Vatican
Vatican News



Pope Leo XIV appears at the window of his studio overlooking St. Peter's Square at the Vatican where Catholic faithful and pilgrims gathered for the traditional Sunday blessing at the end of the noon Angelus prayer, Sunday, March 15, 2026. (AP/Andrew Medichini)

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Vatican City — March 15, 2026

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Pope Leo XIV demanded a ceasefire in the Middle East on Sunday in his strongest comments to date, directly addressing the leaders who launched the war in Iran.

"On behalf of the Christians of the Middle East and all women and men of good will, I appeal to those responsible for this conflict," Leo said. "Cease fire so that avenues for dialogue may be reopened. Violence can never lead to the justice, stability, and peace that the people are waiting for."

Leo didn't cite the United States or Israel by name in his comments at the end of his Sunday noon blessing. But history's first U.S. pope mentioned the attacks that targeted a school, an apparent reference to the missile strike on an elementary school in Iran in the opening days of the war that killed over 165 people, many of them children.

U.S. officials have said outdated intelligence likely led to the United States launching the strike, and that an investigation is ongoing.

The Vatican has highlighted the carnage of the Minab strike, running an aerial photo of the mass grave being dug for the young victims on the March 6 front page of its official newspaper, L'Osservatore Romano, under the headline "The Face of War."

Leo said he was close to the families of those who had been killed in the attacks "which have hit schools, hospitals and residential centers." He expressed particular concern about the impact of the war in Lebanon, where aid groups are warning of a humanitarian crisis.

The plight of Christian communities in southern Lebanon is of particular concern to the Vatican, since they have long represented a bulwark for Christians throughout the majority Muslim region.

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For the two weeks since the start of the U.S.-Israeli war, the pope has limited his comments to muted appeals for diplomacy and dialogue in an apparent attempt to

avoid pitting himself as an American political counterweight to President Donald Trump. He hasn't named the U.S. or Israel publicly, but that is also in keeping with the Vatican's tradition of diplomatic neutrality.

On Friday, for example, in a speech to priests attending a Vatican class on the sacrament of confession, Leo said the sacrament was a workshop that restores unity and peace.

"One might well ask: do those Christians who bear grave responsibility in armed conflicts have the humility and courage to make a serious examination of conscience and to go to confession?" he said.

But while Leo has sought to keep his messaging indirect and apolitical to avoid inflaming tensions, some of his U.S. cardinals and the Vatican secretary of state have not.

Cardinal Robert McElroy, the archbishop of Washington, said the war was morally unjustifiable. Chicago Cardinal Blase Cupich said it was "sickening" how the White House was splicing video game imagery into its social media messaging about the war.

The Vatican secretary of state, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, rejected Washington's claim of a "preventive war." But he said this week that the Holy See was regardless keeping dialogue open.

"The Holy See speaks with everyone, and when necessary we speak also with the Americans, with the Israelis and show them what to us are the solutions," he said.

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