

## **Archbishop Makarios of Australia: “Whoever disregards their history is like a tree that severs its own roots”**



A story filled with deep emotion began to be written in October 2024, when, with the blessing of His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, the “living” museum *Our People, Their Stories* ([www.opts.org.au](http://www.opts.org.au)) opened its online doors. Marking the completion of its first year of operation, an anniversary event was held on Saturday, 4 October, at the Australian National Maritime Museum, during which the project was officially presented in Sydney.

The event was honoured by the presence of His Eminence Archbishop Makarios of Australia and the Greek Minister of Culture, Ms. Lina Mendoni, who was accompanied by her special adviser, Ms. Anna Panagiotarea, and other associates. At first, the Archbishop and the Minister were guided through Australia’s National Monument to Migration—known as the “Welcome Wall”—as well as the warship exhibits of the National Maritime Museum. Upon entering the hall where the event

took place, Ms. Mendoni was welcomed by young members of the Hellenic Lyceum of Sydney, who offered her a bouquet of flowers. In honour of the Minister's island of origin, Chios, a young man was dressed in the island's traditional costume.

The anniversary event began with a screening of an audiovisual tribute, including a representative selection of the stories recorded as part of Our People, Their Stories. This was followed by addresses from His Eminence Archbishop Makarios and the Greek Minister of Culture, Ms. Mendoni. Presenting the project, the Archbishop made extensive reference to its true protagonists—the pioneering migrants who recount the stories and struggles of their lives. He warmly acknowledged the presence of several of them at the event, expressing heartfelt gratitude for their personal contribution to the advancement of Hellenism in the fifth continent. He also expressed his deep emotion that the stories revealed by the “living” museum have touched the hearts of audiences in Australia, Greece, and across the world, as attested by the more than 11 million views they have already gathered.

His Eminence then thanked the contributors to the project, and especially its Director and leading visionary, Mr. Markellos Petropoulos, praising his zeal and dedication. He also expressed gratitude to the sponsors and supporters, making special mention of the Greek Ministry of Culture, which has placed the project under its auspices and recently granted it financial support of 120,000 euros. Addressing Ms. Mendoni personally, he acknowledged that “from the outset, she embraced our ambitious vision, wholeheartedly supported our initiative, and offered us what we, the Greeks of the Diaspora, most need—the moral assurance that the government of our beloved homeland stands close to us, listens to us, cares for us, and actively honours the history being written by Greeks beyond the borders of Greece.”



Archbishop Makarios concluded his address with a message to the younger generation of the Greek diaspora, “the children and grandchildren of those wonderful people who, in difficult times, watered with their sweat the mighty tree of Hellenism in the Antipodes.” “What we enjoy today,” he emphasised, “are, for the most part, the fruits of that tree, which took root deeply through toil, hardship, and countless struggles. Therefore, take care to learn the stories of our people—your parents, your grandmothers, and your grandfathers—and be inspired by their example to face the challenges of the modern age. I implore you, do not overlook this precious inheritance. For whoever disregards their history is like a tree that severs its own roots.”

For her part, Minister Mendoni expressed her respect and admiration for the Greeks who emigrated during the difficult post-war years, and she praised the initiative of the Holy Archdiocese of Australia for recording their stories. “The Greek Ministry of Culture, recognising the value of cultural memory as a foundation of our national identity, warmly embraced this endeavour by placing it under its auspices,” she emphasised, adding: “We are committed that this patronage will not be merely symbolic, but substantial. We will support every effort that strengthens the cultural identity of the Hellenism of the Diaspora, every effort that promotes the outward reach of Greek culture. Our People, Their Stories is a model of such an effort, and we are convinced that it will become a reference point for Greek cultural presence in Australia and internationally.”

After the speeches concluded, guests enjoyed an engaging tour in an adjacent hall, where old artefacts connected to the migration history of the Greek-Australian community were on display.



The master of ceremonies for the anniversary event was Professor Vrasidas Karalis of the University of Sydney, Archon of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Among those present were Their Graces, the Regional Bishops and Assistant Bishops of the Holy Archdiocese of Australia; Archimandrite Ignatios Mourtzanos, Chancellor of the Holy Metropolis of Larissa and Tyrnavos; the Ambassador of Greece to Sydney, His Excellency Mr. Stavros Venizelos; the Deputy High Commissioner of Cyprus, Mr.



Nikolaos Varellas; the Consuls-General of Greece in Sydney and Melbourne, Mr. Georgios Skemperis and Ms. Dimitra Georgantzoglou; the Commercial Attaché of the Greek Embassy, Ms. Chrysoula Prokopaki; the Vice-President and Secretary-General of the Australian Council of the Holy Synod of the Church of Christ, Mr. Professor























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HELLENIC REPUBLIC  
Ministry of Culture



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Όποιος αδιαφορεί για την ιστορία  
του μοιάζει με δέντρο που κόβει  
τις ρίζες του.

Αρχιεπίσκοπος Αυστραλίας Μακάριος

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## OUR PEOPLE THEIR STORIES

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Αρχαιολογικός Αρχαιολόγος, Μουσείο

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Archaeological Museum of Australia

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