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U.S. & World Response

MAY, 1933: EMERGENCY SESSION OF AMERICAN JEWISH CONGRESS (AJC)



When Adolf Hitler was named chancellor of Germany on January 30, 1933, Rabbi Stephen Wise, president of the AJC, organized a mass protest rally in New York City. The AJC organized protest rallies throughout the 1930s and 1940s. In August 1933, the AJC led a general boycott of German goods. Although active in protesting Nazi mistreatment of German Jews, the AJC abstained from publicly calling upon the U.S. government to admit additional refugees from Germany. In 1936 the American Jewish Congress was instrumental in establishing the World Jewish Congress (WJC).

USHMM Photo Archives #89752

JULY 6-15, 1938: REFUGEE CONFERENCE IN EVIAN



The Hotel Royal, site of the Evian Conference.
Evian-les-Bains, France, July 1938.

Delegates from 32 countries and representatives from relief organizations meet in Evian-les-Bains, France, to discuss the German-Jewish refugees. The U.S. encourages all countries to find a long-term solution to the problem. However, the U.S. and other countries are unwilling to ease immigration restrictions. Most countries fear that an increase of refugees will cause further economic hardship. With the exception of the Dominican Republic, no country is willing to accept more refugees than provided for under existing regulations.

USHMM Photo Archives #62121

FEBRUARY 9, 1939 : LIMITED REFUGEE BILL PROPOSED IN U.S. CONGRESS

The Wagner-Rogers refugee aid bill is introduced in the United States Senate by Senator Robert F. Wagner (D-New York). This bill calls for the admission to the United States of 20,000 Jewish refugee children under the age of 14 over the next two years, in addition to those immigrating under the normal quotas. The bill will be introduced in the House of Representatives by Representative Edith Nourse Rogers (R-Massachusetts) five days later. Charity organizations across the country publicize the plight of Jewish refugee children in an attempt to gain support for the bill. However, organizations opposing immigration beyond what was permitted by law claim that the refugee children would deprive American children of aid. After several months of debate, the bill is defeated in committee. The bill would have provided refuge for thousands of German, Austrian, and Czech Jewish children.

<http://www.ushmm.org/outreach/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007698>

MAY 1939 : BRITISH GOVERNMENT RESTRICTS IMMIGRATION INTO PALESTINE

The Palestinian-Arab revolt against the British Mandate Authority in Palestine from 1936 to 1938, inspired in part by opposition to the influx of Jews into the Mandate during the early 1930s, leads to a decisive change in British policy in Palestine. After attempts to broker a compromise between Arabs and Jews in Palestine in the winter of 1939, the British government, now preparing for war against Nazi Germany, issued the White Paper of 1939, which discarded plans to partition the Mandate into separate Jewish and Arab states and announced the future establishment of an independent Palestine governed by Palestinian Jews and Palestinian Arabs in proportion to the number of each group in the population. The British also restrict Jewish immigration to Palestine, setting a limit of 75,000 new Jewish immigrants for the years 1940 to 1944. During the war, there is no attempt to relax this immigration policy; restrictions on Jewish immigration remain in force until the establishment of Israel in 1948. In response to British restrictions, particularly after World War II, illegal immigration of Jewish refugees to Palestine increases. The British intercept the illegal immigrants and intern them in camps.

<http://www.ushmm.org/outreach/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007698>

MAY 13, 1939: 937 JEWISH REFUGEES FLEE NAZI GERMANY AND SAIL FOR HAVANA, CUBA

In May 1939, 937 passengers, mostly Jewish refugees, left Hamburg, Germany, en route to Cuba. All passengers held landing certificates temporarily admitting them to Cuba on condition they move on to other countries to settle. The President of Cuba announced that he would not honor the documents. When the ship sailed close to Florida with the remaining 907 passengers, U.S. officials did not permit the passengers to land. As the *St. Louis* sailed back to Europe. Great Britain, France, the Netherlands and Belgium agreed to admit all passengers as refugees.



Refugees aboard the "St. Louis" wait to hear whether Cuba will grant them entry. Off the coast of Havana, Cuba, June 3, 1939.

USHMM Photo Archives #11291

1938-1940: KINDERTRANSPORT



Kindertransport was the informal name of a series of rescue efforts which brought thousands of refugee Jewish children to Great Britain, France, Belgium and Holland from Nazi Germany, including Austria and the Czech Lands, between 1938 and 1940. Following the nationwide violence staged by the Nazi Party upon Jews during Kristallnacht, the British government eased immigration restrictions for certain categories of Jewish refugees. British and other West European authorities agreed to admit an unspecified number of children under the age of 17 from Germany and German-annexed territories.

Passport issued to Gertrud Gerda Levy, who left Germany in August 1939 on a Children's Transport (*Kindertransport*) to Great Britain. Berlin, Germany, August 23, 1939.

USHMM Photo Archives #07816

SEPTEMBER 5, 1939: SIGNING OF THE NEUTRALITY LAW



Four days after the outbreak of World War II, Secretary of State Cordell Hull signs the Neutrality Law (first signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt) at the State Department. Washington, D.C., United States, September 5, 1939.

USHMM Photo Archives #02868

JULY-AUGUST 1940: CHIUNE SUGIHARA ISSUES TRANSIT VISAS FOR JEWISH REFUGEES



In the summer of 1940, when refugees came to him with bogus visas for Curacao and other Dutch possessions in the Americas, Sugihara facilitated their escape from war-torn Europe. In the absence of clear instructions from Tokyo, he granted 10-day visas for transit through Japan to hundreds of refugees who held Curacao destination visas. Before closing his consulate in the fall of 1940, Sugihara even gave visas to refugees who lacked all travel papers.

Chiune Sugihara, Japanese consul general in Kaunas, Lithuania, who in July-August 1940 issued more than 2,000 transit visas for Jewish refugees. Helsinki, Finland, 1937-1938. USHMM Photo Archives #77563

1939-1942: AMERICAN FRIENDS SERVICE COMMITTEE HELPS AID JEWISH REFUGEES

During 1941 and 1942, the AFSC chose Jewish children from children's homes and refugee camps in southern France for transfer to the United States under the auspices of the U.S. Committee for the Care of European Children. The actions of the AFSC showed that interfaith activity on behalf of European Jews could be successful.



Quaker delegates of the American Friends Service Committee who set up a relief and rescue operation in Toulouse, France, January 1941

USHMM Photo Archives #03090

AUGUST 1942: RIEGNER TELEGRAM REACHES THE U.S.



In August 1942, Rabbi Wise received a cable from Gerhart Riegner, the WJC representative in Switzerland. Riegner reported that the Nazis had planned and were implementing a policy to murder the Jews of Europe; the cable also referred generally to an undefined location in Silesia as the site for this mass murder. After the State Department confirmed the accuracy of the information in the cable, now known as the "Riegner telegram," the AJC convened a Joint Emergency Committee. The committee sought to coordinate the major Jewish organizations in the United States to lobby the Roosevelt administration to take more steps to rescue European Jews.

Gerhart Riegner. United States, 1948.

USHMM Photo Archives #17309

JANUARY 1942: JEWISH ARMY IN FRANCE

The Jewish Army (Armée Juive; AJ), is established by Zionist youth groups in Toulouse, France. Members are recruited from both Jewish and non-Jewish youth and resistance groups and are trained in military and sabotage activities. AJ members smuggle money out of Switzerland to France to distribute to Jewish relief agencies. The AJ smuggles about 500 Jews and non-Jews across the border into neutral Switzerland. During the Allied march through France after June 6, 1944, the AJ participates in uprisings in Paris, Lyon, and Toulouse against the German occupation.



Group portrait of a Jewish French underground group named "Compagnie Reiman." This photograph was taken after the liberation of France. Paris, France, 1945.

USHMM Photo Archives #04090

AUGUST - OCTOBER, 1943: TREBLINKA UPRISING & SOBIBOR UPRISING

August 2, 1943: Treblinka prisoners quietly seize weapons from the camp armory. Hundreds of prisoners storm the main gate in an attempt to escape. Many are killed by machine-gun fire. More than 300 do escape; most are recaptured & killed by German SS & police units.

Early 1943: Deportations to Sobibor slowed. Prisoners suspected that they would soon be killed & the camp dismantled. They plan a revolt & mass escape from the camp.

October 14, 1943: The prisoners revolt, quietly killing German SS managers & Trawniki-trained guards. The guards open fire & prevent prisoners from reaching the main exit, forcing them to attempt escape through a minefield. About 300 escape, but most are killed in a massive manhunt. Around 60 survive the war.



A group portrait of some of the participants in the uprising at the Sobibor killing center. Poland, August 1944.

USHMM Photo Archives #10625

OCTOBER 2, 1943: SWEDEN OFFERS ASYLUM TO JEWS OF DENMARK

At the end of September 1943, the German plan to arrest and deport Danish Jews is leaked to Danish politicians who warn the Jewish population in Denmark and urge them to go into hiding. In response, the Danish underground and many in the general population organize a nationwide effort to smuggle Jews to the coast where Danish fishermen ferry them to Sweden, whose government announced it would admit as refugees any Jews who could reach Swedish territory. In little more than three weeks, the Danes ferry more than 7,000 Jews and close to 700 of their non-Jewish relatives to Sweden. The Germans seize around 500 Jews and deport to the Theresienstadt ghetto.



Danish fishermen used this boat to carry Jews to safety in Sweden during the German occupation. Denmark, 1943 or 1944.

USHMM Photo Archives #62187

JANUARY 13, 1944: UNITED STATES TAKES ACTION

The U.S. government comes under increasing pressure to heighten rescue efforts in Europe. On January 13, 1944, a memo from the Treasury Department rebukes the State Department for its relative inaction regarding rescue efforts. U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt is urged to establish a government commission to coordinate the rescue of Europe's Jews. On January 22, 1944, Roosevelt signs Executive Order 9417, establishing the War Refugee Board. The efforts of the WRB during 1944 and 1945 are believed to have saved the lives of up to 200,000 European Jews.



Meeting of the War Refugee Board in the office of Executive Director John Pehle.
Washington, D.C., United States, March 21, 1944.

USHMM Photo Archives #85939

JULY 9, 1944: RAOUL WALLENBERG IN BUDAPEST



Raoul Wallenberg, a diplomat from neutral Sweden, arrives in Budapest on July 9, 1944, tasked by the Swedish Foreign Ministry and the U.S. War Refugee Board with rescue and relief operations aimed at the Jews in Budapest. In cooperation with the Swiss legation and the International Red Cross, Wallenberg issues Swedish protective passes & moves Jews into houses under Swedish protection. In November 1944, when the Germans begin to force march Jews from Budapest to labor camps in Austria, Wallenberg pursues the march and removes Jews with protective papers and returns them to safe houses in Budapest. As part of a joint effort including the Swiss legation and the International Red Cross, Wallenberg successfully wards off threats from German and Hungarian authorities to systematically murder the surviving Budapest Jews residing in safe houses.

Protective document issued to Erika Vermes by the Swedish Red Cross.
Sweden, September 1944

USHMM Photo Archives #99607