



The American Hungarian Federation

Celebrating 100 Years of Service - Fidelissimus ad Mortem

THE AMERICAN HUNGARIAN FEDERATION REMEMBERS THE HEROES OF THE HUNGARIAN HOLOCAUST

"Whoever Saves a Life, it is Considered as if He Saved an Entire World"
(Jerusalem Talmud)

March 24, 2009

As part of the Holocaust Memorial Month, the Embassy of Hungary is sponsoring the Carl Lutz and the Legendary Glass House in Budapest traveling exhibit in Washington, DC. The Carl Lutz Foundation, Hungarian American Coalition, Lantos Foundation for Human Rights and Justice, Mensch International Foundation and the Embassies of Switzerland and Israel are co-sponsoring the Lutz exhibit.

The American Hungarian Federation applauds the organizers of this important exhibit to honor a foreign diplomat whose incredible courage, humanity and strong principles resulted in thousands of Jewish lives being spared. The Federation also wishes to remember all those, especially Hungarians, who saved lives at great risk to themselves. The Federation believes it would be appropriate that the Embassy of Hungary, as a representative of all Hungarians, expand such exhibits to include Hungarian heroes of the Holocaust.

1944 was a dark and tragic year for Hungary. While the Jewish community in Hungary had reason to hope that it would be spared the fate of other Jewish communities in the countries surrounding Hungary and elsewhere, that terrible year changed everything.

Until 1944, Hungary had enacted a series of laws that increasingly restricted the civil liberties of Jews. But with the exception of the massacres of partisans and Jews in Novi Sad in 1942 (whose perpetrators fled to avoid prosecution by Hungarian authorities only to return to Hungary with the German occupying army in 1944) and the 16,000 "alien" Jews who were returned to German-held Ruthenia in 1941,¹ Hungary refused Nazi Germany's demands that it deport Hungarian Jews or participate in the "Final Solution." Thousands of Jews from surrounding states actually found refuge in Hungary whose Jewish population exceeded 800,000 in March 1944.

When Hitler's patience ran out with the conservative leaders in Budapest and their peace-feelers and contacts with Western allies, Nazi Germany invaded Hungary in March 1944, drastically changing the situation of Hungary and the Jews. Hitler installed a pro-German government which collaborated with the Nazis occupiers and helped to destroy Hungary's Jewry, which had survived under the conservative government. Adolf Eichmann arrived to direct the deportation of Hungary's Jews so that by the end of June, virtually the entire Jewish population of the provinces had been deported.

Until July 1944, the more than 200,000 Jews of Budapest were protected from deportation. Consequently, and at the instigation of the Nazi occupiers, Laszlo Baky, a secretary of state in the Ministry of Interior for "Jewish Affairs," planned to begin and quickly complete the deportation of Jews from the capital. Hungarians foiled that plan, however.



The Federation takes this opportunity to remember Carl Lutz, Raoul Wallenberg and other foreign diplomats as well as the Hungarian heroes who at great personal peril saved many Jewish lives. The Hungarians include but, of course, are not limited to the following individuals:

- General Vilmos Nagybaczoni-Nagy who upon being appointed minister of defense by the Kallay government took measures to end the gross abuse threatening the lives of Jews and others in the auxiliary labor force;
- Tibor Baranszky who, as secretary to Monsignor Angelo Rotta, the Vatican's ambassador to Budapest, saved many lives by distributing protective letters to Jews on forced marches and elsewhere;
- Roman Catholic Priest Ferenc Kallo who gave Jews life-saving certificates of baptism and who was killed by the Arrow Cross on October 29, 1944;
- Jozsef Antall Senior, who as a member of the ministry of internal affairs for civilian refugees gave refuge to and thereby saved Jews and Poles and who enjoyed the support and confidence of Minister of Interior Ferenc Keresztes-Fischer and Prime Ministers Pal Teleki and after his death Miklos Kallay;
- Prince-Primate Jusztinian Seredi, Bishop Laszlo Ravasz of the Reformed Church and Istvan Bethlen who communicated protests to Regent Horthy in 1944 against deportations following Nazi Germany's occupation of Hungary; and
- Col. Ferenc Koszorus, posthumously promoted to the rank of General by Prime Minister Antall after the fall of Communism, who volunteered his services and mobilized the 1st Armored Division under his command to militarily intervene on July 5, 1944 to stop Laszlo Baky, a secretary of state in the Ministry of Interior for "Jewish Affairs," from deporting the approximately 200,000 plus Jews from Budapest.²

The Federation believes that the extraordinary courage, moral strength and fortitude of these and other individuals who despite overwhelming odds were willing to confront evil and act on behalf of humanity serve as examples for all of humankind; they must never be forgotten.

¹ When Minister of Interior Ferenc Keresztes-Fischer learned the details of these actions, he ordered them to be stopped.

² On the 50th anniversary of the Hungarian Holocaust, Congressman Tom Lantos (for whom one of the co-sponsoring organizations is named) referred to Col. Koszorus as "A Hero of the Hungarian Holocaust" and stated that "[a]s a result of his extraordinarily brave efforts, taken at great risk in an extremely volatile situation, the eventual takeover of Budapest by the Nazis was delayed by 3 1/2 months. This hiatus allowed thousands of Jews to seek safety in Budapest, thus sparing them from certain execution. It also permitted the famous Raoul Wallenberg, who arrived in Budapest on July 9, 1944, to coordinate his successful and effective rescue mission." As is clear from Congressman Lantos' remarks, had Col. Koszorus' intervention not occurred, Wallenberg would not have had many lives to save. Neither would have Lutz.

For more information, contact Frank Koszorus, Jr., Co-President and Chair, AHF Public Affairs Committee at (703) 395-5343

The American Hungarian Federation (AHF), founded in 1906 in Cleveland, Ohio, is the oldest and largest Hungarian American national umbrella organization in the United States. AHF is all volunteer, non-profit, non-partisan, and independent, representing the interests of its member organizations and the Hungarian-American community. Among the oldest ethnic organizations in the US, AHF was established as an association of Hungarian societies, institutions and churches to "defend the interest of Americans of Hungarian origin in the United States." Over the past 100 years and with the tragic events unfolding in Europe in WWI, WWII, and then again in 1956, AHF's mission broadened to include support of people of Hungarian descent on both sides of the Atlantic and in the successor states in the Carpathian Basin. *The American Hungarian Federation strives to unite the Hungarian-American community through work that supports common goals.*