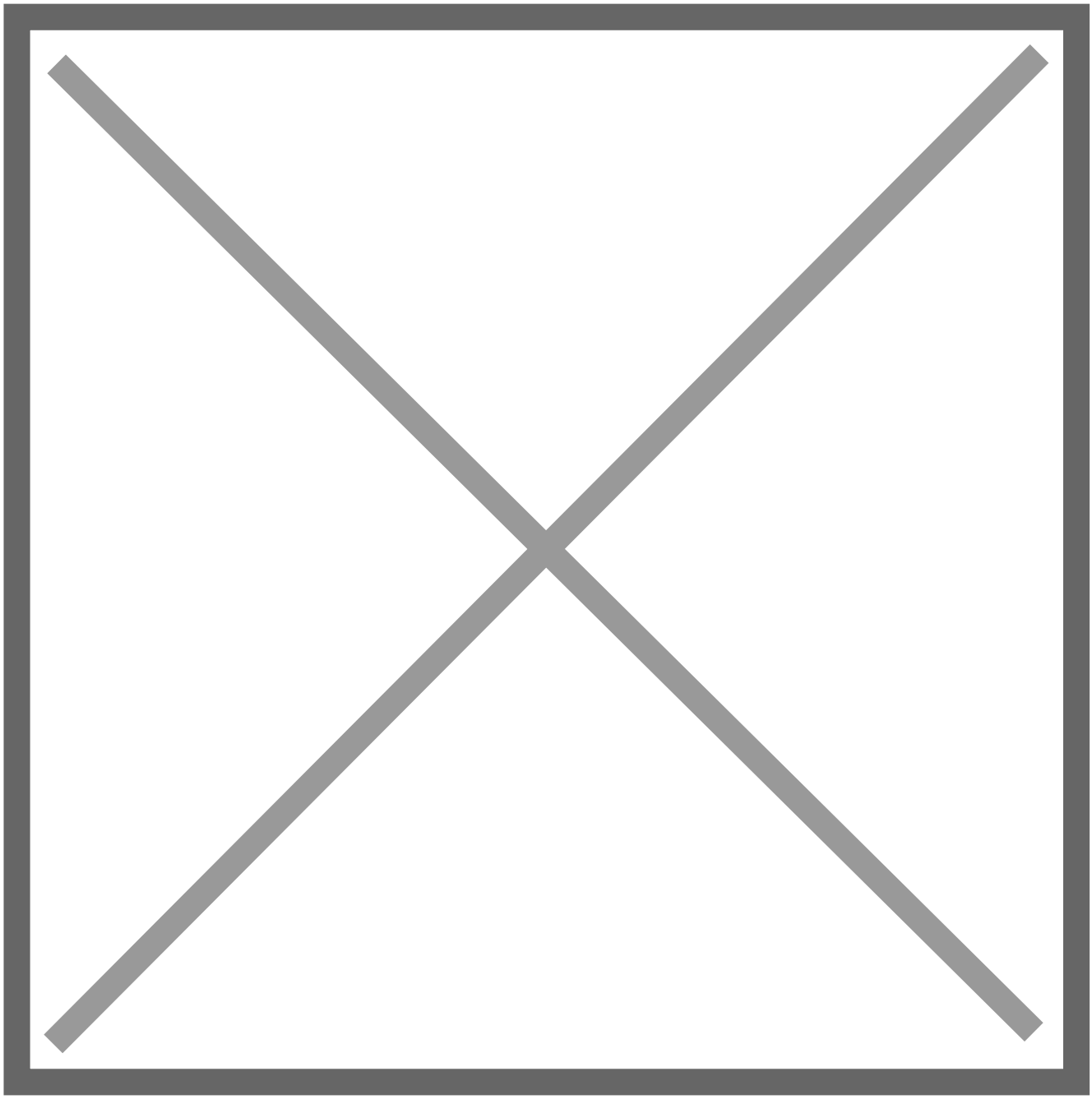
Vatican
Vatican News



Pope Leo XIV delivers the Angelus address in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican Feb. 22, 2026. (OSV News/Vatican Media)



by OSV News

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

Vatican City — February 23, 2026
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Pope Leo XIV has renewed his "heartfelt appeal" for an "immediate ceasefire" in Russia's war against Ukraine and again urged dialogue "be strengthened to pave the way toward peace."

"Peace cannot be postponed," the pope said at the end of the Angelus Feb 22 in St. Peter's Square. "It is an urgent necessity that must find a home in our hearts and be translated into responsible decisions. ... Let the weapons fall silent, let the bombings cease."

The pope's repeated appeal for peace came two days ahead of the fourth anniversary of Russia launching its full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Initiated in 2014, Russia's war against Ukraine was accelerated by the invasion on Feb. 24, 2022.

Russia's most recent assaults have particularly targeted civilian infrastructure and energy systems amid winter, deepening the country's humanitarian crisis.

"Four years have passed since the beginning of the war against Ukraine," Leo said. "My heartfelt thoughts remain focused on the tragic situation unfolding before the eyes of the whole world: so many victims, so many lives and families shattered, such immense destruction, such unspeakable suffering!

"Every war is truly a wound inflicted upon the entire human family; it leaves in its wake death, devastation and a trail of pain that marks generations."

According to the United Nations Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, 2025 was the deadliest year for civilians since the beginning of the full-scale invasion.

Advertisement

The U.N. documented at least 2,514 civilians killed and more than 12,000 injured — a 31% increase compared to 2024 and roughly 70% higher than in 2023. The figures include only verified casualties in areas under Ukrainian government control, meaning the overall numbers are likely higher.

Since February 2022, more than 14,500 civilians — including 745 children — have been confirmed killed, with tens of thousands more injured. Humanitarian organizations are scaling up efforts to meet an unprecedented need.

Across the country, an estimated 10.8 million people — including both internally displaced and war-affected residents who remain in their communities — will require humanitarian support this year, according to the U.N.

"I invite everyone to join in prayer for the embattled people of Ukraine and for all those who suffer due to this war and every conflict in the world, that the long-awaited gift of peace may shine upon our days," Leo said.

Last December, the pope met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy at the papal villa in Castel Gandolfo, southeast of Rome. During the closed-door meeting, the pontiff reiterated the importance of ongoing diplomatic efforts and discussed the issue of prisoners of war and the return of Ukrainian children to their families.

"During the cordial talks, which focused on the war in Ukraine, the Holy Father reiterated the need for the continuation of dialogue and expressed his urgent desire that the current diplomatic initiatives bring about a just and lasting peace," the Vatican press office said in a communique released after the Dec. 9 meeting.

This story appears in the **War in Ukraine** feature series. View the full series.