

# ANNUAL REPORT

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Cover image: Jean Claude van Itallie, Sousa Mendes visa recipient Photo: Anton Evangelista Designer: Fiona Cashell

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The Sousa Mendes Foundation, dedicated to honoring the memory of Aristides de Sousa Mendes and to educating the world about his good work, has a two-fold mission: raising funds for the restoration of the Casa do Passal and the creation within its walls of a museum and memorial site; and sponsoring US-based projects that perpetuate his legacy.



# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



he year 2016 marks 50 years since Aristides de Sousa Mendes was accorded the title of **Righteous Among the Nations** in October of 1966 by Yad Vashem, the Holocaust remembrance authority in Israel. For more on this anniversary, please see **page 2**.

The year was momentous for the Foundation. We began with a highprofile series of events in Los Angeles, including the **world premiere of the full-length oratorio** *Circular 14: The Apotheosis of Aristides* by Neely Bruce. The performance was held at American Jewish University and produced by Marilyn Ziering, to whom we owe great thanks. In tandem with the performance, we opened an **exhibition of original** 

artifacts at the Los Angeles Museum of the Holocaust: Visas to Freedom: Aristides de Sousa Mendes and the Refugees of World War II. For more on the LA events, please see pages 4-5.

After the close of the Los Angeles exhibition, we opened **an important display in New York** at the Center for Jewish History: *Portugal, The Last Hope: Sousa Mendes' Visas to Freedom*. This project was a partnership with the American Sephardi Federation, the Municipality of Almeida in Portugal, and the architect Luisa Pacheco Marques. For more on this project, please see **page 9**.

In June and July **we led a group of 45 international participants** on the moving and memorable Journey on the Road to Freedom pilgrimage from Bordeaux, France to Lisbon, Portugal. For more on this project, please see **pages 6-7**.

We received **major news attention**, including a story on National Public Radio's "Morning Edition" with Eleanor Beardsley, a column in *The New York Times* by Nicholas Kristof and a feature story in *The Los Angeles Times* on the oratorio. The work we do, and the story we tell and retell, continues to be newsworthy and relevant to today's world. For complete press coverage, please **go here**.

And we have a beautiful new website - behold!

Of all our achievements this year, the one of which I am personally the proudest is that <u>we</u> <u>refused to stay silent</u> in the face of the rise in hate speech that coincided with the US elections. The Foundation was at the forefront of an effort by the worldwide Holocaust remembrance community to condemn this trend and stand with targeted and vulnerable minority groups. The statement, given on **page 2**, has been published in the US and international press.

We must stay vigilant, courageous and strong!

Peace,

Olivia Mattis, Ph.D. President, Sousa Mendes Foundation

# STATEMENT OF DECEMBER 6, 2016 INITIATED BY THE SOUSA MENDES FOUNDATION AND CO-SIGNED BY OVER 90 HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE ORGANIZATIONS AND OVER 70 HOLOCAUST SCHOLARS AND EDUCATORS WORLDWIDE

## Holocaust Organizations, Scholars and Educators Sound Alarm on Surge in Hate Crimes and Issue Call to Action to Lawmakers and Citizens

antisemitism and attacks on Hispanics, Muslims, African-Americans, women, the LGBTQ community, as well as other targeted groups. Journalists have been threatened. Places of worship, schools and playgrounds have been defaced with Nazi symbols intended to intimidate and arouse fear. White supremacist groups have become self-congratulatory and emboldened.

As Holocaust scholars, educators and institutions, we intolerance, unchecked, leads to persecution and to not be afraid, and to speak out.

cent months have seen a surge in unabashed violence. We denounce racism and the politics of fear Tracism and hate speech - including blatant that fuels it. We stand in solidarity with all vulnerable groups. We take Elie Wiesel's words to heart: "I swore never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation."

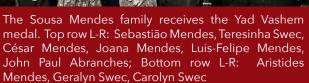
Therefore, we call upon all elected officials as well as all civic and religious leaders to forcefully and explicitly condemn the rise in hate speech and any attacks on our democratic principles. We call upon all media and social media platforms to refuse to provide a stage for hate groups and thus normalize their agenda. And we are alarmed by these trends. History teaches us that call upon all people of good conscience to be vigilant,

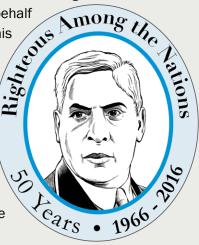
# **RIGHTEOUS AMONG** THE NATIONS 50 YEARS, 1966-2016

n October of 1966, Yad Vashem, Israel's Holocaust remembrance authority, bestowed upon Aristides de Sousa Mendes the title of "Righteous Among the Nations" - a

statement of gratitude on behalf of the Jewish people. This recognition was the result of a long-fought struggle

by the children of Sousa Mendes to have his extraordinary act of altruism acknowledged. Particularly active were Sousa Mendes's son Sebastião, who wrote a book Flight Through Hell about the Bordeaux events, and his daughter Joana, who wrote mountains of letters to Jewish leaders asking them to recognize and honor his deed. With the help of eyewitness accounts provided to Yad Vashem by Rabbi Chaim Kruger and others, these efforts bore fruit. Throughout 2016, we acknowledged the anniversary of this all-important first recognition of Aristides de Sousa Mendes and his action. "Save a life, save a world!"





# **CAPTURING THE STORIES –** OUR MOST URGENT PRIORITY



**Interviewer Monique Rubens Krohn with Sousa Mendes visa recipient Nora London.** Photo: Anton Evangelista

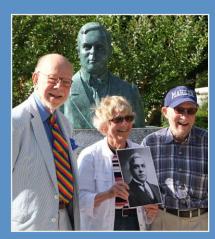
"My sister and I slept in a ditch by the side of the road. We could definitely hear the planes bombing, and that was really quite scary because we didn't know how close they'd come."

- Eileen Berets

"Lisbon was filled with refugees, so they sent us to Figueira da Foz. That's when my new life really began, because I knew we were going to survive."

- Lissy Jarvik

*"My parents died not knowing that we owed our lives to Aristides de Sousa Mendes."* 



## - Sylvain Bromberger

Visa recipients Jorge Helft, Lissy Jarvik and Stephen Rozenfeld stand in front of the Sousa Mendes bust, Esplanade Charles de Gaulle, Bordeaux.

## Sylvair Pierre Jorge Lissy J Daniel

- Sylvain Bromberger Pierre Hahn Jorge Helft Lissy Jarvik Daniel Mattis
- Leon Moed Josette Nelson Stephen Rozenfeld Charles Teschner

To learn more about this project and to support its continuation, please visit: www.crowdrise.com/visastofreedom.

Videotaping the direct witnesses to our story is the Foundation's most urgent priority. These videos, capturing the living memories of former Holocaust refugees, bring the history and lessons of the Holocaust to life. They are central to our educational mission.

We have filmed full-length interviews with the following twenty-four individuals:



Eileen Berets Jacob Censor Ruth Charchat Stanley Deser Rudolph de Winter Jean Duvivier Hadassah Goldberg Lolita Goldstein Sarah Goodman Rochelle Kashtan Poriah Kleinhaus Shulamit Kostman Toni Kostman Armand Lerner Marcel Lerner Nora London Susan Posen Denise Rubens Georgette Standish Lee Sterling John Tetzeli Jean-Claude van Itallie Elza Weinman Françoise Wybauw

In addition, we have captured footage of public testimonials given by the following nine people:

# **EXHIBITION "VISAS TO FREEDOM:** SOUSA MENDES AND THE REFUGEES **OF WORLD WAR II"** AT THE LOS ANGELES MUSEUM OF THE HOLOCAUST



Left: Retired California lawmakers Richard Katz, Rusty Areias and Johan Klehs receive awards from SMF Treasurer Mariana Abrantes; Center: A view of some of the items on display; Right: Marcia Sachs Littell, Consul-General Nuno Mathias, Robert Jacobvitz, Sebastian Mendes

n Saturday, January 23, 2016, the Los Angeles Museum of the Holocaust (LAMOTH) opened an exhibition of original artifacts organized by the Sousa Mendes Foundation. Among the many items on view were original passports with visas, toys carried during the exodus by child refugees, and a letter written by Sousa Mendes describing the situation in Bordeaux at the time he issued the life-saving documents. "The situation here is horrible," the diplomat wrote in the letter dated June 13, 1940 and addressed to his brother-in-law Silverio, "and I am in bed with a severe nervous breakdown."

This letter was lent to the exhibition by Rudolph de Winter. Other lenders were Joan Abranches, Eileen Berets, Ruth Charchat, George Fogelson, Joan Halperin, Karen Hammonds, the HIAS archives, Marilyn Jacques, Edith Kubicek, Daniel Mattis, Sebastian Mendes,



Actor Michel Gill, the son and grandson of Sousa Mendes visa recipients, with Sebastian Mendes, grandson of Aristides de Sousa Mendes



Edward Nathan, Kathleen Rand, Stephen Rozenfeld, Sybil Rubottom, Georgette Standish, Daniel Subotnik and Jean-Claude van Itallie. We thank them all.

The exhibition opening featured moving speeches by Holocaust scholar Michael Berenbaum, actor Michel Gill, LAMOTH Executive Director Samara Hutman, Sousa Mendes visa recipient Lissy Jarvik, the Portuguese Consul-General of San Francisco Nuno Mathias, SMF President Olivia Mattis, and Sousa Mendes's grandson Sebastian Mendes. SMF Treasurer Mariana Abrantes de Sousa and Advisory Council member Robert Jacobvitz presented awards to California lawmakers Rusty Areias, Johan Klehs, and Richard Katz who had been leaders in the Sousa Mendes cause in the 1980s.

As part of the SMF's educational outreach, Olivia Mattis led two training sessions for LAMOTH docents giving tours of the Sousa Mendes exhibition.



# **PERFORMANCE OF "CIRCULAR 14:** THE APOTHEOSIS OF ARISTIDES" AT AMERICAN JEWISH UNIVERSITY

"Circular 14 contains music of great variety and often of unearthly transcendence.... One can compare it to the great masterpieces in this form by Handel (Messiah), Bach (The St. Matthew Passion) and Mendelssohn (Elijah), and in the 20th century Sergei Prokofiev (Alexander Nevsky), Michael Tippett (A Child of Our Time) and William Walton (Belshazzar's Feast)." – Eric Gordon, People's World



On Sunday, January 24, 2016, the Sousa Mendes Foundation presented the first full-length performance of Neely Bruce's dramatic oratorio, *Circular 14: The Apotheosis of Aristides*, to a cheering and appreciative audience. The piece portrays the life and action

of Aristides de Sousa Mendes, as narrated by his twin brother César. The celebrity narrator was actor Michel Gill (*House of Cards*) – himself the son and grandson of Sousa Mendes visa recipients. The event was produced by Marilyn Ziering.

Following the performance, the Foundation presented an award to retired Congressman Tony Coelho, whose heroic efforts in the 1980s led to the recognition of Sousa Mendes by the US and Portuguese governments.

"While writing this piece, Aristides de Sousa Mendes has become far more to me than the subject of this



work," stated Neely Bruce. "He has taught me that one person makes a big difference; that genuine courage can still be found; that you can do the right thing

Neely Bruce, Donald Brinegar and Olivia Mattis

for the right reason; that you can suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune with grace and humility; and that the petty dictators of this world do not have the last word."

The all-star line-up of performers included LA Opera artists Robert MacNeil, tenor, in the role of Aristides de Sousa Mendes, soprano Katherine Giaquinto in the show-stopping role of Aristides' second wife, Andrée Cibial, tenor Ashley Faatoalia in the role of Salazar, soprano Marina Harris as Angelina, and bass Stephan Kirchgraber portraying Rabbi Kruger. The celebrated choral conductor Donald Brinegar led the performance, that included the participation of the Donald Brinegar Singers. Instrumentalists included Pedro da Silva on Portuguese guitar, Cameron O'Connor on guitar, John Krovoza on cello, and the composer at the piano. For organizational matters, David Spiro and Sue Birch were indispensable, and we thank them here.

# JOURNEY ON THE ROAD TO FREEDOM



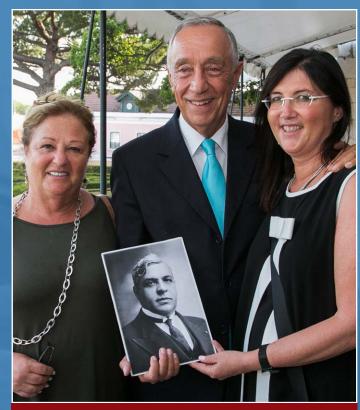
The group gathers on "rue Aristides de Sousa Mendes" in Bayonne, France.

From June 25-July 5, 2016, the Sousa Mendes Foundation led a group of 45 participants on a Journey on the Road to Freedom pilgrimage tour. Participants came from Austria, France, Israel, Portugal, South Africa and the United States and included five Holocaust educators in addition to families directly connected to the story. The group included three direct visa recipients: Jorge Helft, Lissy Jarvik, and Stephen Rozenfeld. At every stop, participants shared family stories, testimonials, thoughts and lessons for today. The trip was co-led by SMF Board members Mariana Abrantes de Sousa, Joan Halperin, Olivia Mattis and Gerald Mendes.

The 10-day tour began in Bordeaux, France, where the group visited the former Portuguese consulate (now an architectural firm) where Sousa Mendes delivered visas in 1940. Other Bordeaux stops included the synagogue

where refugees gathered and slept in 1940, the Parc des Quinconces where refugees camped in the open air, and the former internment camp on Cours du Médoc that was liberated en bloc by Sousa Mendes visas. The present-day Portuguese Consul General in Bordeaux, Ana Filomena Rocha, welcomed the group with a reception of Portuguese desserts. After Bordeaux, the group proceeded southward to Bayonne, in the Basque region, and then to Hendaye on the border with Spain. There, the group held a ceremony on the "freedom bridge" connecting France to Spain. From there, the group continued to Salamanca, staying in the heart of the old city.

The group then crossed into Portugal, arriving at the border town of Vilar Formoso. There, a big (and emotional!) surprise awaited the group. At the train station, where a



Holocaust educators Rene Pozniak and Arlene Sher with Portuguese President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, Lisbon, Portugal

museum called "Frontier of Peace" is scheduled to open in 2017, the names of the participants' family members who had received Sousa Mendes visas were carved into stone tablets. Other highlights in Portugal included: the Sousa Mendes family home, Casa do Passal, and adjacent cemetery where Sousa Mendes is laid to rest; the medieval city of Coimbra, where Sousa Mendes and his twin brother César studied law and where many of the 1940 refugees lived; and the village church in Beijóz, where Sousa Mendes and his wife Angelina were married. Other stops in Portugal included Viseu, Curia, and Caldas de Rainha.

In Lisbon, the group was received in the presidential palace by the President of the Republic Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa. Participants received rare access to the original Sousa Mendes visa registry book in the diplomatic archives and were treated to a private screening of the film *The Disobedient Consul* at the Museum of the Resistance. The tour ended with a symbolic and memorable Fourth of July freedom cruise on the Tagus River with the US ambassador Robert Sherman and Israeli ambassador Tzipora Rimon, as the group imagined the refugees of 1940 leaving Europe behind and sailing to new lands and new lives.



Robert Blaukopf stands in front of the Portuguese Consulate in Bordeaux where his grandparents obtained life-saving visas.



Zachary Donnenfield, grandson of a Sousa Mendes visa recipient, shares his family's story, Hendaye, France.



(From left) Lissy Jarvik, Sebastian Mendes and Gerald Mendes in front of the Portuguese Consulate in Bayonne, France, where Sousa Mendes and vice-consul Manuel de Vieira Braga saved thousands of lives.

# **SELECTED EVENTS**



SMF Board member Leah Sills

On Friday-Saturday, August 26-27, 2016, Leah Sills and the Rozenfeld family hosted a Sousa Mendes-themed weekend in the Pine Lake community of Cortlandt Manor, NY. Leah's father Stephen Rozenfeld, originally from Lodz, Poland, was rescued by Sousa Mendes as a child. The events included a film screening, a

slide show, and a Shabbat service with address by Olivia Mattis on the subject of "Sousa Mendes and the Journey to Freedom." Among the attendees was US Congressman Jerrold Nadler, who has honored Sousa Mendes in the US Congress.



Sousa Mendes visa recipient Michael Back, Karen Denker, Sandra Back, Bruce Denker, Olivia Mattis, Daniel Subotnik

<u>On Wednesday, September 7, 2016</u>, Karen Denker organized a well-attended and highly successful screening in Stamford, CT of *Disobedience: The Sousa Mendes Story*. The event, a benefit for the Sousa Mendes Foundation, was held at the beautiful and historic State Cinema, thanks to the generosity of its owner Joel Freedman. There were numerous Sousa Mendes visa recipient families in attendance, and the post-film discussion was lively. Karen shared the story of her own family, the Bacaleinic family, and how they escaped from Nazi-occupied Europe thanks to the life-saving visas of Aristides de Sousa Mendes. On Tuesday, December 22, 2016, restauranteur Felipe Gomes hosted a fundraising dinner at his Aroma Mediterranean Restaurant in London, Ontario to benefit the Sousa Mendes Foundation. Gomes, himself the grandson of a hero who defied the Portuguese dictator Salazar, has taken the Sousa Mendes cause to heart. The Foundation is lucky to have such a friend!



From November 11-15,

2016, SMF's Director of Educational Initiatives, Joan Halperin, traveled to Kingston, Jamaica, to attend a reunion of families that lived there during the war and to pay her respects to an older sister she never knew. After Joan's family found temporary safety in Portugal, thanks to Sousa Mendes visas, they and other Polish refugees were sent to an evacuee camp on the tropical island. There. Joan's sister Yvonne succumbed to illness

and died at the age of 4. Also attending the event was Robert Jacobvitz, a prime-mover in the Sousa Mendes cause and a valued member of SMF's Advisory Council. Together they presented the Jewish community of Jamaica with a plaque thanking them for helping the wartime refugees in their midst.

Do you want to bring the inspiring story of Aristides de Sousa Mendes to your area with a film screening, exhibition or speaker? Please contact us! http://sousamendesfoundation.org/contact/



# **EXHIBITION "PORTUGAL, THE LAST HOPE" AT** THE CENTER FOR JEWISH HISTORY, NEW YORK

New York's Center for Jewish History hosted the exhibition "Portugal, The Last Hope" from April-December 2016. Sheila Abranches-Pierce, granddaughter of Aristides de Sousa Mendes, spoke at the exhibition opening, as did Sousa Mendes visa recipient Jean-Claude van Itallie. The Sousa Mendes Foundation provided the artifacts for this project, which was designed by architect Luisa Pacheco Marques and written by historian Margarida Ramalho.

"When following orders was the order of the day, Aristides de Sousa Mendes refused to be an accomplice, whether on account of expediency or complacency, to monstrous attacks on human dignity," said Jason Guberman, Executive Director of the American Sephardi Federation. "The Holocaust-era heroism honored in this multi-partner exhibit and program should inspire others to follow in

Aristides de Sousa Mendes' stubbornly conscientious and creative footsteps on behalf of freedom," he added.

Partners included the American Sephardi Federation, the Portuguese Consulate of New York, and the Municipality of Almeida, Portugal, with co-sponsorship of the American Jewish Historical Society, the Centro de Portugal Office of Tourism, the Leo Baeck Institute, the Luso-Americano Foundation, and the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research. The project was coordinated by Elisabeth M. Stevens, Researcher and Events Programmer of the American Sephardi Federation.

During the exhibition's run, Olivia Mattis led several public tours, and the Foundation, along with the American Sephardi Federation, presented a screening of Semyon Pinkhasov's documentary film, *With God Against Man*.



# PRESIDENT MARCELO REBELO DE SOUSA VISITS EXHIBITION

H is Excellency Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, President of the Republic of Portugal, paid tribute to Aristides de Sousa Mendes at the Center for Jewish History on Thursday, September 22. "Your history is our history," said the President as he announced his intention to confer on Aristides de Sousa Mendes the Grand Cross of the Order of Liberty.

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