

Spared Lives

The actions of three Portuguese diplomats in World War II

1944

“Mission to Budapest”, a report by Teixeira Branquinho, describing the situation on the date of his departure from Budapest.

(AHD - Collection of Reports and Monographs)

FOREWORD

In the period during which I temporarily held the position of Portuguese Chargé d'affaires in Hungary, the racial problem surpassed all others in the sphere of action of the Legations of the neutral countries accredited to Budapest. These were: the Holy See, headed by the prestigious doyen of the diplomatic corps, Monsignor Angelo Rota, assisted by Monsignor Verolino, an intelligent coadjutor of the highest moral character; Sweden, under the former Minister in Lisbon, Mr. Dannelson, whose wise counsel I had been advised to seek by Ambassador Teixeira de Sampaio when giving me the instructions I should abide by in my new position; Portugal, whose reaction to the Nazi's anti-semitic policy had, prior to my arrival in Budapest, inspired the anti-Nazi elements' trust, as a result of the Lusitanian gallantry shown by Minister Sampaio Garrido when members of the German and Hungarian police, in ridiculous disguise, attacked and robbed the Portuguese Legation and arrested some Semites who had taken refuge there; Switzerland, Spain and Turkey.

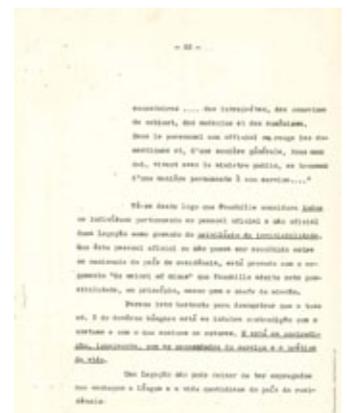
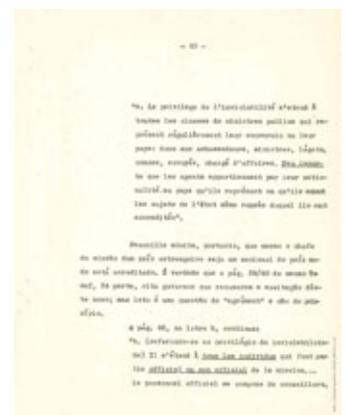
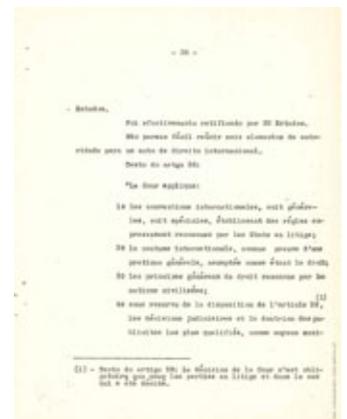
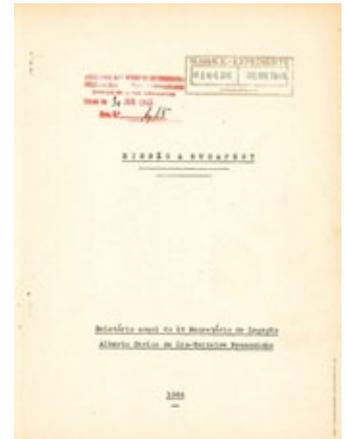
To my first attempts to obtain from the Hungarian government all respect for the protection granted by the Portuguese Legation in Budapest to Hungarian Jews under the terms of the instructions I had received from the Portuguese government, the Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs immediately replied that the Hungarian government was prepared:

1 - not to acknowledge the political nature of the racial problem, it having been considered scientifically proven that the latter had to be imperatively resolved by processes which were part of the internal legislation of the countries so afflicted.

2 - not to respect the right of asylum the foreign Legations accredited to Budapest wished to apply to protect the Jews.

3 - not to grant any type of privilege or immunity or exceptional treatment to the Jews employed in said Legations or at the service thereof.

I replied that I disagreed that the racial problem did not have a political nature and that its study should remain outside the scope of international law; that the right of asylum had suffered other restrictions in addition to those set out in the treaties to which Hungary was a signatory; and whilst I thought it immoral that the foreign Legations should at this point abandon to their sorry fate the Jewish employees who had served them well for so



many years, that if accomplished I could not but consider this attitude of the Hungarian government as an important limitation to the exercise of my functions. Indeed, all the employees of the Portuguese Legation were Jewish, had worked there since the Legation had opened years before, were the only people in Hungary who knew any Portuguese and their replacement would imply serious difficulties to normal working conditions.

I immediately attempted to gather together legal data and opinions from learned persons to enable me to refute the three theses presented by the Hungarian Government.

That is the content of this report.

It was in such an environment of fundamentally opposed views (about which the Foreign Ministry has been informed in detail at all times in official telegrams), that the negotiations proceeded. Already of a very delicate nature, they suffered the effects of the vicissitudes of war and of the local atmosphere inhaled during long months of hard work with the drawback that susceptibilities were extreme. Nevertheless, as a result of my superior orders, the fact is that the day I left Budapest for Lisbon – 29 October 1944 – the Hungarian Government and the German Minister in Hungary had undertaken to respect:

- 1 – Jews sheltered in the Portuguese Legation building in Budapest, a total of thirty;
- 2 – Jews sheltered in the Portuguese Consulate building in Budapest (where a "Protection Section" of the Portuguese Legation had been created), a total of twenty;
- 3 – Jews employed at the Portuguese Legation and at the Portuguese Consulate, whose number we had managed to increase to thirty-five;
- 4 – The families of the Jews employed at the Portuguese Legation and at the Portuguese Consulate, a total of approximately two hundred;
- 5 – Hungarian Jews bearing provisional Portuguese passports (documents which as indicated to me by H.E. the Minister, to which the Hungarian government had finally agreed, contained no mention of nationality), a total of seven hundred.

A complete list of the protégés of the Portuguese government was handed in to the Hungarian Government.

Altogether about one thousand Semites who were saved will owe their lives to the generous actions of the Portuguese government.

