Pope Francis arrives for his weekly general audience in St. Peter's Square, at the Vatican, Wednesday, Nov. 22, 2023. (AP Photo/Andrew Medichini)

Nicole Winfield

[View Author Profile](#)

Associated Press

[View Author Profile](#)

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. [Learn more](#)

Vatican City — November 22, 2023

Pope Francis met separately Nov. 22 with relatives of Israeli hostages in Gaza and Palestinians living through the war and begged for an end to what he called terrorism and "the passions that are killing everyone."

Francis spoke about the suffering of both Israelis and Palestinians after his meetings, which were arranged before the Israeli-Hamas hostage deal and a temporary halt in fighting was announced. Francis didn't refer to the deal, which marked the biggest diplomatic breakthrough since the war erupted following Hamas' Oct. 7 attack on southern Israel.

Francis said he met at the Vatican with relatives of some of the 240 hostages held by Hamas in Gaza, and separately with a delegation of Palestinians, whom the Vatican said had relatives in Gaza. In the VIP seats of St. Peter's Square were people holding Palestinian flags and scarves as well as small posters showing apparent bodies in a ditch and the word "Genocide" written underneath.

"Here we've gone beyond war. This isn't war anymore, this is terrorism," Francis said. "Please, let us go ahead with peace. Pray for peace, pray a lot for peace."

He also asked for God to help both Israeli and Palestinian people "resolve problems and not go ahead with passions that are killing everyone in the end."

Francis has spoken out repeatedly calling for an end to the war and has tried to maintain the Vatican's typical diplomatic neutrality in conflicts. The Vatican is particularly concerned about the plight of Christians in Gaza.

The Hamas attack last month killed about 1,200 people in Israel. Israel retaliatory strikes on Gaza has killed more than 11,000 people, according to Palestinian health authorities.