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Nobuki Sugihara, son of Japanese diplomat, Chiune Sugihara (depicted in black and white picture), who helped saved thousands of Lithuanian Jews in World War 2, speaks during a street-naming ceremony in honor of his father in Netanya, Israel June 7, 2016. (Photo by: REUTERS)

Israel honors Japan's 'Schindler' who saved thousands of Jews in WWII

By REUTERS
06/08/2016

Japanese diplomat Chiune Sugihara's actions saved five times as many people as Oskar Schindler, made famous in the film "Schindler's List."

Israel on Tuesday honored Japan's "Schindler" by naming a street after the Japanese diplomat who issued thousands of exit visas to desperate European Jews, against his government's orders.

Chiune Sugihara helped about 6,000 Jews escape war-torn Lithuania, the advancing Nazis and an almost certain death with his actions during World War Two.

Sugihara began issuing the visas in late July 1940, writing them day and night until he closed the consulate about a month later. Even as he left, he was writing visas and handing them out the window as his train pulled away, bowing and apologizing to those who still remained on the platform.

Within a year, almost all the Jews in Lithuania had been killed.

The Mayor of Netanya, Miriam Fierberg-Ikar unveiled the new street sign in an official ceremony in the presence of Sugihara's son, Nobuki Sugihara.

One of those helped to escape by Sugihara, Itshak Tarashansky, said the diplomat gave them visas even though they did not have a clear destination.

"He was not particular about them (Jews) having a visa to go on, because that is a principle before you give a transit visa, the traveller has to have a destination to go past the transit country,

but Mr Sugihara was not particular that he gave transit visas freely and we got our visas for continuing later in Japan," Tarashansky said.

At a reception later, Nobuki Sugihara thanked the Israeli people.

"I thank you very much for the street by my father's name. My father ones showed refugees the way to escape from Holocaust and this street now show young people the future next to this very meaningful planetarium," he said.

Sugihara's actions saved five times as many people as Oskar Schindler, made famous in the film "Schindler's List."

Sugihara was later asked to resign by Japan's Foreign Ministry for defying the rules of a government then allied with Germany and that a year later was at war with the United States. He died in obscurity in 1986.

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