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*Smoke rises following an Israeli airstrike as displaced Palestinians make their way to flee areas in the eastern part of Khan Younis following an Israeli evacuation order, amid the ongoing Israel-Hamas war, in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip Oct. 7, 2024. (OSV News photo/Hatem Khaled, Reuters)*

## As church prepares for Jubilee, 'Holy Land is bleeding,' Palestine ambassador says



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OSV News

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Without a ceasefire, the upcoming Jubilee year in Rome will be marred by the suffering and bloodshed in the Holy Land, Palestine's ambassador to the Holy See said.

In an interview with OSV News Sept. 27, Ambassador Issa Kassissieh said that he hopes that "the war will be behind us" by the time Pope Francis opens the Jubilee year on Christmas Eve because "we have to remember that the cradle of Christianity is in the Holy Land. It is the birthplace of our Lord, Jesus Christ. It is also where our Lord was crucified in Jerusalem."

"We cannot have the celebration of the Jubilee of 2025 and the Holy Land is bleeding and crying and the people are suffering," he said. "We must say, 'Enough of wars,' and give space for the peacemakers, as our Lord asks of us," he added.

Israel views its military campaign as a necessary action to force Hamas to return 97 remaining Israeli hostages taken by Hamas militants during their brutal Oct. 7, 2023 attack on the country's southern communities. Both its military and covert operations have targeted senior Hamas militants, including Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh, who was killed by a remotely detonated device at his guesthouse in Tehran, Iran.

Operations targeting Hamas and Hezbollah, a close ally of Hamas, have drawn the ire of their main supporter in the region, Iran.

Following incursions into Lebanon, as well as strikes that killed Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah and Iranian Revolutionary Guard Gen. Abbas Nilforushan, Iran launched Oct. 1 some 180 missiles into Israel, The Associated Press reported.

U.N. Secretary General António Guterres warned in his Security Council Oct. 2 speech that "It is high time to stop the sickening cycle of escalation after escalation that is leading the people of the Middle East straight over the cliff."

Palestinian Ambassador Kassissieh told OSV News that Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has consistently warned the international community "that the status quo is not sustainable and things will explode."

"And this is what happened; it exploded in the face of the world. And people, innocent people, are paying the price," he said. "His Holiness (Pope Francis), over so many times, said that 'War is a defeat for humanity.'"

At the end of his homily at the Oct. 2 Mass opening the 2024 Synod of Bishops on Synodality, Pope



*Issa Kassissieh, Palestinian ambassador to the Holy See, attends a prayer service for peace in the Holy Land with Pope Francis in the Vatican Gardens June 7, 2024. The ceremony marked the 10th anniversary of a prayer service Pope Francis and Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew held with Israeli President Shimon Peres and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. (CNS photo/Lola Gomez)*

Francis announced that he was to go Oct. 6 to the Basilica of St. Mary Major in Rome to pray the rosary “for the gift of peace” and encouraged synod delegates to join him. He then joined Cardinal Pizzaballa in encouraging all people to “live a day of prayer and fasting for peace in the world” on Oct. 7.

Regarding the war expanding into neighboring Lebanon, Kassissieh said that in order to “de-escalate the situation in Lebanon, the war must stop in Gaza” and that true peace in the region cannot be achieved without tackling the root cause of the problem, which is the continued “occupation in the Palestinian Territory.”

World leaders, he added, “should protect Lebanon, and we shouldn’t get to the point where Gaza has reached a complete destruction.”

“The world has to preserve the identity, the beauty of Lebanon. They’re suffering; really, they’re suffering. They were already suffering with economic difficulties and they don’t deserve this,” he said.

Throughout its military campaign, Palestine and international organizations have accused the Israeli government of committing war crimes. In May, the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants against several Hamas leaders, as well as against Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant.

The Palestinian ambassador criticized the Western countries, “who continue to support Israel blindly, while ignoring the basic national rights of the Palestinian people, based on international legitimacy, and the relevant U.N. Security Council resolutions.”

“Our people view this as hypocrisy and a double standard, which negatively affects the world’s rules-

based order," the ambassador told OSV News.

The United States, he said, "cannot teach us and preach us about human rights when they continue to turn their back on the violations, the serious violations of the human rights by the settlers, and by the Israeli soldiers in the occupied Palestinian territory," Kassissieh told OSV News.

"And they cannot talk about giving humanitarian aid or encouraging humanitarian aid for the Palestinians in Gaza, while at the same time, they're providing Israel with all the weapons against our people," he said.

The Palestinian ambassador to the Holy See also urged the Vatican to ramp up its diplomatic efforts for the sake of Christians in the Holy Land, who are also "paying the price" as the war continues.

"The very presence of Christianity" in the Holy Land, he said, is threatened.

"Look at Bethlehem! Bethlehem is now a deserted city. ... People are suffering there, people want to migrate and mainly the Christians. We are a few remaining Christian families in Jerusalem and in Bethlehem, it's a very, very sad story," he said.

"I appeal here to the Vatican that they seriously, pay attention to the situation in Bethlehem and Jerusalem, and particularly — I dare to say as Palestinian ambassador — please (pay) attention to the remaining living stones of the Holy Land, the guardians, the protectors of the holy shrines," he said.