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Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew to the Ukrainian People: “The Church will not abandon you”



His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, on the feast of the Finding of the Precious Head of the Prophet, Forerunner and Baptist John, presided on Clean Tuesday, 24 February, at the Divine Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts. At the conclusion of the service, he celebrated a Trisagion for the repose of the souls of the victims of the war in Ukraine, marking four years since the Russian invasion of the country.

Present were the Consul of Greece in Constantinople, Mr Theophilos Georgakis, representing the Consul General; the Consul General of Ukraine, Mr Roman Nedilskyi, together with members of his staff; the Consuls General of Austria, Argentina, Belgium, Moldova, and the Netherlands; as well as representatives of the Consuls General of the United Kingdom, Canada, the Federal Republic of Germany, Poland, Slovakia, France, and Sweden.

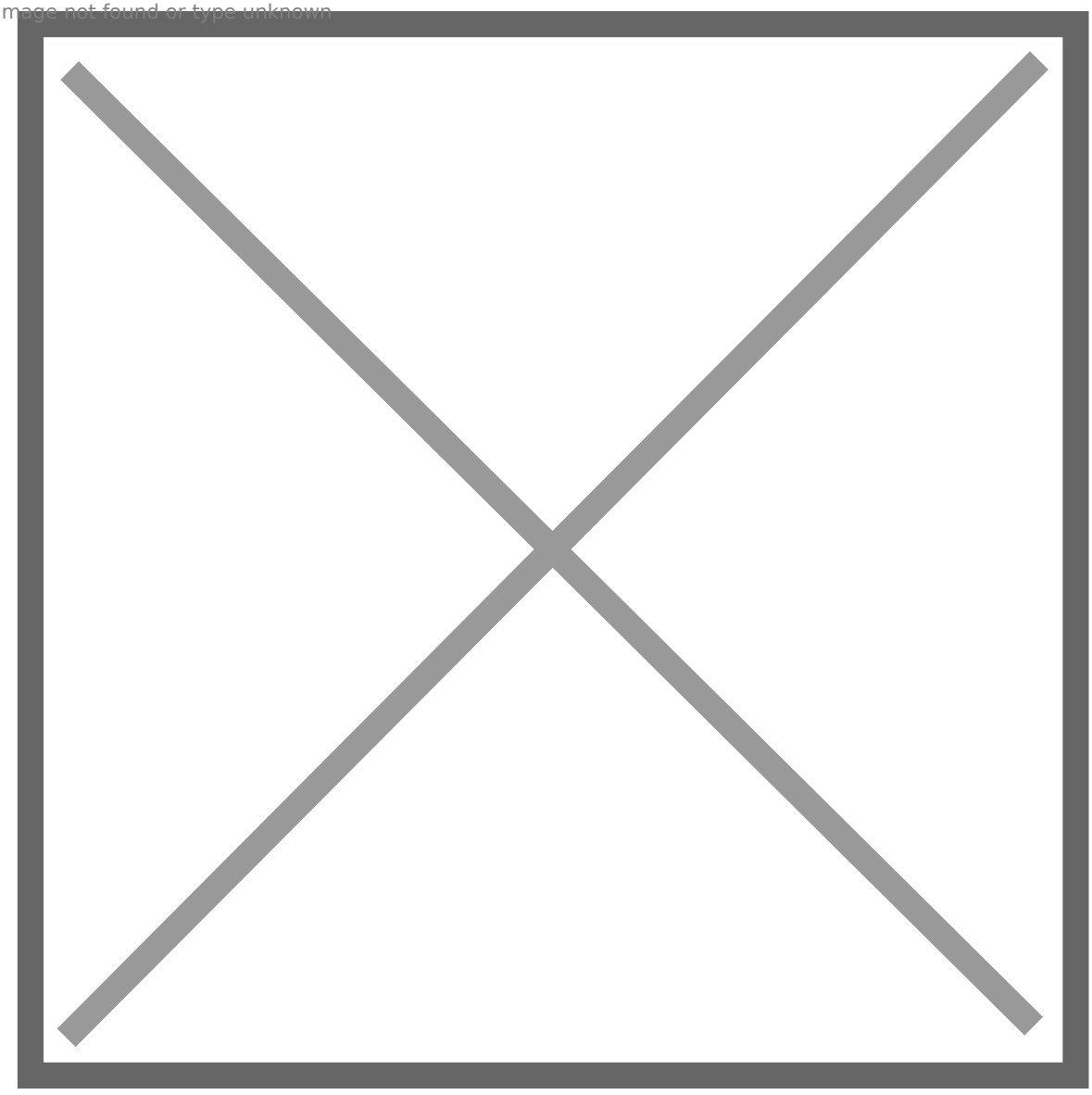
Also in attendance were more than two hundred women, mothers, sisters, wives, and daughters of fallen, captured, and missing Ukrainian soldiers, who had travelled from Ukraine to pray at the Patriarchal Church, holding throughout

photographs of their beloved family members.

In his address, His All-Holiness referred to the completion of four years since the Russian attack against the sovereign nation of Ukraine, which has shattered the lives of countless families.

“Each victim is not a statistic. It is a sacred life bearing the unique imprint of God,” he emphasised, urging all not to allow hardened indifference to prevail in our hearts.

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Elsewhere in his remarks, the Ecumenical Patriarch highlighted the resilience of the Ukrainian people, who have preserved their faith, language, and cultural heritage amid pressures to disappear into the shadows of larger empires. “Efforts to suppress the spirit of a people may inflict deep wounds, but they cannot extinguish the life within it. The yearning for freedom and the ability to live according to one’s

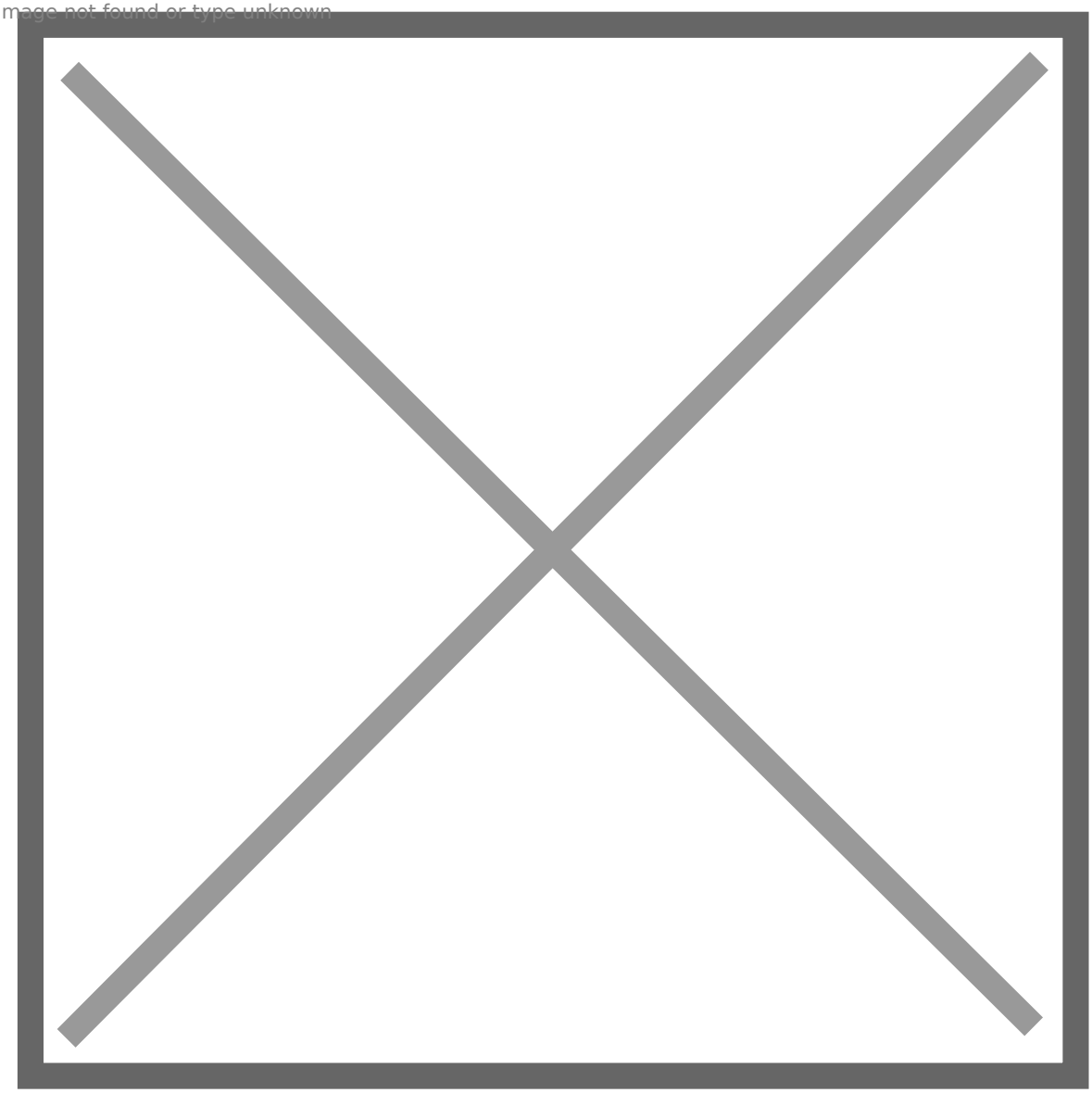
conscience are God-given realities that cannot be erased by violence," he said, once again expressing the unwavering concern of the Mother Church of Constantinople for Ukraine.

"We offer our prayers today for those whose lives have been lost, not as collateral damage in a strategy of power, but as beloved persons whose absence leaves a void that no geopolitical arrangement can fill," he stressed. He added that on this day we pray for all who suffer, for families torn apart, and for those experiencing captivity. He also prayed for all those defending their homeland "not from a desire for conflict, but from deep love for their families and for a future not yet written."

As His All-Holiness noted, the aim must not be merely a cessation of hostilities, but a genuine, just, and lasting peace.

"A battlefield without gunfire is not always peace. It may be an uneasy silence, fatigue mistaken for calm, or submission disguised as tranquillity. True concord requires the restoration of what has been violated and recognition of a nation's right to determine its own destiny. It is a moral imperative that the future of a people cannot be the subject of secret negotiation or decided without its full and equal participation. Anything less is not peace, it is simply injustice given a diplomatic name."

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“The Church will not abandon you,” His All-Holiness assured the Ukrainian people, affirming that she will remain at their side until the final triumph of peace.

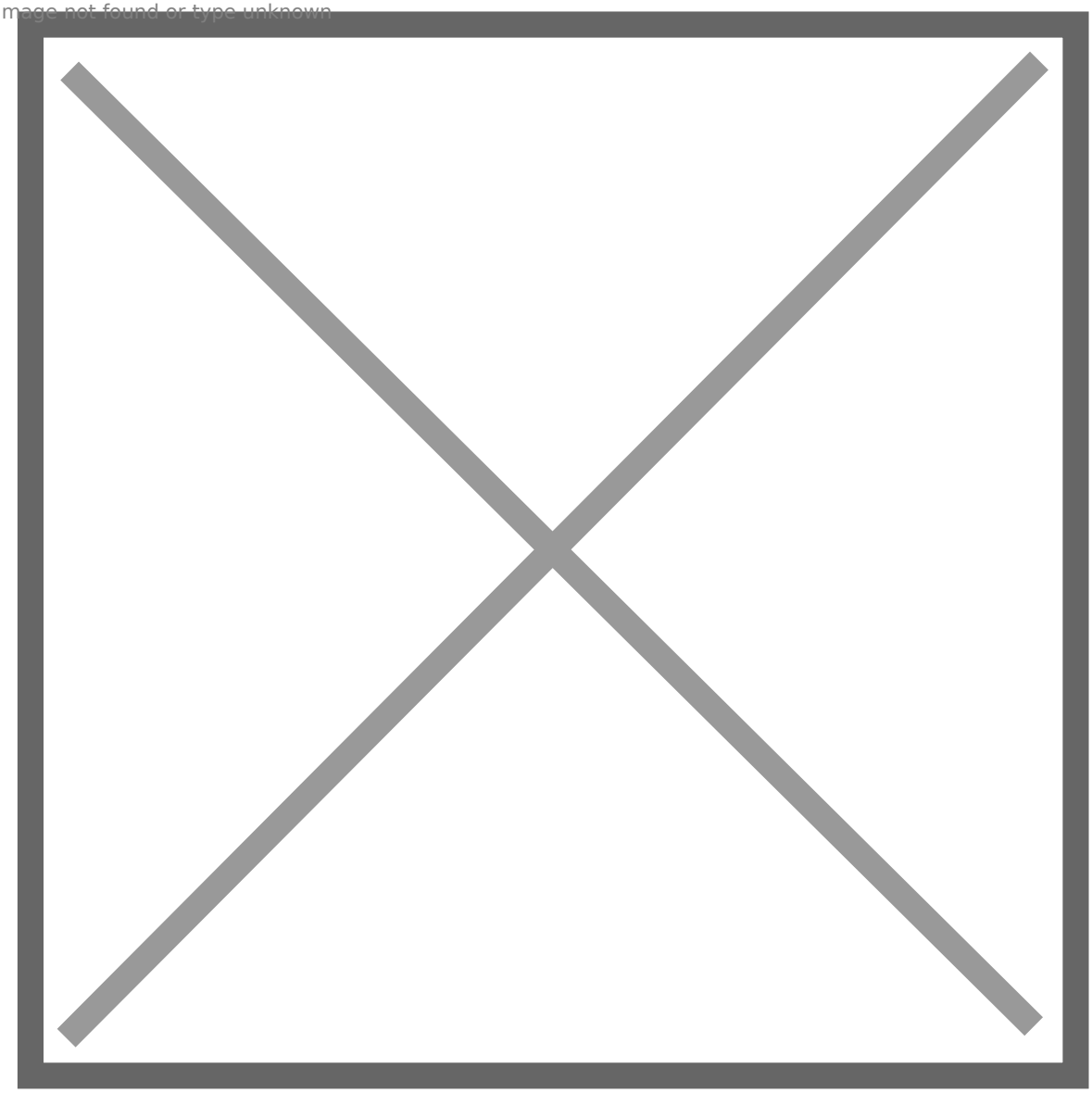
Earlier, the Consul General of Ukraine addressed the Patriarch, stressing that Russian aggression “has brought to Ukrainian soil crimes the world has no right to forget: destroyed homes, murdered and tortured civilians, abducted children, devastated churches. The torture and abuse of Ukrainian prisoners of war are crimes that shock the conscience of humanity.”

He described the war as unprovoked and violent, recalling that His All-Holiness had characterised it as “diabolical.”

“It is a sin before God and a crime against humanity. For this reason, the spiritual support we feel here, at the heart of Orthodoxy, is so precious.

Your All-Holiness, allow me to express our profound gratitude to Your revered Person for your consistent and courageous support of Ukraine’s struggle for freedom. You have condemned this war as evil, as lawlessness, as an attack against a peaceful people.

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Your voice is the voice of Christian love and solidarity. Your voice so deeply troubles the aggressor that its secret services attempt public pressure against Your All-Holiness. Your voice is a light of hope for the Ukrainian people in the embrace of the Mother Church.”

Early in the afternoon, His All-Holiness presided from the Patriarchal Throne in the venerable Patriarchal Church during the sacred service of Great Compline on Clean Tuesday.

Photographs: Nikos Papachristou

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