

Pope makes urgent appeal for end to 'tragic violence'

VATICAN CITY – Pope Benedict XVI made an urgent appeal for an end to the “tragic violence” escalating in the Gaza Strip.

After praying the noonday “Regina Coeli” with pilgrims gathered in St. Peter’s Square May 20, the pope called on both Palestinian and Israeli leaders to renew efforts for dialogue and to curb the violence.

He said the mid-May rocket attacks by Palestinian militants against nearby Israeli towns and subsequent air raids launched by Israel against Palestinians were “provoking a bloody deterioration of the situation and causing dismay.”

“Once again in God’s name, I implore this tragic violence be put to an end,” the pope said, adding that his thoughts were with the suffering Palestinian and Israeli people.

He appealed to the Palestinian Authority to “take up again the difficult path of understanding” and to neutralize violent factions firmly through dialogue.

He called on the international community to help kick-start negotiations between the warring parties.

According to The Associated Press May 21, the Israeli government decided the day before to increase military action aimed at Hamas and Islamic Jihad, the two main Islamic militant groups in Gaza.

In his remarks to English-speaking pilgrims, the pope said Jesus prays that all people may be united and one.

“By working for reconciliation and peace, may Christians everywhere bear clearer witness to the Father’s love for the world,” he said.