

Our National Hero Of Solidarity



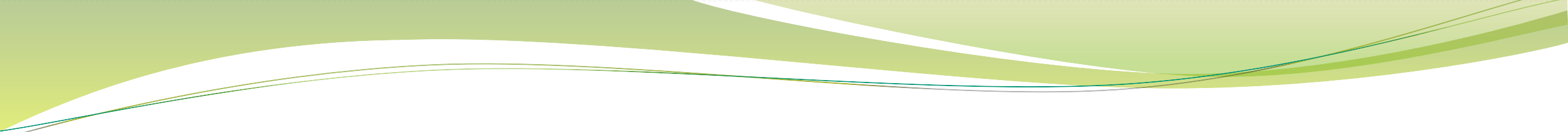
TOGETHER WE CAN



ARISTIDES DE SOUSA MENDES



(Cabanas de Viriato, July 19, 1885— Lisbon, April 3, 1954)



Aristides de Sousa Mendes
was one of the greatest
heroes of the Second World
War.

As the Portuguese consul stationed in Bordeaux, France, he found himself confronted in June of 1940 with the reality of many thousands of refugees outside the Portuguese consulate attempting to escape the horrors of the Nazi war machine.



Outside the Portuguese consulate in Bordeaux

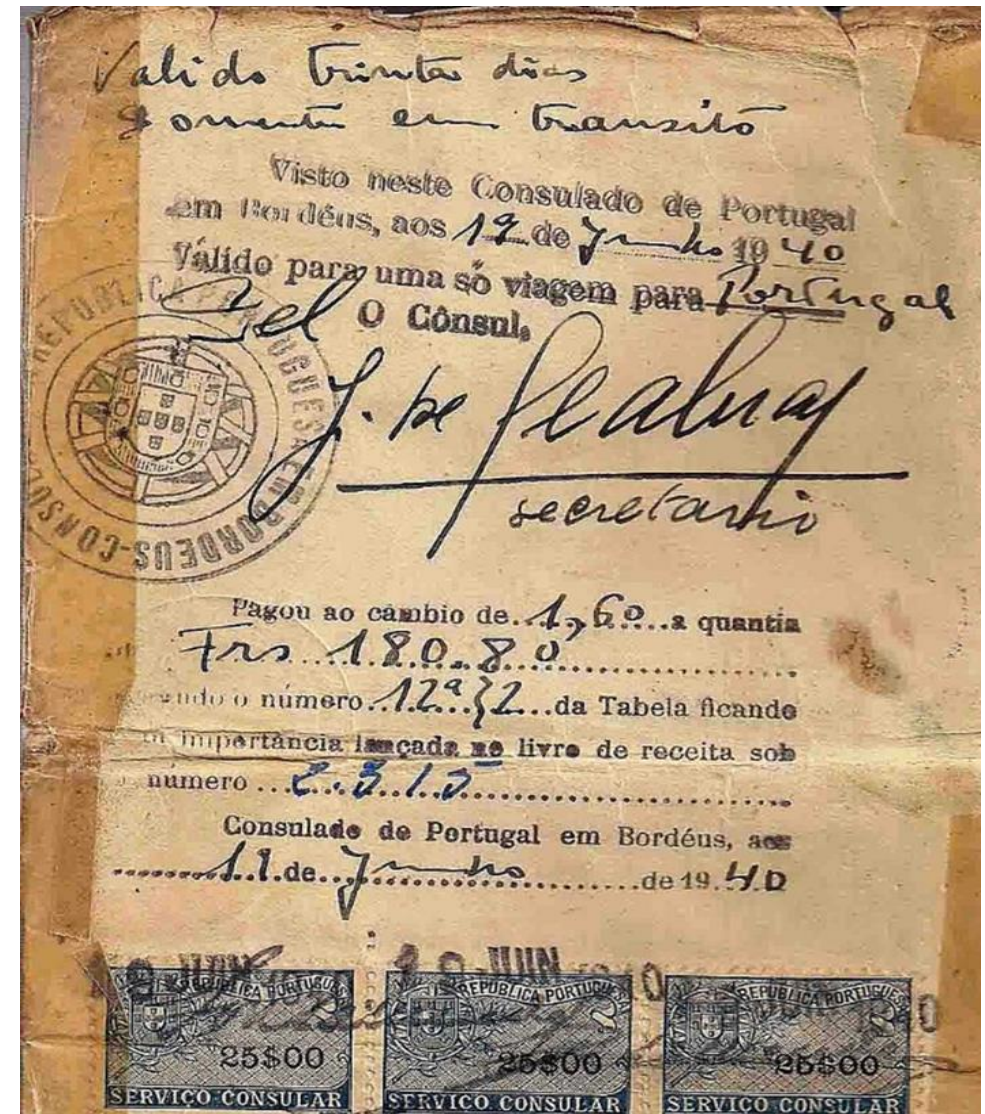
These persons were in desperate need of visas to get out of France, and a Portuguese visa would allow them safe passage through Spain to Lisbon, the capital of Portugal, where they could find liberty to travel to other parts of the globe.



Outside the Portuguese consulate in Bordeaux

- Portugal, officially neutral, yet unofficially pro-Hitler and under the dictatorial rule of Antonio de Oliveira Salazar, issued a directive – the infamous “Circular 14” – to all its diplomats to deny safe haven to refugees, including explicitly Jews, Russians, and stateless persons who could not freely return to their countries of origin. Aristides de Sousa Mendes’s act of heroism consisted in choosing to defy these inhumane orders and follow his conscience instead. **“I would rather stand with God against Man than with Man against God.”** he declared.

Sousa Mendes issued some 30,000 visas, including about 10,000 to Jews, over the period of a few days. This heroic feat was characterized by the Holocaust historian Yehuda Bauer as **“the largest rescue action by a single individual during the Holocaust.”**



Visas granted to citizens of the countries involved in the project "Together we can":

Cyprus: <http://sousamendesfoundation.org/countries/cyprus>

Italy: <http://sousamendesfoundation.org/countries/italy>

Poland: <http://sousamendesfoundation.org/countries/poland>

Spain: <http://sousamendesfoundation.org/countries/spain>

Other countries: <http://sousamendesfoundation.org/countries>

The Sousa Mendes visa recipients came from forty-six countries and all walks of life. They were Jews and non-Jews, public figures and private citizens, most with passports but many without.

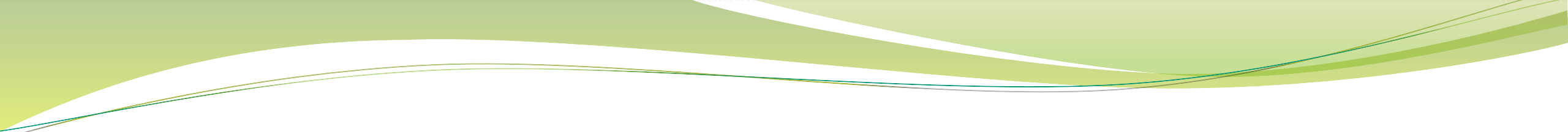
- Most of the visa recipients were able to cross into Portugal and arrived at the border town of Vilar Formoso.

He helped many of them to get near the Spanish border.



- There they were sorted by the Portuguese authorities and assigned to “fixed residences” where they were required to live for the duration of their time in the country. They were not permitted to remain in Portugal. Their visas were valid for only thirty days, during which time they were required to find ship passage and visas to another country. Many Sousa Mendes visa recipients were initially unsuccessful in finding ship passage and onward visas, and required multiple extensions of their Portuguese visas – extensions that were generally granted.





Many other visa recipients were unable to do cross into Portugal because they arrived at the Hendaye, France/Irun, Spain border too late. On June 24, 1940 the crossing was sealed by the Spanish authorities on the request of the Portuguese authorities. The New York Times estimated the number of refugees trapped in Nazi-occupied France by this border closure to be around 10,000. Because of the location and the timing, these refugees were certainly Sousa Mendes visa recipients. Of those, some survived the Holocaust and others were murdered.

For his act of defiance Sousa Mendes was severely punished by Salazar, stripped of his diplomatic position and forbidden from earning a living. He had fifteen children, who were themselves blacklisted and prevented from attending university or finding meaningful work.



In this way what was once an illustrious and well-respected family – one of the great families of Portugal – was crushed and destroyed. The family’s ancestral home, known as “Casa do Passal,” was repossessed by the bank and eventually sold to cover debts.



- Before his death in 1954, Sousa Mendes asked his children to clear his name and have the honor of the family restored. His sons and daughters, along with their children – now scattered all over the globe – have fought for decades to have his deeds posthumously recognized.



Memory card of Sousa Mendes in Bayonne

Homage in Vienna



Homage to Aristides in Portugal



Righteous Among the Nations

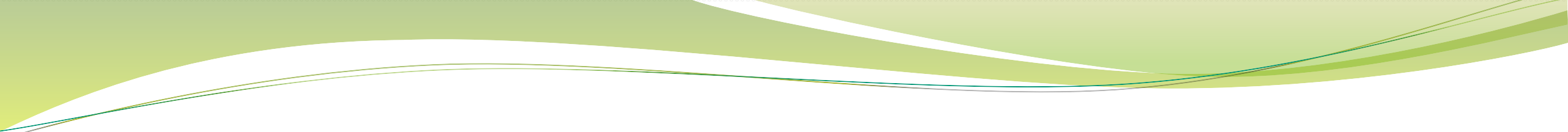
- The first recognition came in 1966 from Israel, which declared Aristides de Sousa Mendes to be a “Righteous Among the Nations.” In 1986, the United States Congress issued a proclamation honoring his heroic act. Later he was finally recognized by Portugal, when its President Mário Soares apologized to the Sousa Mendes family and the Portuguese Parliament promoted him posthumously to the rank of Ambassador. The face of Aristides de Sousa Mendes has now appeared on postage stamps in several countries.

Righteous Among the Nations

- Aristides de Sousa Mendes is an example of the fight **against intolerance, against racism and genocide.** Aristides de Sousa Mendes's act of conscience consisted in defying the direct orders of his government and exhibiting courage, moral rectitude, unselfishness, and self-sacrifice by issuing visas to all refugees regardless of nationality, race, religion or political opinions.

*“I could not
have acted
otherwise, and
I therefore
accept all that
has befallen me
with love.”*





In the memorial Yad Vashem, to the victims of the holocaust, in Jerusalem, there is a tree with a Portuguese name. This name is that of Aristides de Sousa Mendes, whom they called "the Portuguese Schindler" because he also had his list: he saved from the death about 30 thousand persecuted by the Nazis. For this he disobeyed the direct orders of Salazar and ruined a brilliant diplomatic career.

Memorial Yad Vashem



Memorial Yad Vashem



Tree in Honor of Mendes



Tree in Honor of Mendes



Ambassador **SOUSA MENDES**
saved more **Jews** than
Oscar Schindler

*“It was truly
my intention
to save all
those people”*



Our National Hero Of Solidarity

