

"SOUNDS OF LOSS"

An audio installation to remember the lives lost in war - Atrium of Saint Peter's Basilica, 21 September 2026

"Sounds of Loss" is a global audio art installation conceived by filmmaker Philip Gröning to commemorate the UN International Day of Peace. This initiative involves broadcasting approximately 1,000 irregular clicking sounds across public spaces and media platforms to represent the statistical reality of wartime fatalities occurring throughout the day. By integrating these acoustic disruptions into everyday environments such as theatres, transport hubs and religious services, the project aims to bypass conscious mental filters and resonate within the unconscious perception of the public. The varying volume and timing of the clicks serve as a poignant reminder of the human lives lost, regardless of their cultural or political background. Ultimately, the work seeks to challenge the normalisation of conflict in modern society and foster a deeper, collective awareness of the urgent necessity for peace.

The Dicastery for Culture and Education of the Holy See was invited by Mr Gröning to support the project and, together with the Dicastery for Communication and the Fabric of Saint Peter's Basilica, is very pleased to endorse and participate in this important initiative. In this context, the installation will be hosted in the Atrium of Saint Peter's Basilica on 21 September, on the occasion of the UN International Day of Peace. The installation will serve to remind visitors to the Basilica of the reality of warfare and its cost in terms of human lives.

The Atrium of the Basilica welcomes thousands of visitors every day, and "Sounds of Loss" is a particularly creative way of marking the UN International Day of Peace and bringing it to the attention of a wider public.

In welcoming the project, Cardinal José Tolentino de Mendonça, Prefect of the Dicastery for Culture and Education, stated: "I am delighted that the Dicastery for Culture and Education has been able to support Philip Gröning in the realization of his 'Sounds of Loss' project. Philip Gröning is a true master of silence. In this project, he seeds the fertile ground of silence with short bursts of sound which serve to call our attention to the daily tragedy of the loss of life in wars around our world. He reminds us of the eloquence of silence, its capacity to call us to consciousness and a deeper engagement with our environment. This project is a summons to responsibility; to 'hear the cry' of those who are the victims of violence and aggression and to never resign ourselves to complacency and distraction."

Cardinal Mauro Gambetti, Archpriest of St. Peter's Basilica and President of the Fabric of Saint Peter's, said: "Welcoming the Sounds of Loss project to Saint Peter's Basilica means offering a space for listening and reflection on the victims of conflicts. On the occasion of the International Day of Peace, this sound installation reminds us of the value of every human life and of our shared responsibility to build paths of peace."

Paolo Ruffini, Prefect of the Dicastery for Communication, stated: "I feel it is my duty to thank Philip Gröning, with all my heart, for conceiving something as simple and powerful as Sounds of Loss, to awaken us from our torpor in the face of war. The Dicastery for Communication, Vatican News and Vatican Radio will stand alongside him, together with the Dicastery for Culture and Education and Saint Peter's Basilica, to make heard, amid the general silence, the quiet sighs of our conscience, which never cease to ask us 'why?' in the face of the 'senseless slaughter' of wars — to use the words of Benedict XV — repeated every day before our distracted eyes. A thousand sounds, over 49 hours, will remind us of as many lives being extinguished, eyes closing, hearts ceasing to beat. Stories we would rather not hear and which, for this reason, we drown out in the noise of everyday life, where everything is consumed and then removed, and death is reduced to an unpleasant thought. Communication is not detached from all this. And precisely for

this reason, it can and must explore other paths, other languages. Like the one found by Gröning. Each beat, an untold story, a face, a name, a voice silenced, a smile cut short. A warning that should leave us breathless. And yet, instead, it feeds rivers of empty words that overwhelm the sound of death, erasing faces and voices. All conflicts — as Don Tonino Bello used to say — are born from the fading of faces. Perhaps, to awaken us from this spell, we need to immerse ourselves in the quiet yet deafening ticking of a clock that does not count the minutes, but the final breaths of those who die in war. Let us try to listen to them. To think of their faces and their voices, as Pope Leo invited us to do this year in his Message for the World Day of Social Communications. And to allow ourselves to be changed.”

The artist and filmmaker Philip Gröning, who conceived the project, said: “In the very first year of this five-year project, I am overwhelmed to be given the opportunity to present “Sounds of Loss” in the Atrium of Saint Peter’s Basilica. I began “Sounds of Loss” in the winter of 2026. It appeared as though we had silently come to accept over 500 humans losing their lives in global wars daily. And I felt it was time to raise the fact of wars killing humans every 2.6 minutes back into our awareness. I am an artist. So the only thing I could do was to create a project which, over time, may open our perception to what we choose to ignore. Images are fleeting. Repetition and sound may be more persistent. We recorded over 24,000 samples of clicking, knocking and banging noises over a period of three months. Sounds ranging within 50 categories, from light switches, to old telegram machines, to rain on a tin roof in Japan, to large bronze casts in the Art Academy of Munich, old clocks, nuts cracked, door locks snapping, cardboard boxes crackling, and of course pencils on tables. We programmed a new device for sound designers to map sounds according to a multitude of criteria and spread them on a map, with islands and continents as they appeared. And in the end, we put together 49 hours consisting of 1,096 sounds. The number of humans killed at war statistically over 49 hours in 2026. I am thankful for the support of the Vatican and look forward to the continuation of “Sounds of Loss” until 2031.”

During the 20 and 21 September event, the Vatican News web portal will open a window onto Saint Peter’s Square connected to the Sounds of Loss audio. Vatican Radio will dedicate space in its programmes and news bulletins to the International Day of Peace and the Sounds of Loss project. L’Osservatore Romano will also provide coverage of the initiative.

Content of the Project

At the centre of the project is the “broadcasting” of a series of seemingly random clicks. The clicks are 1,096 individually recorded simple clicking or tapping sounds. They are designed and structured based on the following principles:

- Statistical representation: Each click represents one person killed in war during the UN International Day of Peace. Based on 2026 statistics projecting at least 500 wartime deaths daily (an average of 22.92 deaths per hour), a click occurs on average every 2.62 minutes across the 49-hour global timeframe.
- Irregular timing: Rather than playing at fixed, predictable beats, the clicks occur at irregular intervals — sometimes forming small clusters, pausing in silence, or returning in sudden outbursts — to mirror the dynamic and unpredictable nature of war.
- Varying volume: The volume of each click differs, with some loud, some soft and some very loud. This deliberate variation reflects how human empathy and media coverage are often biased towards victims sharing similar cultures, religions or skin colours.

Date: The intervention takes place globally on 21 September, the UN International Day of Peace.



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Global Duration: It spans 49 hours to encompass the full calendar day across all time zones, beginning in Kiribati (13 hours ahead of GMT) and concluding on Baker Island (12 hours behind GMT).

Locations: The Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City has officially endorsed the initiative. It will host and present the Sounds of Loss audio intervention on the UN International Day of Peace. The Cathedral traditionally serves as the venue for a speech by the incoming President of the UN General Assembly. The audio intervention is scheduled to form the backdrop to the incoming President's address on 20 September.

The initiative is also being supported in a wide number of places of worship globally, including the Cathedral of Santa Maria Matricolare in Verona.