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Warfare continues in Ukraine; Archdiocese of America begins major fundraising effort for the country



A day after seizing their first major Ukrainian city, Russian forces on Thursday continued to lay siege to urban areas across the country, in a grinding offensive that has pummeled even civilian neighborhoods. The assault has also deepened a humanitarian crisis that has pushed some one million people to flee the country.

The fall of the ancient Black Sea port of Kherson raised fears that other cities could soon. Russian forces appeared to be making their biggest gains in the south, where they had nearly surrounded another two strategic cities in an apparent bid to capture Ukraine’s entire Black Sea coast.

Additionally, Russian troops have encircled the port city of Mariupol, a key point between the Russian border and the Russia-controlled Crimean Peninsula. Mariupol and surrounding villages host up to 150,000 ethnic Greeks, many of whom trace their roots to the region for centuries.

A continent away, the United Nations said a million Ukrainians had become refugees in the week since Russia launched its invasion, one of the largest exoduses in recent times.

At the same time as the horror and stench of war hung over Ukraine, Orthodox Churches around the world continued efforts to assist the victims and refugees.

For instance, the Archbishop of America, His Eminence Elpidophoros, on Wednesday reaffirmed the Archdiocese's solidarity with Ukrainians and announced a major fundraising effort to help those most affected by the Russian invasion.

His Eminence made the statements at the Democritus University of Thrace, in the northeast Greek city of Komotini, and during a ceremony where he was conferred an honorary doctorate by the faculty of Greek Philology.

In his address, entitled "The Ecumenical Patriarchate as a Body of Peace and Mutual Understanding Between People and Cultures," the Archbishop said the fundraising effort aims to raise $1 million for both immediate and long-term support of the Ukrainian people.

Previously, the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America donated $100,000 to the Ecumenical Patriarchate to support the efforts of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine.

In a related development, the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, His All Holiness Bartholomew I, released a message on the occasion of the looming commencement of Great Lent, referring specifically to the situation in Ukraine.
His All Holiness referred to a "heavy Cross" being borne these days by the pious Ukrainian people, who are burdened with the unspeakable terrors of an unprovoked and irrational offensive war.