

30. March 2006, Swissinfo

Lutz honoured for Holocaust rescues

A memorial plaque to honour Swiss diplomat Carl Lutz who rescued more than 60,000 Jews during the Second World War has been unveiled in Budapest.

The third monument to Lutz in the Hungarian capital, the plaque is mounted on the Glass House, which the diplomat helped set up to handle Jews emigrating to Palestine. Lutz, who was the consul in charge of foreign interests and visas at the Swiss Embassy between 1942 and 1945, issued tens of thousands of protective letters for Hungarian Jews, which were reluctantly recognised by the Nazis. He also established 76 Swiss safe houses throughout Budapest and, with the help of his wife Gertrud, liberated Jews from deportation centres and death marches.

The issue of protective letters was subsequently adopted by representatives of other neutral governments in Budapest such as Raoul Wallenberg of Sweden. "I am very proud of my father and wish he was here today," said Lutz' stepdaughter, Agnes Hirschi, who attended Wednesday's ceremony. "He always wanted to come back to Hungary because the Glass House had been the centre of his work," she said.

"I'm alive"

Also on hand was a 75-year-old woman saved by Lutz. "I have mixed feelings about being here today," Zsafia Zoltan said, adding she had one good memory to hold on to, "and that's that I'm alive." A rabbi said during the ceremony that the plaque was not only to remember Lutz, who died in 1975, but also "to remember that we have to take action and speak out."

About 550,000 of Hungary's 800,000 Jews were killed during the Holocaust.

Lutz' heroic efforts have been recognised by the Swiss government and he has been honoured by Israel, where he was given the title, "Righteous Among the Nations" at the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial. A street has been named after him in the Israeli town of Haifa, and in his Swiss home town of Walzenhausen.

Since 1991, there has been a Lutz memorial at the entrance to the old Budapest ghetto. Another sculpture dedicated to the diplomat stands close to the synagogue in the same area.

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