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Pope Leo XIV leads the Angelus prayer from the window of the Apostolic Palace at the Vatican, March 1, 2026. (OSV News/Guglielmo Mangiapane, Reuters)



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Vatican City — March 1, 2026

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Pope Leo XIV issued a "forceful appeal" to end increasing violence in the Middle East as the United States, Israel and Iran continue to exchange missile strikes and threats of escalations, warning of the risk of a "tragedy of enormous proportions."

The American-born pope called on all countries involved in the conflict to "assume the moral responsibility of stopping the spiral of violence before it becomes an irreparable abyss," after praying the Angelus in St. Peter's Square March 1.

Leo's comments came the day after surprise U.S.-Israeli strikes killed Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, prompting Tehran to launch missiles at Israel and nearby Gulf Arab nations that host U.S. military bases. On Sunday, a major Israeli strike rocked Tehran, and an Iranian missile killed at least four people in central Israel hours later.

"Stability and peace is not built with reciprocal threats nor with weapons that sow destruction, pain and death," the pope said, "but only through a reasonable, authentic, responsible dialogue."

Leo called for diplomacy to "regain its role and promote the good of peoples who yearn for peaceful coexistence based on justice."

"And let us continue to pray for peace," he said.

President Donald Trump said the strikes were launched "to ensure that Iran does not obtain a nuclear weapon" and dismantle their missile capabilities. He called on Iranians to "take over your government" following widespread protests in the country calling for regime change.

The latest escalation follows U.S. strikes last June that targeted three nuclear-enrichment sites in Iran and debilitated Iranian air defense systems.

"Let diplomacy silence the weapons," Leo said following those strikes. "Let nations chart their future with works of peace, not with violence and bloody conflicts!"

Ahead of those strikes, Bishop Abdallah Elias Zaidan, head of the U.S. bishops' conference's Committee on International Justice and Peace, called on the United States and the broader international community "to renew a multilateral diplomatic engagement for the attainment of a durable peace between Israel and Iran."

During his post-Angelus remarks the pope also called for dialogue in light of the "worrying news" of clashes between India and Pakistan, issuing a call for an "urgent return to dialogue."

"Let us pray together that harmony may prevail in all conflicts throughout the world," he said. "Only peace, a gift from God, can heal the wounds between peoples."

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