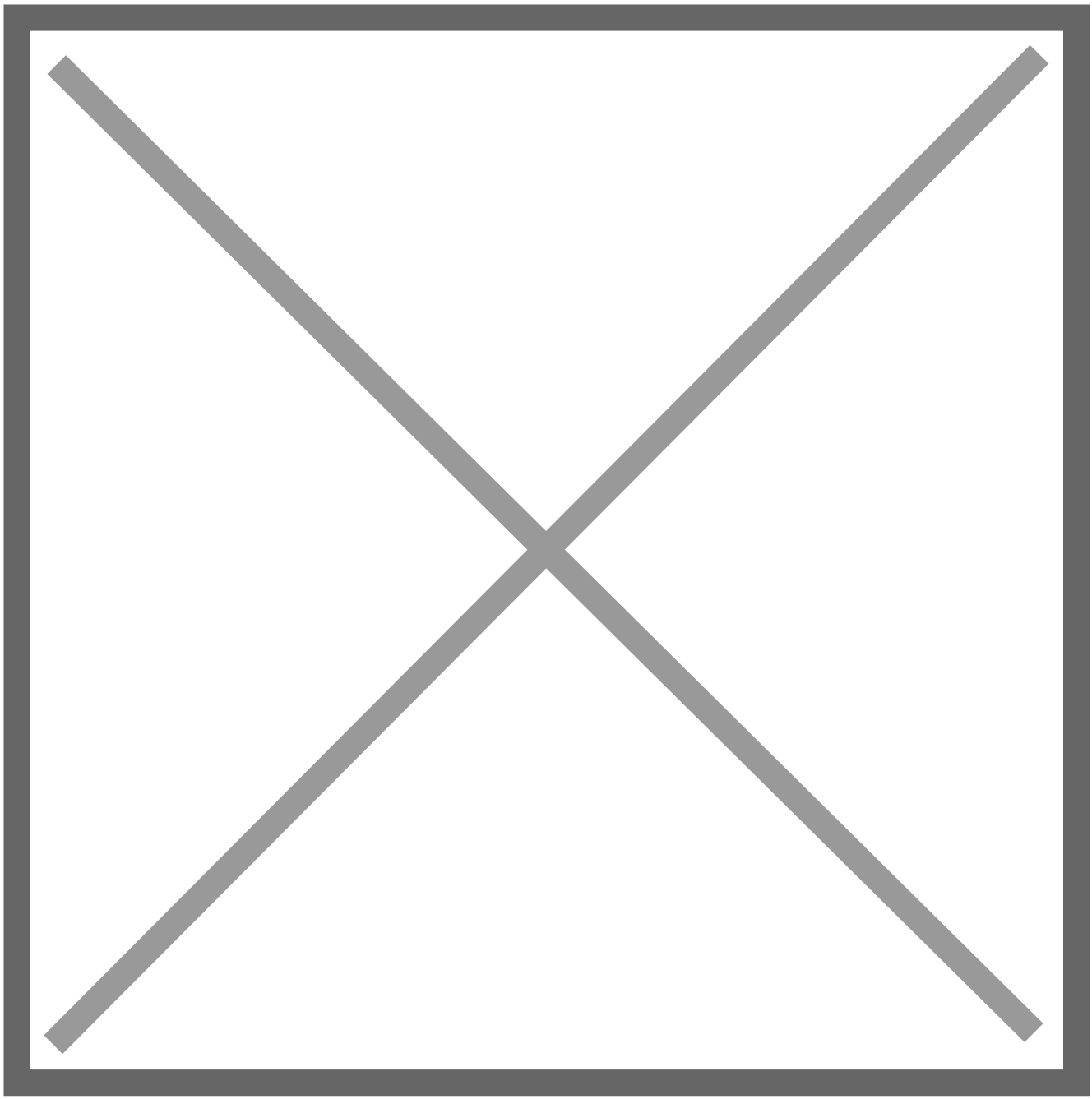
News



Palestinians collect aid supplies from trucks that entered the Gaza Strip, amid a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas in Gaza City, Oct. 12, 2025. (OSV News/Reuters/Ramadan Abed)

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Gaza City, Gaza Strip — October 13, 2025

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Historic momentum is felt across the Middle East as thousands gathered Oct. 11 in Tel Aviv, Israel, for the last mass gathering before the hostage release expected to take place Oct. 13, and tens of thousands of Palestinians started to make their way back to their homes in northern Gaza Strip.

But those Palestinians have returned to see only mostly rubble left, with Fr. Gabriel Romanelli, the pastor of Gaza City's Catholic parish, saying the entire enclave has experienced a "tsunami" of destruction.

Hundreds of aid trucks slowly made their way out of a gigantic Rafah crossing queue into Gaza early morning Oct. 12 — a territory exhausted, starving and flattened after a two-year war that started after Hamas, the Palestinian militant group ruling Gaza, carried out a surprise attack on Israel, killing 1,200 people in massacres perpetrated in southern Israeli communities Oct. 7, 2023. The ensuing war has led to an estimated 67,000 Palestinian dead and 170,000 injured, the vast majority believed to be civilians.

At the same time in the Vatican, Pope Leo XIV called for the warring to lay down their weapons in the presence of the original statue of Our Lady of Fatima.

"Disarm your hands and, even more importantly, your hearts. As I have said before, peace is unarmed and disarming," Leo said. "It is not deterrence, but fraternity; it is not an ultimatum, but dialogue. Peace will not come as the result of victories over the enemy, but as the fruit of sowing justice and courageous

forgiveness."

In an Oct. 11 video recorded as the pope was placing a gold rose in a small vase at the foot of the Our Lady of Fatima statue and prayed silently before beginning the prayer vigil, Romanelli, said, "Today we pray united to the Patriarch of Jerusalem and to the Holy Father and to all Christians of the world; and we offer penance, sacrifice and fasting for peace, especially by praying the rosary and Mass."

President Donald Trump will visit Israel Oct. 13 to address Israel's parliament, the Knesset, and meet hostage families. He will later fly to the Red Sea resort city of Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, to witness signing a peace deal between Israel and Hamas, along with the other guarantors of the Gaza peace deal.

Leaders and foreign ministers from Germany, Spain, France, the United Kingdom, Italy, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Indonesia are expected to participate at the summit hosted by Egypt's President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi.

The peace deal comes at a point where people on both sides have expressed exhaustion with the war: Israelis waiting to see their loved ones, among them the 20 remaining hostages said to still be alive, and Palestinians overwhelmed by the scale of death and destruction in Gaza.

Ofir Braslavski, father of 21-year-old hostage Rom Braslavski, set to be released Oct. 13, told CNN, "Every second feels like it's lasting forever; we're just waiting for the moment they call us — to Re'im (the meeting point) and then to the hospital."

Meanwhile, one Palestinian woman making her way to her home told the news outlet Oct. 12, "The scale of destruction is indescribable."

Romanelli, lightly injured in the leg during the Israeli military strike on the Holy Family Parish compound July 17, attempted to put into words the scale of Gaza's tragedy.

"What's happened here is something analogous (to) a tsunami," he said in a video posted on his YouTube and X social media feeds.

"Do you remember when we saw the photos, the live images of the tsunami many times? How everything was utterly crushed, right? It's literally like that" in Gaza, he said Oct. 11.

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"There are entire neighborhoods like that; and in every neighborhood there are many houses like that," he said. The Catholic priest added that just as with a natural disaster there are fears of subsequent waves, the same feeling is palpable among Palestinians.

"There's fear that there will be, that there will be other waves, and that fear is there. I mean, there's the fear that war will return, there's the fear that the parties won't respect them, even those who have made commitments," Romanelli said.

He said the peace deal is a clear sign that "something has changed" and "everyone is fed up with the war."

"For the first time in at least many years, many countries that ... disagree on politics, foreign policy, domestic policy ... have agreed to say that, in addition to freedom, they must release the hostages and prisoners, that Gaza must be rebuilt, that people must live on their land, that Palestinians can live here in the strip ... it's absolutely essential," he said.

Romanelli said the big question now for the diminished Palestinian Catholic community in Gaza — of whom around 500 sheltered in the Holy Family Parish — is "OK, now what do we do? How do we do it?" now that initial peace deal is agreed upon.

"From a spiritual point of view, we have always tried to help them and continue to help, to pray, to encourage them," Romanelli said. He emphasized that the priests and religious in the parish were assisting the faithful "by celebrating the liturgy, prayer, adoration; always being ready for spiritual direction, for confession, for groups." They did this even though "it may be very difficult, because we ourselves are in the same place, so sometimes oneself ... has no strength, or is powerless."

"But God has always helped us ... and must also help us in the moral aspect, that is, by giving encouragement. Now, it's perhaps the most important thing, because these days, people are going back to where their homes were," the steadfast pastor said.

"Even some — who still knew their homes or parts of their homes were still there — have now returned and found nothing," he said.

Many questions remain pressing to answer, the pastor said, from how Gaza will be governed, how humanitarian aid will be distributed, to "reconstruction, cleaning the streets, bulldozers, diesel ... gasoline, electricity, drinking water, the possibility of going to the sea," he said.

The priest pointed out that "sometimes the only water available is seawater for everything, for their needs, for cooking, for bathing." He said it was unclear, as of Oct. 11, whether people were even permitted to approach the seaside.

He said, "You can see the pain in people's expressions. There are so many orphans everywhere, so many childless parents." But he said he still remained hopeful that "with the help of God and so many men and women of good will ... this can be done."

"Just as the populations that suffered the tsunami ... were able to lift their heads and rebuild their lives — hopefully, Gaza can also rebuild its life," Romanelli said.

"May there be peace in everything ... that we can enjoy a long period of peace between Palestine and Israel is not impossible," he said. But the priest added, "It will take a long time."