

On the 17th of October during its traditional Souccoth dinner at Hekhal Hanes, the Henry Dunant Lodge, under the Presidency of Hilda Cohen, tribute was paid to Aristides de Sousa Mendes, Righteous among the Nations, Portuguese Consul in Bordeaux, who saved 30,000 souls against the will of his government that he personally strongly paid for until the end of his life.



In the presence of about a hundred guests, journalist at "Le Monde" José-Alain Fralon and author of the book "Aristides de Sousa Mendes the Righteous from Bordeaux", producer of the film "Disobedience" and grandson of the Consul, Mr. Gerald Mendes and Mrs Monica Barzilay, granddaughter of a "holder of a Mendes visa" each took their turn to tell us how the story of this Righteous person had personally touched them.

With his usual expertise, Philippe Lugassy, journalist at TSR and moderator of the discussion, managed to bring the speakers to tell the stories holding the audience spellbound as all were able to ask questions at the end of the conference.

During the 30 years of Salazar regime, Portugal purposely ignored Aristides de Sousa Mendes's action, at it is only in the 80's that Yad Vashem recognised that this "rather unorthodox Consul" deserved to become Righteous Among the Nations. In June 1940, in only 9 days time, he managed to deliver over 30.000 visas for Portugal to anybody that applied for it, completely disobeying the rules implemented in those times. When he received the injunction to obey orders, he replied : "No, if these orders are contrary to any humanitarian feelings". At the beginning, the name of each holder was registered in the visa book, but there were so many immigrants coming from Bordeaux, Belgium, Holland, Poland, Lichtenstein and Luxembourg that it was no longer possible to update the registers and the Consul even had to sit in the street to deliver the visas.

This well-thought-out gesture, in all conscience, as a good Catholic and respectful of the Portuguese Constitution, will be fatal to his career and to the life of Aristides de Sousa Mendes. Salazar will always held it against him, depriving him of his diplomatic status and striking him

from the Bar, thus stopping him from working for ever. Most of his 14 children then had to go into exile to find work, and are now scattered in many different countries.

Today, there are Sousa Mendes Foundations in the United-States and in France, and there is a website we recommend you to consult : <http://www.foundationsousamendes.com>

"Aristides de Sousa Mendes, the Award for Disobedience" was a wonderful evening. We extend our thanks to the speakers and to the participants for having made it so interesting.