

Please join us for our 20TH ANNIVERSARY Kristallnacht Commemoration 2026:

The Remarkable Deeds of Aristides de Sousa Mendes

***“...Starting today, I will obey only my conscience:
I simply do not have the right to let these people die.”***

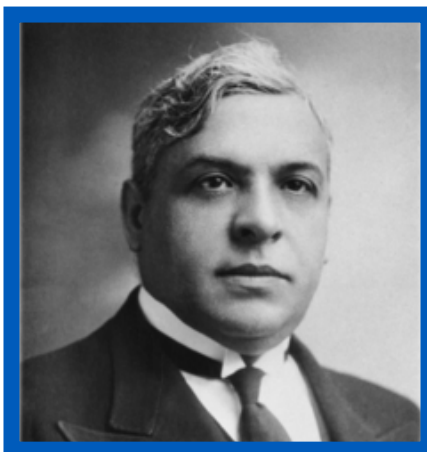
In May of 1940, German forces attacked France, quickly overwhelming the French army. Within a month, France fell to the Nazi regime and a swastika flag was raised over the Eiffel Tower.

At the time, many world leaders chose to declare neutrality regarding the war, in order to avoid confrontation with Germany. Similarly, the Prime Minister of Portugal declared neutrality, even forbidding refugees from Nazism to escape to Portugal.

Meanwhile, myriads of panic-stricken Jews, along with many who had publicly opposed Nazism, began to flee to southwestern France in hopes of finding a way to cross over into neutral Spain or Portugal.

In the midst of this maelstrom, a diplomat by the name of Aristides de Sousa Mendes, the Portuguese Consul in Bordeaux, France, watched in deep dismay. Torn between his conscience and his government's orders, he soon suffered an emotional breakdown, refusing food and human contact. After three days, however, Sousa Mendes emerged from his bedroom

and tremblingly informed his wife: *“Starting today, I will obey only my conscience; I simply do not have the right to let these people die.”*



“I could not have acted differently; I accept all that has befallen me with love.”

—Aristides de Sousa Mendes,
(before his death)

Immediately, Aristides de Sousa Mendes began issuing illegal visas to as many refugees as possible. The exact number of people he saved from certain death is unknown — 10,000 is a conservative estimate! Among those he saved were Hans & Margaret Rey, the Jewish creators of the Curious George series of children's books, and Salvador Dali, the Spanish artist, and his wife Gala. Historians characterize the life-saving work of Aristides de Sousa Mendes as “the largest rescue operation ever undertaken by a single person during the Holocaust.” Prime Minister Mário Soares, the “Father of Portuguese Democracy,” called him “Portugal's greatest hero of the 20th century.”

**What penalty did Sousa Mendes suffer for his deeds?
How did he become a national hero after his death?
COME & LEARN!**

PROGRAM'S EVENTS:

- Dr. Olivia Mattis, President & CEO of the Sousa-Mendes Foundation, will recall how her family was rescued by Aristides de Sousa Mendes.
- Rabbi Alvin Wainhaus will relate the remarkable story of the rescue of Hans & Margaret Rey, creators of the Curious George series of children's books.
- Mrs. Gracinda Lavado, President of the Parish Council at Our Lady of Fatima Portuguese Parish, Hartford, will bring a message from Fr. António J. Tchingui and the Portuguese American community.
- U.S. Senator Richard Blumenthal will present a Certificate of Special Recognition to Sousa Mendes' great-grandson, Jason Abranches, who will receive the posthumous honor on behalf of his family.



— IN-PERSON & VIA ZOOM —
SUNDAY, NOV. 8 | 9:30 AM — 11:30 AM
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