

Forgotten 'Brazilian Schindler' Gets Homage in US

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On the 50th anniversary of the death of the 'Brazilian Schindler,' Luiz Martins de Souza Dantas, will be honored by the Consulate General of Brazil and The International Raoul Wallenberg Foundation (IRWF) on December 6th.

Moved by what he later called "a Christian feeling of mercy," Souza Dantas granted diplomatic visas for hundreds of Jews, homosexuals and other "undesirables" to enter Brazil. With his actions, Souza Dantas saved about 800 people from extermination.

The ceremony will include the presentation of Fabio Koifman's book on Souza Dantas, *Quixote nas trevas* (Quijote in Darkness), and the awarding of a Commemorative Souza Dantas Medal, part of the Medals of the Saviors minted by the IRWF.

Ambassador Júlio César Gomes dos Santos, Consul General of Brazil will speak during the commemoration.

The ceremony to honor Dantas' heroic deeds will take place on December 6th, 2004, at 6.00 in the Consulate General of Brazil, located at 1185 Avenue of the Americas, 21st floor New York, NY 10036.

Souza Dantas

Amid the years of Holocaust atrocities, Ambassador Luiz Martins de Souza Dantas, in charge of the Brazilian diplomatic mission in France, challenged both French and Brazilian dictatorships to grant hundreds of diplomatic visas for those fleeing Nazi Europe, to enter Brazil.

During the 1940's, he steadfastly confronted Brazilian immigration policy. which did not allow entry to "undesirables" defined as Jews, communists and homosexuals escaping from the horror of Nazism.

With his actions, Souza Dantas saved more than 800 people from extermination.

He became the Brazilian equivalent of the German industrial Oskar Schindler, who saved 1,200 people from the Holocaust, in accordance with what was narrated by Steven Spielberg in his movie, *Schindler's List*.

The memory of the diplomat's actions was forgotten for years. Only recently has his story gained public awareness, both in Brazil and internationally.

In June of 2003 he became one of the few to receive the "Righteous Among Gentiles" distinction from Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Museum in Israel, an honor granted to those who, under the Nazi yoke, risked their lives on behalf of others.

Souza Dantas' actions are not yet chronicled in schoolbooks. For decades they were restricted to the memory of those families he helped save.

An important part of that story was confined to the documents of the bureaucracy of the State, kept as memos in the historical files of Itamaraty (Brazilian State Department) and in the National File.

By putting together those two sources of information, a historian from Rio de Janeiro, Fabio Koifman, built a more precise biography of the Ambassador.

Out of the testimonies picked during those four years of work, one concerned the director of the Polish Theater Zbigniew Ziembinski, considered one of the greatest scenic arts revolutionaries in Brazil.

It was due to Souza Dantas that he arrived Rio de Janeiro in 1941, after wandering through Europe in search of an exit of the hellish war.

"I had people lying on the floor, next to the embassies, begging, waiting, subjected to the worst derisions, to the worst tortures", remembered Ziembinski years later in an unprecedented registry of his memories.

"Until the moment that, suddenly, we learnt that there was a Quixote... the famous ambassador Dantas."

From Koifman's careful work arises one of the most dignifying Brazilian biographies.

The Foundation

The International Raoul Wallenberg Foundation (IRWF) is a public non-profit organization, dedicated to keep the example of Raoul Wallenberg alive all over the world, with the aim of promoting peace among nations and people, as well as developing educational projects based on concepts of solidarity, dialogue and understanding, with no distinctions.

Raoul Wallenberg is the Swedish diplomat who disappeared in January 1945 after saving the lives of tens of thousands of Jews condemned to certain death by the Nazis during World War II.

He was captured by the Soviet troops which, in January 1945, took control of Budapest, never to be seen again.

The Foundation, with branches in Buenos Aires, Caracas, Jerusalem and New York, has focused all of its efforts to honor Raoul Wallenberg and carry his heroic legacy to future generations.

More information
www.raoulwallenberg.net