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Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew: May peace prevail in the Middle East and Ukraine



On Saturday, April 4, 2026, His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew delivered a keynote address at the “HERITAGE ISTANBUL” meeting, dedicated to the preservation and promotion of the city’s cultural heritage.

Speaking in Turkish, the Patriarch emphasised that the future of any society is closely linked to how it preserves its memory. He noted that societies which lose their connection with the testimonies of the past risk losing not only their history but also their sense of direction. “Cultural heritage is not only a space for remembering the past,” he stressed, “but also a shared responsibility toward the future.”

He further described cultural heritage as the memory of humanity—how a society understands itself, reflects on its shared experiences, and determines what legacy it will leave behind. In this context, he highlighted the centuries-long contribution of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in safeguarding and transmitting this legacy. He referred to restoration efforts of churches, schools, and cemeteries, as well as the protection and digitisation of rare manuscripts and archival material, supported by experts from various scientific fields.

“The Church, with all its elements, creates its own unique cultural fabric,” the Patriarch noted, underscoring also the spiritual, artistic, and symbolic value of iconography.

Referring to the preservation of collective memory, he recalled the Patriarchate’s initiatives marking the 1700th anniversary of the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea, including the planned joint commemoration with Pope Leo XIV and other Christian leaders in Nicaea, as well as a papal visit to the Ecumenical Patriarchate, during which a significant joint declaration was signed.

The Patriarch also stressed that the Patriarchate is not only concerned with preserving the past, but also actively engages with contemporary global and local developments. He highlighted its contribution to fostering dialogue, coexistence, and solidarity, promoting values such as tolerance, understanding, and mutual respect, while rejecting exclusion and hate speech.

Concluding, he reaffirmed that the Ecumenical Patriarchate continually prays for the end of conflicts and the establishment of peace in the Middle East, Ukraine, and all regions affected by war.

The Patriarch was welcomed and accompanied throughout the event by the President of the Organising Committee, Osman Murat Akan, while representatives of participating organisations warmly invited him to visit their exhibition stands and presented their cultural initiatives.

Photographs: Nikos Papachristou

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