Vatican

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Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, speaks with the press after the presentation of the 2025 Religious Freedom Report compiled by the papal foundation Aid to the Church in Need and released Oct. 21, 2025, during a conference at Rome's Augustinianum Patristic Institute. (CNS/Lola Gomez)

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Vatican City — February 18, 2026
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The Holy See "will not participate" in President Donald Trump's "Board of Peace" for Gaza, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Vatican's secretary of state, said Feb. 17, citing "points that leave us somewhat perplexed."

In comments to reporters at a bilateral meeting in Rome with the Italian government at Palazzo Borromeo, seat of the Embassy of Italy to the Holy See, Parolin confirmed the Holy See "will not participate in the Board of Peace because of its particular nature, which is evidently not that of other States."

"There are points that leave us somewhat perplexed" about the board, and "some critical points that would need to find explanations," he said.

"The important thing," he said, "is that an attempt is being made to provide a response. However, for us, there are certain critical issues that should be resolved."

"One concern," he continued, "is that at the international level it should above all be the U.N. that manages these crisis situations. This is one of the points on which we have insisted."

The board was part of Trump's peace plan for Gaza, which he announced in September, in which he said he would establish "a new international transitional body" headed and chaired by himself, "with other members and heads of State to be announced, including Former Prime Minister Tony Blair."

Trump is scheduled to host the board's inaugural meeting in Washington on Feb. 19 at the U.S. Institute of Peace, which the Trump administration renamed the "Donald J. Trump Institute of Peace" in December.

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More than two dozen countries have accepted Trump's invitation to join the Board of Peace, including Israel as well as Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Egypt. However, like the Holy See, key U.S. allies in Europe have declined to join the board, with some expressing concern it would undercut the United Nations. Trump sought a one billion dollar membership fee to become a member nation.

Ahead of that meeting, a network called Priests Against Genocide USA — which said in a Feb. 17 press statement it is comprised of of 2,200 priests from 58 countries, along with 22 bishops and archbishops, and two cardinals — urged "a Lenten conversion of heart through prayer, fasting and action in solidarity with the people of Palestine," while expressing concern the board "risks sidelining Palestinian voices."

Hamas attacked Israel Oct. 7, 2023, carrying out the largest mass killing of Jews since the Holocaust and provoking Israel to declare war the following day. About 1,200 people were killed in the surprise attack by Hamas, officially designated a terrorist entity by the U.S. government, with militants engaging in sexual violence and taking hostages before retreating to Gaza.

In the years since, the Israeli government's management of the ensuing conflict has been met with scrutiny and criticism, including from the United Nations, over its actions that led to civilian casualties, mass displacement and famine.

Since Israel's declaration of war, more than 70,000 Palestinians have been killed out of Gaza's 2.1 million pre-war population, a figure Israel's military recently acknowledged. The vast majority of Palestinians killed are reported to be civilians, making the war among those with the highest civilian death rates in any 21st-century conflict.