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Archbishop Paul Gallagher, the Vatican foreign minister, and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey

Archbishop Paul Gallagher, the Vatican foreign minister, and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, attend a news conference following their meeting in Moscow Aug. 25, 2026. (OSV News/Pool via Reuters/Ramil Sitdikov)

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The Vatican foreign minister urged Russian officials to end their war with Ukraine and to begin negotiations with the help of the international community.

"The position of the Holy See remains clear: the conflict cannot be resolved by military means," said Archbishop Paul Gallagher, the Vatican's secretary for relations with states and international organizations, at an Aug. 25 press conference in Moscow alongside Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov.

"It is essential to create the conditions for a serious political and diplomatic process," the archbishop said. "The Holy See urges both parties to demonstrate openness and goodwill so that such dialogue can become a reality as soon as possible."

"Let us be clear: This war must end," Gallagher said.

The bilateral meeting in Moscow was the first high-level meeting of Gallagher's four-day visit to Russia. The meeting was the first between Gallagher and Lavrov in five years. The Vatican foreign minister last visited Moscow in 2021.

Before delivering their statements to the press, Gallagher spoke with Lavrov for more than an hour at a meeting that was also attended by Archbishop Giovanni d'Aniello, the apostolic nuncio to Russia, Vatican News reported.

Addressing the members of the press, Lavrov described the talks with Gallagher as "comprehensive" and "substantive," while noting that despite "fundamental changes in the geopolitical landscape," relations between the Vatican and Russia "remain trusting, friendly, and pragmatic."

However, the Russian foreign minister took the opportunity to criticize Europe's support for Ukraine, which he called "the Kyiv regime."

Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24, 2022, an escalation of a conflict that began in 2014 with the Russian annexation of Crimea. Russia's war on Ukraine has been described as genocidal in character in two joint reports from the New Lines Institute and the Raoul Wallenberg Center for Human Rights, with Russia continuously attacking civilian infrastructure and targets since their invasion started.

In his statement, Gallagher focused on his "constructive" conversation with Lavrov, stressing that "in an international context marked with deep tensions, meeting and discussing matters together with clarity already constitutes a sign of responsible action."

"Dialogue does not eliminate differences of opinion or approach, but it does prevent incomprehension and suspicion from becoming the only language available to us," the archbishop said.

Both sides, he continued, agreed on the need to "keep the channels of communication open," as well as the protection of civilians and "the importance of pursuing collaboration on humanitarian issues."

The Vatican foreign minister also noted that he and Lavrov had "an extensive exchange of views on numerous regional and international issues," including situations in the Middle East, Asia, Latin America and Africa.

Highlighting the need for diplomacy, especially "when differences exist," Gallagher expressed the Vatican's "deep concern" over the war in Ukraine, and "deplores the sufferings of the innocent."

"After more than four years of hostilities, the conflict continues to expand, the number of victims continues to grow, many families remain divided, and the material and psychological consequences of the conflict affect millions of people in Ukraine and Russia," the archbishop said.

"For this reason, during our exchange, I reiterated the appeal of His Holiness Pope Leo XIV to end the hostilities and to begin authentic negotiations with the support of the international community," the Vatican's foreign minister said.

He also stressed that true dialogue "implies a recognition of the fact" that the longer the war continues, "the more difficult it will be to arrive at an adequate resolution, while the sufferings of the population continue to increase."

"Pope Leo XIV has recently reiterated that peace is at the same time a gift and a responsibility," Gallagher said. "He has defined it as both unarmed and disarming. In terms of diplomatic relations, pursuing such peace means promoting the de-escalation of tensions, dialogue, trust-building measures, and arms control."

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