



Pope Francis stands by an olive tree with Raphael Schutz, the Israeli ambassador to the Holy See, Issa Kassissieh, the Palestinian ambassador to the Holy See, Rabbi Alberto Funaro of Rome and Abdellah Redouane, secretary-general of Rome's Muslim community in the Vatican Gardens June 7, 2024. The tree was planted 10 years ago during a prayer service with Pope Francis, Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople, Israeli President Shimon Peres and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. (CNS/Vatican Media)

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Vatican City June 10, 2024

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Sitting in the Vatican Gardens with the dome of St. Peter's Basilica as a backdrop, Pope Francis told cardinals and diplomats, including the ambassadors of Israel and Palestine, "Every day I pray that this war will finally end."

With a representative of Rome's Jewish community and a representative of the city's Muslim community in attendance June 7, the pope repeated his call for a cease-fire, his appeal to Hamas to release all the hostages it kidnapped Oct. 7 and his plea that Israel protect civilians in Gaza and allow humanitarian aid to reach them.

The prayer service marked the 10th anniversary of Pope Francis and Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople praying for peace in the Holy Land with Israeli President Shimon Peres and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas at the same spot in the Vatican Gardens.

In 2014 they had planted an olive tree; now it towered over the pope.

"We wish to ask the Lord to give continued growth to the olive tree we planted on that day, which has already become strong and flourishing because it has been sheltered from the wind and watered with care," the pope said. "Likewise, we must ask God that peace may spring forth in the heart of every person, in every people and nation, in every corner of the earth, protected from the winds of war and nourished by those who daily strive to live in fraternity."

Holding a green watering can, the pope was joined at the tree by: Raphael Schutz, the Israeli ambassador to the Holy See; Issa Kassissieh, Palestinian ambassador to the Holy See; Rabbi Alberto Funaro of Rome's Jewish community; and Abdellah Redouane, secretary-general of the Islamic Cultural Center in Rome.

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Rabbi Funaro told reporters that events like the pope's prayer service "somehow help us to go on. If there were one of these initiatives every day, who knows what could happen. We are all here in hope."

In his brief address, Francis said he was thinking of all the people suffering in the Holy Land today.

"I think of how urgent it is that from the rubble of Gaza a decision to stop the weapons will finally arise, and therefore I ask that there be a ceasefire," he said. "I think of the families and of the Israeli hostages and ask that they be released as soon as possible."

"I think of the Palestinian population and ask that they be protected and receive all necessary humanitarian aid," he continued. "I think of the many who are displaced due to the fighting and ask that their homes be rebuilt soon so that they can return to them in peace."

The pope said he also was thinking of "those Palestinians and Israelis of good will who, amid tears and suffering, continue to hope for the coming of a new day and strive to bring forth the dawn of a peaceful world where all peoples 'shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.'"

Repeating the Vatican's longstanding position on the region, he encouraged everyone to work for "a lasting peace, where the State of Palestine and the State of Israel can live side by side, breaking down the walls of enmity and hatred."

And, he added, "we must all cherish Jerusalem so that it will become the city of fraternal encounter among Christians, Jews and Muslims, protected by a special internationally guaranteed status."

At the same time, Francis said, "peace is not made only by written agreements or by human and political compromises. It is born from transformed hearts and arises when each of us has encountered and been touched by God's love, which dissolves our selfishness, shatters our prejudices and grants us the taste and joy of friendship, fraternity and mutual solidarity."

"There can be no peace if we do not let God himself first disarm our hearts, making them hospitable, compassionate and merciful. God is hospitable, compassionate and merciful," he said.

Francis then read the same prayer for peace he had read 10 years ago in the presence of the Orthodox patriarch and the presidents of Israel and Palestine.

"Lord God of peace, hear our prayer," he said. "We have tried so many times and over so many years to resolve our conflicts by our own powers and by the force of our weapons. How many moments of hostility and darkness have we experienced; how much blood has been shed; how many lives have been shattered; how many hopes have been buried. But our efforts have been in vain. Now, Lord, come to our aid!"