

Righteous Among the Nations

In 1953, the Knesset passed the Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority Law, which created Yad Vashem. Yad Vashem received the mandate to look for non-Jews who had risked their lives during the Holocaust to save Jews in countries that had been under Nazi rule or had collaborated with the German regime.

The historical account of the Holocaust would not be complete without the amazing stories of the Righteous Among the Nations. They are perhaps the sole rays of light in this dark era, the few whose consciences prevented them from being indifferent to the fate of the Jews and their brutal treatment. The criteria for awarding this honor of **Righteous Among the Nations**, determined by the public committee of Yad Vashem, is as follows:

- An attempt that included the active involvement of the rescuer to save a Jew regardless of whether these attempt(s) ended in success or failure
- Acknowledged mortal risk for the rescuer during the endeavor - during the Nazi regime, the warnings clearly stated that whoever extended a hand to assist the Jews placed not only their own life at risk but also the lives of their loved ones
- Humanitarian motives as the primary incentive - the rescuer must not have received material compensation as a condition of their actions
- There must be testimonial support by the rescued person or archive material concerning the deed

In most instances, the rescue involved providing a hiding place in the home or premises of the rescuer. Often this entailed the construction of shelters where Jews remained, sometimes for weeks, months, and even years, without seeing the light of day. In addition to endangering their own lives, the rescuers would have had to supply food, medical assistance, clothing and daily necessities. There was a constant danger of informers who were always ready to betray them. The rescuer occasionally had to find ways to move the hidden Jews to other hiding places. Others found ways to aid the Jews by providing forged documents that enabled them to live under false identities as non-Jews. In other instances, people helped by smuggling Jews across the borders.

Assisting the Jews was not the result of rational, premeditated, long-term planning. Neither was it a conscious decision or a commitment to rescue in spite of all the dangers involved. For the most part, these were people who did not regard themselves as rescuers. They were suddenly faced with an unexpected situation that demanded an immediate solution. Among those who helped were men, women, laborers, simple farmers, intellectuals, diplomats, members of left-wing parties from before the war, and active members in national organizations. Some of these were even antisemitic. There were individuals who lived among Jews before the war and some who had hardly encountered Jews prior to their decision to render assistance. Denmark was exceptionally remarkable during the war as its citizens collectively saved all of Danish. As a result, Yad Vashem declared the entire country Righteous Among the Nations. Yad Vashem, up until the present, has conferred the honor of Righteous Among the Nations upon 19,141 individuals.