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## Attack on Israel: Pope's phone call to a priest in Gaza. Testimonies amid fears and prayers

The Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) struck more than 200 targets last night in the Gaza Strip, where shelling continues, especially in the Rimal and Khan Yunis districts. On the fourth day of the war between Hamas and Israel, the number of victims has tragically risen, with more than 900 dead and 2,600 wounded in Israel. The Palestinian death toll in the Strip stands at 687, including 140 children. According to the latest count by the Gaza Ministry of Health, 3,726 people have been wounded. Gaza is currently under what the UN calls an 'illegitimate' siege imposed by Israel, which has cut electricity, food and fuel supplies in retaliation for the 7 October attack.



[the priest of the only Catholic parish in Gaza, told SIR: "I spoke with Pope Francis yesterday, he offered his closeness and his prayers for the entire ecclesial community of Gaza and for all the parishioners and residents."](#) The Argentinian-born priest is currently stranded in Bethlehem, waiting to return to his parish devoted to the Holy Family. ["I thanked the Pope for his appeal for peace in Israel and Palestine during the Angelus last Sunday," the priest said, adding, "Pope Francis imparted his blessing so that everyone could feel his closeness."](#) The small Catholic community has met every evening since Saturday 7, the day of the attack, to pray the Rosary for peace: ["The faithful gather for Holy Mass and then pray the Rosary before the Blessed Sacrament. In the hope of offering a few moments of peace in the face of an increasingly dramatic scenario, we have prepared a small oratory for the children."](#) The possibility of a ground invasion announced by Israel, the priest concluded, ["would be a massacre. Fighting door to door in a densely populated area would have devastating consequences for both sides."](#) The parish is currently sheltering 130 refugees, with others staying in neighbouring parish facilities. **Amidst fears and prayer.** Speaking to SIR from Gaza, Sister **Nabila Saleh**, Director of the local "Rosary's Sisters School", confirmed what the parish priest said. ["The situation is extremely serious, like never before. Last night we heard the hellish roar of planes and exploding bombs. We are scared and don't know what to do. Pray for us, pray for peace,"](#) was the nun's dramatic testimony. ["Our school," she said, "is located in an area that was hit by the bombs. A nearby building was torn down by Israeli bombs and the explosion caused some minor damage to the windows of our school building. All classes have been suspended and our students are all at home. Going out on the streets is impossible and extremely dangerous", as happened in the Jabalia market massacre in the north of the Strip, caused by Israeli raids. More than 50 civilians died. Despite this, the school's director keeps in touch with the students' families, who are scattered across the Strip. "We try to remain close to them in some way," she says, "and we listen to their testimonies of destroyed neighbourhoods, of rubble scattered everywhere. Many of these families' homes were destroyed or damaged and they sheltered in UN schools. Some of them are Christians."](#)



. The siege imposed by Israel is of great concern to the nun because, she says, "it will definitely aggravate the dramatic living conditions of the people of Gaza. How can anyone survive without water, light and fuel? The siege is beginning to take its toll on the population. Here at the school," she says, "we manage to have a few hours of electricity thanks to solar panels. We try to carry on as best we can and help as much as we can. The biggest fear now, adds Sister Nabila, "is no longer the bombs falling from the sky, but the tanks entering Gaza." The nun does not hesitate to speak of an "unimaginable catastrophe, a massacre of human lives on both sides." She concludes: "All we can do is pray for those who hold the fate of the war in their hands. May God enlighten their minds. Pray for us, this is a dramatic moment."

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