

Summer Welles Papers
Box 83 Folder 3
Office Correspondence
Roosevelt, Eleanor, Jan-June 1942

March 18, 1942

Dear Eleanor:

With reference to my letter to you of March 12 concerning the Struma case, I am enclosing for your information a paraphrase of a telegram I have received from our Embassy in London, which quotes the text of a memorandum received from the British Foreign Office.

Believe me

Yours very sincerely,

Enc.
Paraphrase

Mrs. Roosevelt,
The White House.

PARAPHRASE OF TELEGRAM

FROM: American Embassy, London
TO: Secretary of State, Washington
DATED: March 16, 1942

The Foreign Office has sent to us a memorandum which states that all of the material facts relating to the sinking of the STRUMA were stated in Parliament by the Secretary for the Colonies and the Under Secretary on March 10 and 11. It is also stated in the memorandum that:

In spite of the fact that all of the immigrants on board this ship were, so far as is known, of enemy nationality, while the ship's captain and crew themselves were also enemy (Bulgarian), it was not because of this fact alone that it was found impossible to grant permission to any of the immigrants except the children to enter Palestine. It is essential to His Majesty's Government's policy that the admission of Jewish immigrants be regularized and a reversal of this policy at a critical moment of the war would involve a risk of dangerous repercussions on the non-Jewish populations of the Middle East by which the whole conduct of the war might be affected.

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The terrible persecution in Germany and German-controlled countries has not been viewed without sympathy by His Majesty's Government and many practical demonstrations of its anxiety to assist the victims of persecution, both racial and religious, have been shown. Although illegal immigrants who have reached Palestine have been and will continue to be treated with every regard for humanity, nevertheless the authorities responsible for the military and political security of the Middle East cannot help but regard with the greatest misgivings indiscriminate and substantial additions to the number of these immigrants. The Government of the United States is, of course, aware that His Majesty's Government is not alone in finding it necessary to restrict emigration from enemy countries under the stress of war.

It is further stated in the memorandum that the British Government has no confirmation of the report mentioned by the Department and states in conclusion that according to the information of the British Government, the Government of Turkey, which had already expressed its inability to allow the children from the STRUMA to be landed and taken across Turkey to Palestine, decided to return the ship to the port

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from which it sailed since it was apprehensive of an attempt to force it to accept all the immigrants in its territory.

#128

March 14, 1942

Dear Eleanor:

I can fully understand your feeling as manifested in your letter to me of March 13.

I wish I felt that your suggestion could in fact be carried out. The first practical difficulty is that there are no ships available to transport these unfortunate people either to Africa or to South America. The second difficulty is that in these war times I fear that the other American Republics would not accept a shipload of refugees because of their well-founded fear that among them would undoubtedly be some subversive agents planted by the German authorities. We have, unfortunately, reason to know by experience that when the Gestapo permits a quantity of refugees, such as that on board the Struma, to leave Nazi-controlled territory, it does so only with some ulterior purpose in mind.

Insofar as the possibility of refuge in Africa for these unfortunates is concerned, if safe shipping

Mrs. Roosevelt,

The White House.

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communications were available this would prove a more practical solution except for the fact that in the British-controlled colonies of eastern Africa -- which would be the more logical part of Africa to consider in this connection -- there are no present facilities for taking care of refugees who have no means of livelihood or funds at their disposal and who are unable to speak the language of the country to which they are going and equally unable to earn their own livelihood under the conditions which exist there without at least a considerable number of months of preparation.

The President's Intergovernmental Committee is the agency which was created to deal with tragedies of this character. I have asked that this particular problem be submitted to it.

Believe me

Yours very sincerely.

U:SW:DMK

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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

March 13, 1942

Dear Sumner:

I have your letter of March 12th.
Why not try to give asylum and guarantee
that such refugees will continue to Africa
and South America?

This policy is so cruel that if it were
generally known in this country, it would
increase the dislike of Great Britain which
is already too prevalent.

Cordially yours,

Edward R. Ross

#123

March 12, 1942

Dear Eleanor:

With reference to your letter to me of March 9, you will be interested in the following statement made yesterday in the House of Commons by the British Under Secretary of State for the Colonies:

"The STRUMA was a converted yacht of about two hundred tons. Flying the Panamanian flag, she left Constanza last October with some seven hundred sixty-nine Jews on board with the intention of effecting their entry illegally into Palestine. She reached Istanbul about mid-December, when she was described as being badly overcrowded, and thereafter considerable repairs to her engines had to be effected. While she was lying at Istanbul, the Turkish authorities intimated that the passengers could not be allowed to remain in Turkey. The Palestine Government also made it clear, with the support of His Majesty's Government, that they could not be admitted to Palestine. This action was in conformity with the policy consistently followed since the establishment of the mandatory regime and publicly confirmed by His Majesty's Government in November, 1940.

"When the Turkish authorities found that the passengers would not be admitted to Palestine, they decided on the twenty-third February to send the vessel back to the Black Sea. On the twenty-fourth February news was received that she had sunk as a result of an explosion four or five miles from the entrance to the Bosphorus. The cause of the disaster is not

Mrs. Roosevelt,

The White House.

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definitely established. She may have struck a mine, but the possibility of her having been torpedoed is not excluded as a Turkish vessel was torpedoed in the vicinity about the time.

"His Majesty's Government greatly deplore the tragic loss of life which occurred in this disaster. They had hoped that effect might have been given to the offer of the Palestine Government to admit to Palestine the children on board between the ages of eleven and sixteen, but this proved impracticable as the Turkish authorities did not feel themselves able to give the necessary permission to land.

"His Majesty's Government earnestly hope that such a tragedy will not occur again. It does not lie in their power, however, amid the dangers and uncertainties of war, to give any guarantee, nor can they be party to any measures which would undermine the existing policy regarding illegal immigration into Palestine, in view of the wider issues involved. Subject to these reservations, however, I can say that His Majesty's Government will endeavor, so far as lies in their power, to ensure that there is no recurrence of such a disaster as that which befell the STRUMA."

This is one of the most shocking tragedies which have taken place in a tragic year. Naturally I am doing everything I can to prevent a recurrence, but the British are adamant in their refusal to prevent any increased immigration into Palestine for fear of Arab unrest.

Believe me

Yours very sincerely,

DEPARTMENT OF STATE
THE UNDER SECRETARY

Pr

March 10, 1942

NE - Mr. Murray:

Please draft some appropriate letter for me to send to Mrs. Roosevelt.

*Letter drafted
3/12/42
NE-5 PM/R*

RECEIVED
MAR 12 1942
DIVISION OF
NEAR EASTERN AFFAIRS

U:SW:GES

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

DEPARTMENT OF STATE
MAR 11 1942
DIVISION OF
NEAR EASTERN AFFAIRS

*Also by
subsequent letters
from Mr. Welles
File
Ab*

March 9, 1942
DEPARTMENT OF STATE
1942
WELLES

Dear Sumner:

This memo seems perfectly shocking to me. We have taken British children and I think they ought to pay some attention to us in return!

They have set a very low quota in Palestine and the Arabs have agreed, so why, because of a technicality of not having visas when these people come from countries where they can not get visas anyway, they should be turned back, just seems to me cruel beyond words.

After all these are anti-Axis refugees and they certainly will help us rather than the Axis and from what I read in the papers, we may be needing some help in that part of the world before long.

Very cordially yours,

Franklin D. Roosevelt

March 1942

MEMORANDUM ON THE SINKING OF THE REFUGEE SHIP "STRUMA"
AND SIMILAR EARLIER DISASTERS

1. During the past few years, handfuls of terror-stricken Jews have managed to escape from Eastern and Central Europe to the shores of the Black Sea. In leaky, antiquated and unseaworthy boats, these refugees have made desperate attempts to reach the Jewish National Homeland where they hoped they might find haven. Obviously, such refugees in flight have neither visas nor immigration permits. The policy of the British Administration in Palestine has consistently been to refuse permission for these people to enter their Homeland. Where they have succeeded in reaching its shores, they have been declared liable to deportation or internment as illegal immigrants. That policy has been responsible for a whole series of inhumane and avertible tragedies.

2. The most recent of these disasters concerns the "Struma", a 180-ton, 50-foot yacht which reached Istanbul in December with 769 victims of the Roumanian pogroms on board. They were anchored for ten weeks in the harbor of Istanbul. Repeated and urgent requests to the British Administration for permission for them to enter Palestine were rejected. Several warnings were sent to the British Government by the Jewish Agency that rejection of these appeals meant certain death for the refugees either by sinking or deportation to Roumania. On February 24th, the ship was ordered to leave Turkish territorial waters, despite the protests of the captain that it was in no condition to put to sea. It was towed out of port and went to pieces as soon as it reached open water. Only one person survived the sinking.

3. In November 1940, more than 1770 Jews who escaped from nazi-occupied lands reached Palestine on board two refugee ships. They were ordered deported by the British authorities. On November 25th, the ship to which they had been transferred for deportation to Africa, the "Patria", was destroyed by a mysterious explosion in the harbor of Haifa. More than 250 of these refugees lost their lives. Not until vigorous protest had reached the British Government was the deportation order rescinded.

4. In November 1939, the tiny ship "Salvador" sank in the Sea of Marmora, with the loss of between 200 and 300 people, the victims included virtually all the children aboard the ship.

5. In late 1940, another vessel, the "Atlantic", a 400-ton ship, reached Palestine with 1800 refugees on board. Again the British Administration ordered these refugees deported. Because the ship was in a sinking condition, the refugees were removed to shore and internment. Late one night, hundreds of police surrounded the internment camp preparatory to removing the refugees to ships for deportation. The refugees were beaten mercilessly with truncheons; some of them were carried out on stretchers, unconscious; others were pushed out naked or bare-foot; some were bleeding from newly-inflicted wounds. They were finally crowded into lorries, removed to two ships in the port of Haifa, and deported to the Island of Mauritius in the Indian Ocean. There, many of them have since died; several others, the remnants of shattered families have gone insane.

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6. In March 1940, another ship, the "Darien", reached Palestine in sinking condition with 800 refugees from the Bucharest pogroms, together with the survivors of the "Salvador". In conformity with the policy of the British Administration in Palestine, they have been interned since their arrival. That they have thus far escaped deportation has been due to the fact that no shipping facilities have been available to transfer them to Africa or the Indian Ocean.

7. These disasters, which have resulted in the wanton destruction of innocent lives, have been due largely to the policy of the British Government which insists on closing the doors of the Jewish National Homeland to those Jewish refugees who manage to escape from nazi persecution. Such policy not only violates all considerations of justice and humanity by virtually condemning to death these anti-fascist Jewish refugees, but is in defiance of military necessity. For, many of these refugees who have gone to their deaths or are languishing in internment are able-bodied men with military training or skilled technicians and laborers whose contribution to the war effort could be an extremely vital one.

8. The policy of deporting Jewish refugees from the National Homeland after they have set foot on its soil, or interning them in Palestine, or denying them haven within its boundaries, has aroused profound indignation in Palestine and throughout the entire Jewish world. The heartlessness of these acts is rendered all the greater by the fact that they were not dictated even by the logic of official policy. For, because of the exigencies of war, even the limited immigration quota permitted by the British White Paper policy has not been filled. These refugees therefore could very readily have been admitted into Palestine and their numbers deducted from the official quota, as the Jewish Agency repeatedly urged.

9. Attention should also be drawn to the fact that while Jewish refugees have been barred from the Homeland, Palestine has offered haven in the past few years to thousands of non-Jewish refugees — Greeks, Czechs, Poles, etc. While most of these non-Jewish refugees are genuine anti-fascists, it is a well-known fact that they include in their midst many who have not always been conspicuous for their loyalty to the democratic ideal.