



Pope Francis gives his blessing to visitors and pilgrims gathered in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican for the recitation of the Angelus prayer Aug. 4, 2024. (CNS/Vatican Media)

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Vatican City — August 5, 2024

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As fears of a widening war in the Middle East grew again in early August, Pope Francis pleaded with the region's leaders to exercise restraint and engage in dialogue.

"Let us have the courage to resume dialogue so that there is an immediate cease-fire in Gaza and on all fronts, the hostages are freed and the people are helped with humanitarian aid," the pope said Aug. 4 after leading the recitation of the Angelus prayer.

"Attacks, even targeted ones, and killings can never be a solution," the pope told thousands of people gathered in the midday heat to pray with him. The pope's remarks came after the killing July 31 of a top Hamas leader in Iran — a killing widely attributed to Israel.

Attacks and killings, the pope said, never promote "the path of justice, the path of peace, but generate even more hatred and revenge."

"Enough, brothers and sisters! Enough," he said, "Do not stifle the word of the God of peace, but let it be the future of the Holy Land, the Middle East and the entire world! War is a defeat!"

Francis also extended his condolences to members of the Druze community a week after a rocket strike, presumably from Hezbollah forces in Lebanon, killed 12 children and teenagers in the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights.

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The pope began his post-Angelus remarks by telling the crowd about the beatification in Lebanon Aug. 2 of Maronite Patriarch Estephan Douaihy.

"He led the Maronite Church with wisdom from 1670 to 1704 during a difficult time marked also by persecution," the pope said. "A teacher of the faith and an attentive pastor, he was a witness of hope always close to the people."

"Even today, the Lebanese people suffer so much," Francis said, pointing in particular to the massive explosion Aug. 4, 2020, at the Port of Beirut, which killed more than 200 people. "I hope that justice and truth will soon be done," the pope said, referring to ongoing efforts to investigate responsibility for the explosion.

Francis also publicly expressed his concern for Venezuela, which, he said, "is experiencing a critical situation" following a highly contested presidential election July 28.

"I make a heartfelt appeal to all parties to seek the truth, to exercise restraint, to avoid any kind of violence, to settle disputes through dialogue, to have at heart the true good of the people and not partisan interests," the pope said, entrusting the country to Our Lady of Coromoto, patroness of Venezuela.