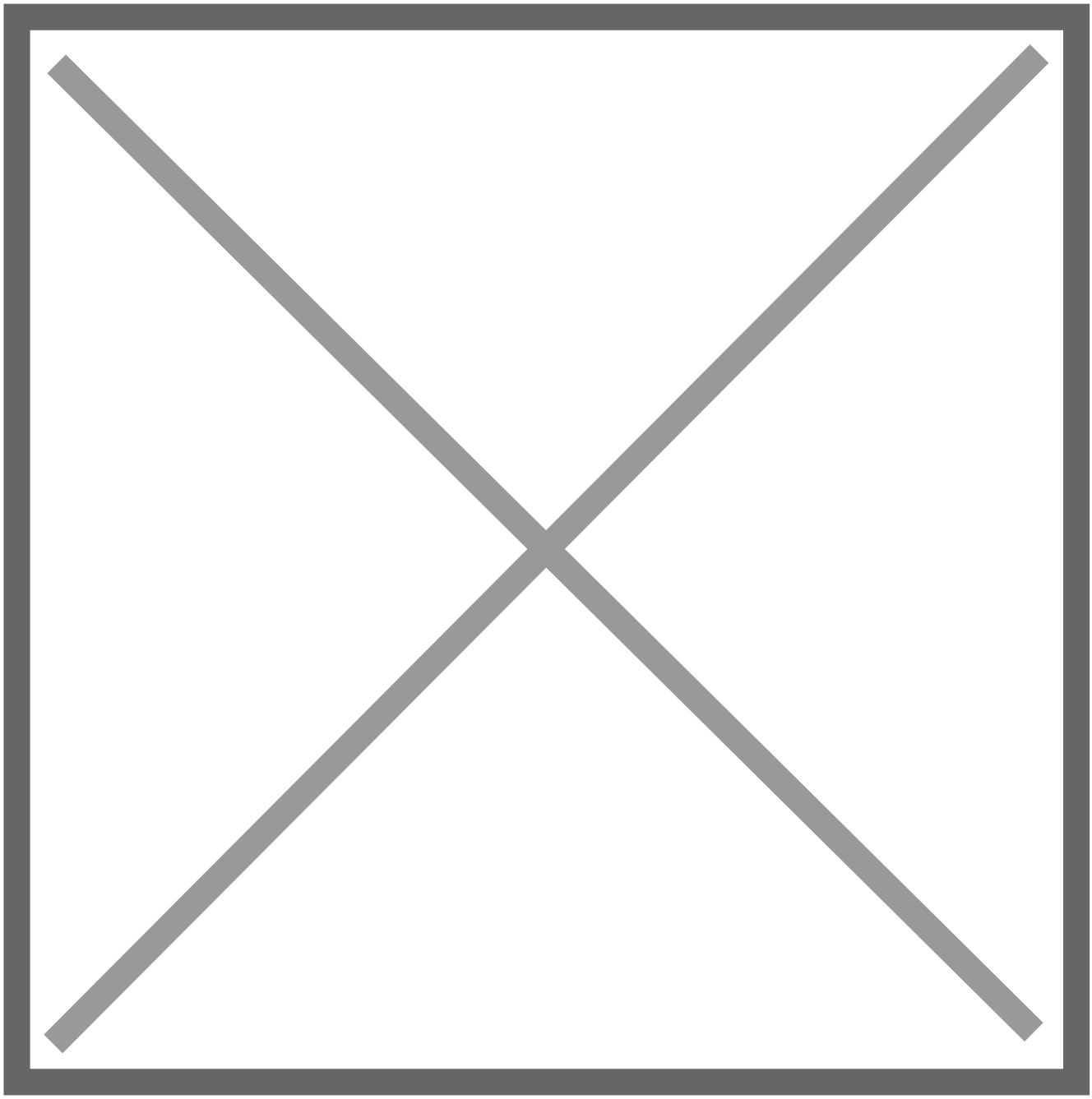
Vatican
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A drone view shows the U.S. Navy guided-missile cruiser USS Gettysburg (CG-64) docked at the port of Ponce, Puerto Rico, Nov. 4, 2025. Pope Leo XIV has called for dialogue and peace in Venezuela as the United States amps up pressure on the South American country over allegedly sending drug boats to the U.S. Also, relations between the country's socialist regime and Catholic officials have become tense. (OSV News/Reuters/Ricardo Arduengo)



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Caracas, Venezuela — November 6, 2025
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Pope Leo XIV has called for dialogue and peace in Venezuela as the United States amps up pressure on the South American country — where relations between the socialist regime and Catholic officials have become tense.

"A country has the right to have a military to defend peace, to build peace," the pope told reporters Nov. 4 at Castel Gandolfo. "In this case, however, it seems a bit different, with the tension increasing," he added. "I read some news saying that they are getting closer and closer to the coast of Venezuela," referring to U.S. naval ships and troops.

"I think that with violence, we don't win," the pope said. "The important thing is to seek dialogue, to try in a fair way to find solutions to the problems that may exist in any country."

Eight U.S. warships and thousands of soldiers have amassed in the Caribbean off Venezuela's north coast since the summer. U.S. forces have sunk presumed drug

boats carrying cocaine toward the United States, while President Donald Trump has spoken of regime change in the oil-rich South American country.

President Nicolás Maduro, who was sworn into office again in January after claiming to have won reelection — in a vote that countries such as the U.S. consider to have been rigged — welcomed Leo's comments. He said Nov. 5, "Pope Leo, vicar of Christ, head of the Catholic Church, has called for dialogue between the United States and Venezuela to find solutions and defend and preserve peace. Thank you, Pope Leo."

The U.S. government has accused Maduro of being a drug trafficker and in August doubled the bounty for arrest to $50 million. "He is one of the largest narco-traffickers in the world and a threat to our national security," U.S. Attorney General Pam Bondi said.

Trump recently told the CBS News program "60 Minutes" that Maduro's days were numbered, but said, "I doubt it. I don't think so," when asked if the U.S. would declare war on Venezuela. The U.S. military has carried out strikes on at least 16 suspected drug boats in the southern Caribbean since Sept. 2, killing dozens of persons, according to a count by PBS News.

Meanwhile, the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, along with 61 other civil society organizations, sent a letter to Congress on Nov. 4, saying, "The Trump administration has not provided any valid legal justification for these strikes or any evidence to substantiate its claims that the victims were an imminent threat to the security of the United States."

Daniel Di Martino, a native of Venezuela and fellow at the Manhattan Institute, said many Venezuelans inside and outside the country would support U.S.-led regime change.

"Venezuelans have lost all hope after 26 years of socialist dictatorship and the largest refugee crisis in the world," he told OSV News. Nearly 8 million Venezuelans have left the country, he added, "and the regime has all the weapons against the civilians."

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Venezuelan opposition leader María Corina Machado endorsed Trump's actions, telling a U.S. business audience that the U.S. president's actions would "protect millions of lives of Latin American citizens and certainly Venezuelan citizens." She added, "Maduro started this war and President Trump is ending that war," according to Politico.

Machado was recently awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, having been banned from running in the 2024 election and leading the Venezuelan opposition from hiding inside the country. Edmundo González Urrutia replaced her on the ballot and overwhelmingly won, according to tally sheets collected by the opposition, but denied victory by pro-Maduro electoral officials.

Venezuela's Catholic leaders called for the vote to be respected, intensifying anti-church government actions.

Cardinal Baltazar Porras, retired archbishop of Caracas, recently called for the release of political prisoners, saying Oct. 17 in Rome, "We are living through a morally unacceptable situation. The exercise of civic freedom is deplorable. The growth of poverty, militarization as a form of government that incites violence and introduces it as part of daily life, corruption, and the lack of autonomy of public authorities and respect for the popular will create a landscape that does not foster peaceful coexistence or overcome the structural deficiencies of society."

He added, "The issue of political prisoners, deprived of their liberty for reasons that are not always clear, breaks down family unity, leaving them to suffer without anyone to turn to."

The discord between Venezuelan church leaders and political figures spilled into the celebration of Venezuela's first saints, who were canonized Oct. 19: St. José Gregorio Hernández, known as "doctor of the poor," and Sr. María Carmen Elena Rendiles Martínez, who was born with one arm missing but founded convents and schools. Maduro subsequently alleged — without offering proof — "Baltazar Porras spent his entire life conspiring against José Gergorio Hernández … but he has been defeated by God and the people."

The Archdiocese of Caracas called off a large Mass of thanksgiving scheduled for Oct. 25 due to security concerns. Porras later alleged he was unable to travel to a Mass of thanksgiving in the city of Isnotú, birthplace of St. José Gregorio Hernández,

due to flights not being able to land and a military show of force in the area.

"What crime has been committed that prevents one from fulfilling a duty and a religious duty?" Porras asked.