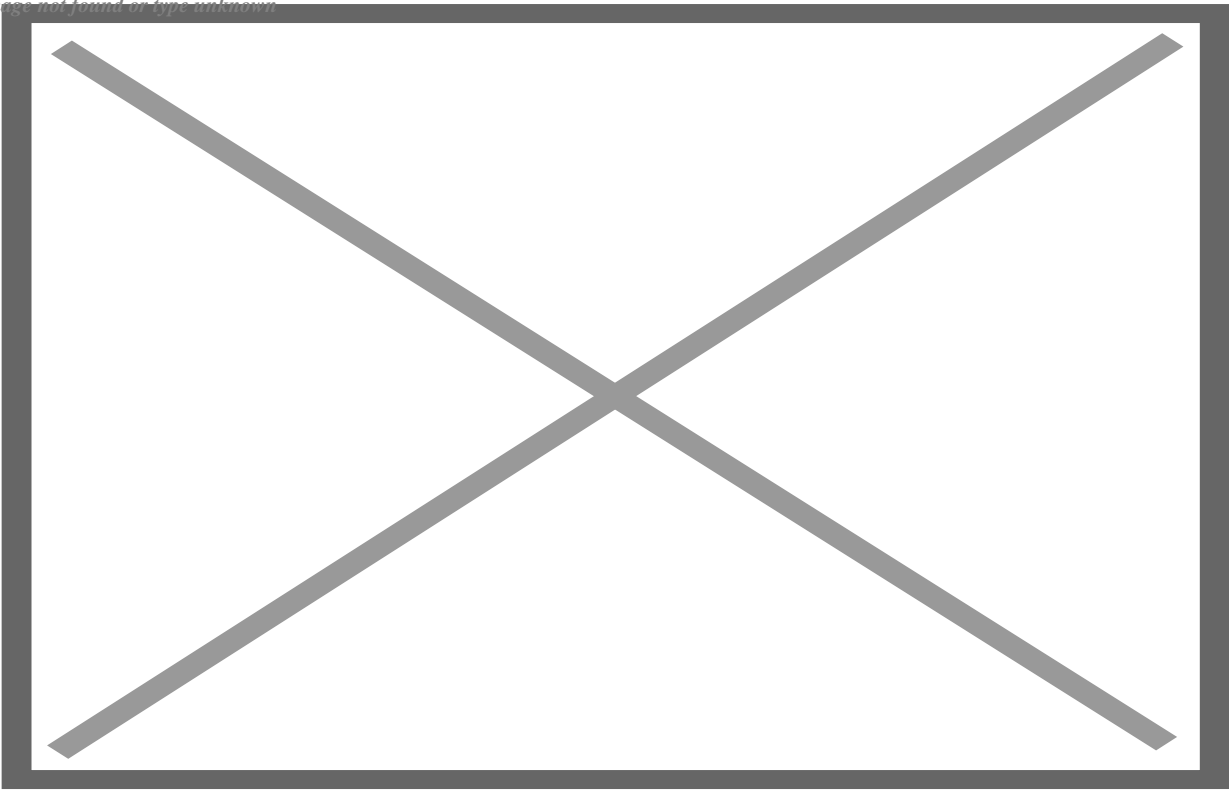


Pope Francis concerned about possible escalation of Middle East conflict

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Vatican City, April 14 (RHC)-- Pope Francis on Sunday expressed his regret at a possible escalation of the conflict in the Middle East, due to Iran's recent bellicose response to Israel's April 1 attack on its consulate in Damascus, Syria.

After reciting the Regina Caeli from the window of his study in the Vatican Apostolic Palace before the approximately 15 thousand faithful and pilgrims present in St. Peter's Square, the Supreme Pontiff expressed that "no one should threaten the existence of others".

The Bishop of Rome said that he follows "with concern, even with pain" the news of the last hours about a worsening of the situation due to the Iranian military action with the launching of about 200 drones and

missiles against Israel, an action expected after the provocation of Tel Aviv, by destroying the consulate of Tehran in Syria.

The Israeli bombing killed 11 people, among them seven members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), including General Mohammed Reza Zahedi, who was one of the most important military chiefs of that country.

The pontiff called for a halt to any action that "could fuel a spiral of violence with the risk of dragging the Middle East, where as a result of the Israeli-Palestinian war more than 34,000 people have already died in Zionist attacks on the Gaza Strip, into an even greater conflict.

"Let all nations defend peace," said the pope, who again pointed to the recognition of "two states, side by side, in conditions of security" as a way to solve the Israeli-Palestinian dispute.

Francis asked that "we soon reach a cease-fire in Gaza and follow the paths of negotiation with determination", while he referred to the need for the release of the Israeli hostages kidnapped since October last year and demanded help for the people of Gaza who have fallen into a humanitarian catastrophe.

"How much suffering! We pray for peace, no more war, no more attacks, no more violence! Yes to dialogue and yes to peace!", Pope Francis finally emphasized.

At 4:00 p.m. local time today, a meeting of the leaders of the countries that make up the Group of Seven (G7) began in Rome, coordinated by Giorgia Meloni, Prime Minister of Italy, the country that currently presides over this forum, which is also made up of the United States, France, Germany, Japan, Canada and the United Kingdom.

In a communiqué published on the official website of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers of this European nation, it is specified that in the debate among the G7 leaders, to be held this afternoon by videoconference, actions against Iran will be evaluated after the recent retaliatory attack against Israel. (Source:PL)

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