



United States  
of America

# Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 119<sup>th</sup> CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Vol. 171

WASHINGTON, TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 2025

No. 151

## WELCOMING HIS ALL-HOLINESS, ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH BARTHOLOMEW

Mr. Speaker, it is an extraordinary honor to welcome His All-Holiness, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, to Washington, D.C. We are grateful to receive not only the spiritual leader of more than 300 million Orthodox Christians worldwide, but also a man whose life and ministry have embodied courage, compassion, and an unshakable commitment to peace and human dignity.

He was born Demetrios Arhondonis in 1940 on the island of Imvros in Turkey – most inhabitants of Imvros were Greek until the 1960s, when the Turkish government forced them to emigrate. In 1970, the Turkish government officially renamed Imvros to Gökçeada. Thus, Patriarch Bartholomew's journey has been marked from its earliest days by faith and perseverance in the face of religious persecution and nationalistic intolerance. Educated at the Theological School of Halki and later in Rome, Munich, and Switzerland, he distinguished himself in the fields of theology and canon law, becoming a respected scholar even before his ordination. In October 1991, he was elected the 270th Archbishop of Constantinople-New Rome and Ecumenical Patriarch, assuming the role of "first among equals" in the ancient Patriarchate founded by the Apostle Andrew.

Since that time, His All-Holiness has been called many things: the "Patriarch of Peace," the "Green Patriarch," and, above all, a bridge builder. For more than three decades, he has labored under extraordinary difficulties. In a region where the Orthodox community has suffered harassment and intimidation by Islamic extremists, he has stood steadfast, not only defending the faithful, but offering reconciliation to their adversaries. He has endured hostility, threats, and attempts to silence his office, yet his response has always been guided by the Christian virtues of forgiveness, humility, and love.

His All-Holiness has taken that witness far beyond the walls of the Patriarchate in Constantinople. He has convened dialogues among Christians, Muslims, and Jews, creating unprecedented opportunities for mutual understanding in the Middle East, one of the world's most divided regions, and beyond. From Libya to Syria, from Egypt to Azerbaijan, he has sought not confrontation, but instead "a dialogue of loving truth."

Mr. Speaker, His All-Holiness is not only a voice of principle, but a leader of action. He presided over the historic Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church in Crete in 2016, granted autocephaly to the Church of Ukraine in 2019, and continues to strengthen unity within the Orthodox world while opening channels of dialogue with the Catholic Church and other Christian traditions. His leadership is defined not by power or coercion, but by example - the examples of service, sacrifice, and fidelity to Christ's command to love our neighbor as ourselves.

As we welcome him, we are mindful that the challenges he faces are immense. Religious freedom is often denied to Orthodox Christians – and under constraint in many of the lands they have inhabited for centuries. Christians and other minorities in many regions still face persecution.

Your All-Holiness, we thank you for your witness, for your courage, and for your example. Washington welcomes you, not only as a guest, but as a brother, a teacher, and a peacemaker. May your visit strengthen the bonds between our peoples, and may your ministry continue to inspire us all to walk humbly, act justly, and love mercifully in the service of God and one another.



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