

Cardinal Parolin: “October 7 and Gaza: ‘It is unacceptable to reduce people to collateral victims’”

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Two years have passed since that terrible day, the terrorist attack perpetrated by Hamas against Israel, and the beginning of what has become a full-blown war that has razed the Gaza Strip to the ground. Let us remember those events and what happened afterwards with the Cardinal Secretary of State, Pietro Parolin.

Your Eminence, we are entering the third year since the tragic attack of 7 October. How do you remember that moment and what did it mean, in your opinion, for the State of Israel and the Jewish communities in the world?

I repeat what I had the opportunity to say in those days: the terrorist attack carried out by Hamas and other militias against thousands of Israelis and resident migrants, many of them civilians, who were about to celebrate the day of the "Simchat Torah", at the end of the week of the "Sukkot" holiday, was inhumane and unjustifiable. The brutal violence perpetrated against children, women, young people, the elderly, can have no justification. It was an unworthy and — I repeat — inhuman massacre. The Holy See immediately expressed its total and firm condemnation, immediately asking for the release of the hostages and expressing closeness to the families affected during the terrorist attack. We have prayed and continue to do so, just as we continue to ask for an end to this perverse spiral of hatred and violence that threatens to drag us into an abyss of no return.

What do you feel like saying to the families of the Israeli hostages still in the hands of Hamas?

Unfortunately, two years have already passed, some of them have died, others have been released after long negotiations. I am deeply affected and saddened by the images of these people held captive in tunnels and reduced to starvation. We cannot and must not forget them. I recall that Pope Francis in the last year and a half of his life made 21 public appeals asking for the release of hostages and met with some of their families. His successor, Pope Leo XIV, continued to make these appeals. I express to them all my closeness, in daily prayer for their sufferings, continuing to assure them of all our readiness to do everything possible so that they can embrace their loved ones safe and sound or at least have the bodies of those who have been killed, so that they may be worthily buried.

In commemorating the first anniversary of the attack on 7 October, Pope Francis spoke of "the shameful inability of the international community and the most powerful countries to silence their weapons and put an end to the tragedy of war". What is needed for peace?

Today, the situation in Gaza is even more serious and tragic than it was a year ago, after a devastating war that has claimed tens of thousands of lives. It is necessary to recover the sense of reason, to abandon the blind logic of hatred and revenge, to reject violence as a solution. It is the right of those who

are attacked to defend themselves, but legitimate defense must also respect the parameter of proportionality. Unfortunately, the ensuing war has had disastrous and inhumane consequences... I am struck and afflicted by the daily count of the dead in Palestine, dozens, indeed sometimes hundreds a day, so many children whose only fault seems to be that of being born there: we risk becoming accustomed to this carnage! People killed while trying to reach a loaf of bread, people buried under the rubble of their homes, people bombed in hospitals, in tent cities, displaced people forced to move from one part of that narrow and overpopulated territory to another... It is unacceptable and unjustifiable to reduce human persons to mere "collateral victims".

How can we judge the episodes of anti-Semitism that have increased significantly in different parts of the world in recent months?

They are a sad and equally unjustified consequence: we live on *fake news*, on the simplification of reality. And this leads those who feed on these things to attribute responsibility for what is happening in Gaza to the Jews as such. We know that this is not the case: there are also many voices of strong dissent that are raised from the Jewish world against the way in which the current Israeli government has operated and is operating in Gaza and in the rest of Palestine where — let us not forget — the often violent expansionism of the settlers wants to make the birth of a Palestinian state impossible. Let's see the public testimony of the hostages' families. Anti-Semitism is a cancer to be fought and eradicated: there is a need for men and women of good will, educators who help to understand and above all to distinguish... We cannot forget what happened in the heart of Europe with the Shoah, we must commit ourselves with all our strength so that this evil does not raise its head. At the same time, we must ensure that acts of inhumanity and violation of humanitarian law are never justified: no Jew must be attacked or discriminated against because he is a Jew, no Palestinian because he is a Jew must be attacked or discriminated against because — as we unfortunately hear — a "potential terrorist". The perverse chain of hatred is destined to generate a spiral that can bring nothing good. It is sad to see that we cannot learn from history, even recent history, which remains a teacher of life.

You spoke of an unsustainable situation and mentioned the many interests at stake that prevent the end of the war. What are these interests?

It seems clear that the war perpetrated by the Israeli army to defeat the Hamas militiamen does not take into account that it is facing a population that is mostly defenseless and reduced to the end of its strength, in an area scattered with houses and buildings razed to the ground: it is enough to see the aerial images to realize what Gaza is today. It seems equally clear to me that the international community is unfortunately powerless and that the countries that have been able to really influence have not done so to date to stop the carnage taking place. I can only repeat the very clear words spoken in this regard by Pope Leo XIV on 20 July last: "I appeal to the international community to observe humanitarian law and to respect the obligation to protect civilians, as well as the prohibition of collective punishment, the indiscriminate use of force and the forced displacement of the population". Words that are still waiting to be accepted and understood.

So what can the international community do?

Certainly it can do much more than what it is doing. It is not enough to say that what is happening is unacceptable and then continue to allow it to happen. There are serious questions to be asked about the legitimacy, for example, of continuing to supply weapons that are used to the detriment of the civilian population. Unfortunately, as we have seen, so far the United Nations has not been able to stop what is happening. But there are international actors who would instead be able to have a greater influence to end this tragedy and we need to find a way to give the United Nations a more effective role in ending the many fratricidal wars underway in the world.

What do you think of the plan presented by President Trump to achieve a truce and an end to the war?

Any plan that involves the Palestinian people in decisions about their future and allows this massacre to end, freeing the hostages and stopping the daily killing of hundreds of people, is to be welcomed and supported. The Holy Father also expressed the hope that the parties would accept and that a path of peace could finally begin.

How can we judge the positions taken by civil societies that are expressing themselves, including in Israel, against the war policies of the Israeli government and in favor of peace?

Even if sometimes these initiatives, due to the violence of a few troublemakers, risk sending the wrong message to the media, I am positively struck by the participation in the demonstrations, and the commitment of so many young people. It is a sign that we are not condemned to indifference. We must take seriously that desire for peace, that desire for commitment... Our future is at stake, the future of our world is at stake.

There are those who maintain, even in the Church, that in the face of all this we must first of all pray, not take to the streets so as not to play into the hands of the violent...

I am a baptized person, I am a believer, I am a priest: for me, incessant prayer before God to assist us, help us and intervene to put an end to all this by supporting the efforts of women and men of good will is essential, daily, fundamental. Pope Leo invited us once again to recite a Rosary for peace on October 11. But I would also like to recall that the Christian faith is either incarnate or it is not... We are followers of a God who became man by assuming our humanity and testified to us that we cannot be indifferent to what is happening around us and even far from us. For this reason, prayer will never be enough, but neither will concrete commitment, the mobilization of consciences, peace initiatives, awareness, even at the cost of appearing "out of touch with the world", even at the cost of taking risks: there is a silent majority — also made up of many young people — who do not surrender to this inhumanity. They too are called to pray. To think that our role, as Christians, is to lock ourselves up in sacristies, I find it profoundly wrong. Prayer also calls for a commitment, a witness, concrete choices.

Pope Leo never tires of asking for peace. What can the Holy See do in this situation? What can be your contribution and that of the whole Church?

The Holy See, sometimes misunderstood, continues to ask for peace, to invite dialogue, to use the words "negotiation" and "negotiation", and it does so on the basis of a profound realism: the alternative to diplomacy is perennial war, it is the abyss of hatred and self-destruction of the world. We must shout loudly: let's stop before it's too late. And we must act, do everything possible so that it is not too late. Everything possible.

Why is the recognition of the State of Palestine important at this stage?

The Holy See officially recognized the State of Palestine ten years ago, with the Comprehensive Agreement between the Holy See and the State of Palestine. The preamble to that international agreement fully supports a just, comprehensive and peaceful resolution of the issue of Palestine, in all its aspects, in accordance with international law and all relevant UN resolutions. At the same time, it advocates an independent, sovereign, democratic and viable State of Palestine, inclusive of the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza. The same agreement identifies this state not in opposition to others, but capable of living side by side with its neighbors, in peace and security. We look with satisfaction at the fact that several countries of the world have recognized the State of Palestine. But we cannot fail to note with concern that Israeli statements and decisions go in the opposite direction, that is, they are intended to prevent forever the possible emergence of a real Palestinian state. This solution — the creation of a Palestinian state — seems to me to be even more valid after what has happened in the last two years. It is the path, that of the two peoples in two States, that the Holy See has pursued from the beginning. The fate of the two peoples and the two states are interconnected.

How is the Christian community on the ground, after the harsh attack on the Holy Family Church, and why is its role in the Middle East important?

The Christians of Gaza, as we have seen, have also been under attack... I am moved to think of these people who are determined to stay and who pray daily for peace and for the victims. It is an increasingly precarious situation. We try to be close to them in every way, thanks to the activities of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem and *Caritas*, we thank the governments and all the institutions that are committed to getting aid and allowing the seriously injured to be rescued. The role of Christians in the Middle East has been and remains fundamental, even if their numbers are dwindling. I would like to recall that they participate in all respects in the events of their martyred Palestinian people, whose sufferings they share.