

Holocaust/Refugee Collection

Additional Materials from the ER Papers  
Correspondence with Sumner Welles

March 15, 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,

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Hon. Sumner Welles

Copy to Justice Polier

March 9, 1942

Dear Sumner: *Welles*

This memo seems perfectly shocking to me. We have taken British children and I think ~~they~~ *British government* 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-Nazi 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,

THE UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE  
WASHINGTON

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.

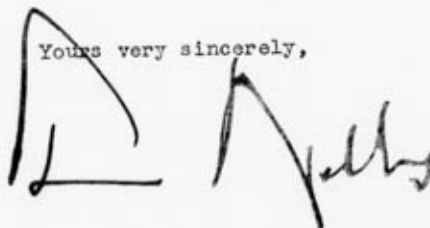
"His Majesty's Government greatly deplore the tragic loss of life which occurred in this disaster. They had hoped that effect might have been given to the offer of the Palestine Government to admit to Palestine the children on board between the ages of eleven and sixteen, but this proved impracticable 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,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "D. Nelly". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "D" and a long, sweeping underline.

THE UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE  
WASHINGTON

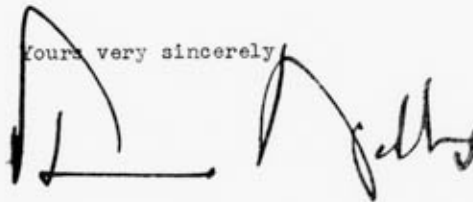
March 18, 1942

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.

September 12, 1942

Dear Mr. Welles:

Mrs. Roosevelt asked me, before she left Washington this week, to send you the enclosed copy of a report she has received from Mr. Varian Fry, which she wishes kept confidential. Her question to you is: "Could we protest and may I mention in my column?"

Very sincerely yours,

Administrative Officer  
Social Correspondence

Honorable Sumner Welles  
Under Secretary of State  
Washington, D.C.

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THE UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE  
WASHINGTON

*sub*  
*9/28/42*

September 22, 1942

Dear Eleanor:

I have Mr. Magee's memorandum of September 12, 1942 enclosing a copy of a report which you have received from Mr. Varian Fry with respect to the mass deportation of foreign Jews in France. We have protested not once but several times to the head of the French Government against this inhuman program. Heads of our relief organizations in unoccupied France have protested to Marshal Petain. Representatives of other civilized states have followed suit. All this, however, has made no impression on Laval who is apparently determined to carry out his original plans to return these unfortunate people to their oppressors.

While the attached report appears to be basically correct, we cannot, of course, vouch for the names of the individuals or the figures mentioned, nor do we have any confirmation of the reasons, reported by Mr. Fry, for the French Government's action.

I see no objection to your using this material in your column.

Sincerely yours,

Enclosure:  
Report returned.

Mrs. Roosevelt,  
The White House.

C O P Y

REPORT SENT BY VARIAN FRY

Vichy has agreed to deport 16,000 foreigners and French Jews from the occupied zone and 10,000 foreigners, believed to be both Jewish and Gentile, but so far no French, from the unoccupied zone. 3,600 persons have already been deported from the unoccupied zone to an unknown destination in eastern Europe, including 1,000 from the camp at Gurs, 700 in the camp at Vernet, and 700 from the camp at Les Milles. According to one report, the entire camp of Vernet has been taken to the demarcation line and handed over to the Gestapo. Men, women and children are being arrested in the streets of Marseille, Toulouse, Lyon and other population centers to make up the quota. In the unoccupied zone children over five years of age are being deported with their parents, in the occupied zone children of two years or more. Children under these ages are being left behind, but their parents are being sent, thus making the children virtual orphans.

People are trying to escape over the frontiers into Spain and Switzerland, and the Spanish and Swiss authorities have been turning them back. This is the significance of a cable from Bern in the New York Times of August 25, according to which, under pressure of Swiss welfare organizations, the Swiss federal government has decided not to deport refugees that succeeded in eluding the authorities and entering Switzerland illegally before August 13. There have been 300 suicides in France since the deportations began. All French exit permits have been stopped without distinction of race or nationality.

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Among those who have already been deported are General Mieczyslaw Bortenstein, a Pole who had a Canadian visa and a United States transit visa which arrived too late to do him any good; Erich Jacobi, a German intellectual, Karl Bordek, an Austrian Social Democrat, and Hermann Bieber, a German Social Democrat, and his wife. The last two had had so-called "emergency" visas, but the visas had expired and had not been renewed in time.

According to a Washington source, the agreement to deport the refugees is the result of an attempt on Vichy's part to obtain more food. Laval is said to have complained to the Germans that they were taking too much food from France. To this the Germans are reported to have replied somewhat as follows:

"Get rid of your Jews and foreigners first and then perhaps we will talk about giving you more food - if you still need it."

August 26, 1942

September 28, 1942.

My dear Mr. Welles:

Mrs. Roosevelt asks me to thank you for your letter of September 22nd in which you advise her concerning the matter mentioned in the report sent to her by Mr. Varian Fry.

Very sincerely yours,

Secretary to  
Mrs. Roosevelt.

Hon. Sumner Welles  
Under Secretary of State  
State Department  
Washington, D. C.

VDS