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# REPORT

## **Memory in Poland of the Rescuers and the Rescued from the Holocaust. On the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Granting the Title of the Righteous Among The Nations to Sugihara Chiune, Japanese Consul in Lithuania**

### Conference Report

On 11–12 June 2015 at the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw, an international conference entitled *Memory in Poland of the rescuers and the rescued from the Holocaust* was held. The event was organized by the Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures, Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN) and University of Technology Sydney in the collaboration with the Inter-institute Unit for Migration Research of the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University (UKSW). The conference was arranged by Olga Barbasiewicz from the aforementioned Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures, PAN and Aleksandra Hadzelek from the Faculty of Arts and Sciences from University of Technology Sydney (UTS) in Australia, with the co-operation of Barbara Dzien-Abraham from the United Kingdom. The event was organized under the auspices of the Embassy of Japan in Poland, which provided a meeting after the conference in Nożyk Synagogue and the Embassy of Israel in Poland as the patron of the conference. It was also held under honorary patronage of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw, the Galicia Jewish Museum in Cracow, Center for Yiddish Culture of the Shalom Foundation in Warsaw, the prof. Moses Schorr Foundation in Warsaw, European Network of Remembrance and Solidarity, the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland and Institute of Middle and Far East Asia of the Jagiellonian University in Cracow, and under media patronage of Miasteczko Poznań, Japonia online and Forum Żydów Polskich.

The conference was opened by Vice-Rector of UKSW, prof. Jerzy Cytowski and director of the Inter-institute Unit for Migration Research,

prof. Janusz Balicki. It was also supervised by prof. Andrew Jakubowicz, Aleksandra Hadzelek from UTS and Olga Barbasiewicz from the IMOC and PAN. The meeting languages were Polish and English. Simultaneous translation was provided.

It is worthy to note that the conference was dedicated in memory of Japanese Consul in Kaunas in Lithuania, Sugihara Chiune. In cooperation with Dutch Honorary Consul Jan Zwartendijk, he issued over 2,500 visas to Polish Jews who in 1939 found refuge in and around Vilnius. Thanks to these visas, up to 6,000 people escaped the Holocaust by crossing the Soviet Union and entering Japan, and from there resettling in other countries. For his actions, in 1985 Sugihara was awarded the title of Righteous Among The Nations.

The event was attended by twenty one speakers from eight countries, which allowed the participants to listen to over twenty different papers presented in a two day conference program.

As mentioned, renowned researchers from various countries and disciplines agreed to take part in this conference, such as: Rotem Kowner from Israel, Ewa Pałsz-Rutkowska from Poland, Chiharu Inaba from Japan, Andrew Jakubowicz from Australia, and also people like: Simonas Davidovicus, Director of Sugihara House in Kaunas in Lithuania, Mikhail Mitsel from Joint Distribution Committee in New York, former Ambassadors of Poland in Japan and Israel, including Maciej Kozłowski and Henryk Lipszyc as well as representatives of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and representatives of the Embassies of Japan and Israel in Poland.

The conference's main aim was to bring together scholars interested in public memory and commemorations of Sugihara's actions, and of similar rescue operations.

During the first and second day of the event several panels were organized under these topics:

Day one:

- Rescuing Jews in Japan and Asia
- Jews in Asia

Day two:

- Memory and commemorations of Sugihara and Zwartendijk in Poland and Lithuania
- The Righteous Among the Nations: Contemporary dilemmas and problems associated with the award.

- The perspective of the rescued: personal testimonies of people saved by The Righteous, and their descendants
- The rescuers and the rescued from the Holocaust. Activities of Polish Institutions

The first day started with keynote speeches, the first one by Rotem Kowner from Haifa in Israel, who dealt with Reflections on the Righteous Among The Nations: Sugihara Chiune as a Case Study. *Next* Chiharu Inaba from Nagoya, Japan presented her lecture titled Japanese rescuers other than Sugihara in Vladivostok and in Kobe, followed by a reading by Ewa Pałasz-Rutkowska from Warsaw, Poland about The rescued in Japan. The role of Polish Ambassador Tadeusz Romer. *Later*, Mikhail Mitsel from New York, USA spoke about *JDC's Major Rescue Operations During WWII* and Teruji Suzuki from Kanagawa, Japan introduced the audience to his lecture entitled *Japanese government and military leaders measures toward Jews*. The second session was opened by Joanna Guzik from Cracow, Poland who spoke on Japan's Policy toward Jews with the *contribution* of Andrew Jakubowicz from Sydney, Australia, who next presented speech titled Suspended between...: the Polish Jewish community of Shanghai 1941–1946. Finally, Barbara Abraham from Oxford, UK and Shanghai, China explained Jewish literary contribution to the cultural life of Polish community in Shanghai. Involvement of Stefan Gołąb and A. Swislocki in publication of *Echo Szanghajskie* and “*Wiadomosci*” – the special supplement for the Polish refugees in China.

On the next day of the conference, Linas Venclauskas from Kaunas, Lithuania considered the issue of Process of memorialization of Ch. Sugihara and J. Zwartendijk in Lithuania. Simonas Strelcovas from Šiauliai, Lithuania presented his lecture entitled Footprints of Sugihara and Zwartendijk in Lithuanian historiography. The perspectives for future research followed by Aleksandra Hadzelek from Sydney, Australia, who dealt with Silence or amnesia: the non-memory of Sugihara in Poland. Consequently, the next speeches were given: Miriam David from Tel Aviv, Israel spoke on *The Righteous Among The Nations in the Jewish Tradition*; Jan Grosfeld from Warsaw, Poland considered the problem of *Instrumentalisation of the memory. The case of the 'Righteous Among The Nations'*. Jakub Greloff also from Warsaw, Poland talked about *Recent Issues in Polish Historiography of the Shoah, commemoration, public and scientific discourse* and Iryna Radchenko

from Dniepropetrovsk, Ukraine focused on *The Righteous Among The Nations: the problem of rescue in saviors' representations*. Additionally, Leora Tec from Tel Aviv, Israel mentioned *Kryzia Bloch, Hela Bawnik, Nechama Tec – the labels of victim, survivor and rescuer*; Adam Raszewski from Warsaw, Poland presented his lecture entitled *Destroyed innocence. The experience of children of the Holocaust in terms of Bogdan Wojdowski and Joanna Iwaszkiewicz*; Anna Wencel and Kamila Czerkawska from Cracow, Poland considered the issue of *Working with Survivors and Witnesses – Educators' Perspective*. Finally, Tomasz Sudół from Warsaw, Poland explained the activity of *Komitet dla Upamiętnienia Polaków Ratujących Żydów (Committee for the Commemoration of Poles who Rescued Jews during the Holocaust)* and its collecting data activity of testimonies of Poles that rescued Jews in years 1939–1945 and his fellow Varsovien Klara Jackl presented the Project *'The Polish Righteous – Recalling Forgotten History'* by the *Polin Museum*. At the end of this session, a documentary film entitled *Ocaleni (Rescued)*, by Joanna Krol and Karolina Dzieciolowska (English Subtitles) was presented by Joanna Krol, with her introduction.

Apart from theoretical analysis, an important part of the conference, which took place in Nozyk Synagogue in Warsaw, were personal testimonies of people saved by Sugihara Chiune and their descendants. The speakers including: Nina Admoni from Israel, who was had been saved by Sugihara as well as the children of Erica Mitsidis from Greece and Andrew Jakubowicz from Australia. During the Synagogue meeting, the trailer of the movie about Sugihara Chiune entitled *Persona non grata* was also presented.

The main aim of the Conference was to gather researchers interested in the collective memory and annual memorialization of what Sugihara did for other people, as well as others concerned in the fate of those who were rescued from the Holocaust. Lots of participants took part in this project in order to promote a dialogue and a constructive discussion between the academics and a broader public.

Karina Zalewska