

Executive Order Creating the War Refugee Board (January 22, 1944).

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Release by radio commentators, newscasters, etc. NOT EARLIER THAN 9:00 P.M., E.W.T., Saturday, January 22, 1944.

STEPHEN EARLY

Secretary to the President

The President today, by Executive Order, set up a War Refugee Board consisting of the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Treasury and the Secretary of War, to take action for the immediate rescue from the Nazis of as many as possible of the persecuted minorities of Europe – racial, religious or political – all civilian victims of enemy savagery.

The Executive Order declares that “it is the policy of this Government to take all measures within its power to rescue the victims of enemy oppression who are in imminent danger of death and otherwise to afford such victims all possible relief and assistance consistent with the successful prosecution of the war”.

The Board is charged with direct responsibility to the President in seeing that the announced policy is carried out. The President indicated that while he would look directly to the Board of the successful execution of this policy, the Board, of course, would cooperate fully with the Intergovernmental Committee, the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, and other interested international organizations.

The President stated that he expected to obtain the cooperation of all members of the United Nations and other foreign governments in carrying out this difficult but important task. He stated that the existing facilities of the State, Treasury and War Departments would be employed to aid Axis victims to the fullest extent possible. He stressed that it was urgent that action be taken at once to forestall the plan of the Nazis to exterminate all the Jews and other persecuted minorities in Europe.

It will be the duty of a full-time Executive Director of the Board to arrange for the prompt execution of the plans and programs developed and the measures by the Board.

EXECUTIVE ORDER

ESTABLISHING A WAR REFUGEE BOARD

Whereas it is the policy of this Government to take all measures within its power to rescue the victims of enemy oppression who are in imminent danger of death and otherwise to afford such victims all possible relief and assistance consistent with the successful prosecution of the war.

Now, therefore, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and the statutes of the United States, as President of the United States and as Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy, and in order to effectuate with all possible speed the rescue and relief of such victims of enemy oppression, it is hereby ordered as follows:

There is established in the Executive Office of the President a War Refugee Board (hereinafter referred to as the Board). The Board shall consist of the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Treasury and the Secretary of War. The Board may request the heads of other agencies or departments to participate in its deliberations whenever matters specially affecting such agencies or departments are under consideration.

The Board shall be charged with the responsibility of seeing that the policy of the Government, as stated in the Preamble, is carried out. The functions of the Board shall include without limitation the development of plans and programs and the inauguration of effective measures for (a) the rescue, transportation, maintenance and relief of the victims of enemy oppression, and (b) the establishment of havens of temporary refuge

for such victims. To this and the Board, through appropriate channels, shall take the necessary steps to enlist the cooperation of foreign governments and obtain their participation in the execution of such plans and programs.

It shall be duty of the State, Treasury and War Departments, within their respective spheres, to execute at the request of the Board, the plans and programs so developed and the measures so inaugurated. It shall be the duty of the heads of all agencies and departments to supply or obtain for the Board such information and to extend to the Board such supplies, shipping and other specified assistance and facilities as the Board may require in carrying out the provisions of this Order. The State Department shall appoint special attaches with diplomatic status, on the recommendation of the Board, to be stationed abroad in places where it is likely that the assistance can be rendered to war refugees, the duties and responsibilities of such attaches to be defined by the Board in consultation with the State Department.

The Board and the State, Treasury and War Departments are authorized to accept the services or contributions of any private persons, private organizations, State agencies, or agencies of foreign governments in carrying out the purposes of this Order. The Board shall cooperate with all existing and future international organizations concerned with the problems of refugee rescue, maintenance, transportation, relief, rehabilitation, and resettlement.

To the extent possible the Board shall utilize the personnel supplies, facilities and services of the State, Treasury and War Departments. In addition the Board, within the limits of funds which may be available, may employ necessary personnel without regard for the Civil Service laws and regulations and the Classification Act of 1923, as amended, and make provisions for supplies, facilities and services necessary to discharge its responsibilities. The Board shall appoint an Executive Director who shall serve as its principal executive officer. It shall be the duty of the Executive Director to arrange for the prompt execution of the plans and programs developed and the measures inaugurated by the Board, to supervise the activities and the special attaches and to submit frequent reports to the Board on the steps taken for the rescue and relief of war refugees.

The Board shall be directly responsible to the President in carrying out the policy of this Government, as stated in the Preamble, and the Board shall report to him at frequent intervals concerning the such recommendations as the Board may seem appropriate for further action to overcome any difficulties encountered in the rescue and relief of war refugees.

Franklin D. Roosevelt

THE WHITE HOUSE, January 22, 1944.

Traduzione del Cablogramma del 9 giugno del 1944 inviato dal Presidente degli Stati Uniti, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, all'Ambasciatore in Algeria, Robert Murphy.

“Le informazioni in mio possesso indicano che ci sono possibilità reali di salvare vite umane portando un maggior numero di rifugiati dalla Jugoslavia all'Italia del sud. Inoltre sono informato sul fatto che la fuga dei rifugiati attraverso questo itinerario di tanto in tanto è stata impedita perché le strutture per i rifugiati nell'Italia del sud sono risultate sovraccariche. Sono dell'avviso che attualmente la situazione è questa e che di conseguenza possiamo perdere la possibilità di aumentare il flusso dei rifugiati in Italia. Capisco che molti dei rifugiati in Italia del sud sono stati e si stanno spostando verso i campi profughi provvisori nelle zone adiacenti al Mediterraneo e che gli sforzi stanno facendo aumentare le attuali strutture per i rifugiati in queste zone. Desidero che questo sforzo di portare i rifugiati dall'Italia verso zone relativamente vicine sia intensificato. Allo stesso tempo ritengo che sia importante che gli Stati Uniti indichino che sono pronti a condividere le difficoltà di occuparsi dei rifugiati durante la guerra. Di conseguenza, **ho deciso che circa 1.000 rifugiati devono immediatamente essere portati dall'Italia in questo paese, per essere sistemati in un Emergency Refugee Shelter da stabilire a Fort Ontario vicino ad Oswego, New York, dove sotto appropriate restrizioni di sicurezza rimarranno per la durata della guerra.** Questi rifugiati saranno introdotti in questo paese fuori dalla procedura normale di immigrazione così come sono stati portati qui gli internati civili dai paesi dell'America Latina e i prigionieri di guerra. L'Emergency Refugee Shelter sarà ben attrezzato per prendersi cura di questa gente. **È contemplato che alla conclusione della guerra dovranno tornare nei loro paesi d'origine.** Potete supporre che l'Emergency Refugee Shelter sarà pronto per ricevere questi rifugiati quando arriveranno. Apprezzerò quindi se si organizzerà al più presto possibile per la partenza verso gli Stati Uniti, coerentemente con i requisiti militari, di circa 1.000 rifugiati dell'Italia del sud. Può invitare i rappresentanti del War Refugees Board ad Algeri affinché l'aiutino. La cooperazione completa delle nostre autorità militari e navali dovrebbe garantire l'appoggio nell'effettuare rapidamente il trasferimento e il trasporto dei rifugiati. Nella scelta dei rifugiati da portare negli Stati Uniti, consideri per favore che nella misura possibile dovrebbero essere selezionati quei rifugiati per i quali non sono immediatamente disponibili altri luoghi di rifugio. Mi piacerebbe, comunque, che il gruppo includesse una proporzione ragionevole di varie categorie di persone perseguitate e fuggite in Italia. Dovrebbe considerare che poiché questi rifugiati devono essere portati in un campo negli Stati Uniti sotto adatte limitazioni di sicurezza, la procedura per la selezione dei rifugiati e le disposizioni per portarli qui dovrebbero essere il più possibile semplici e rapide, non complicate da nessuna delle usuali formalità nell'ammissione delle persone negli Stati Uniti secondo le leggi sull'immigrazione. Tuttavia, la prego di essere sicuro che siano effettuati i controlli sanitari necessari per evitare di portare qui persone afflitte da qualche malattia instabile, pericolosa o contagiosa. Se incontra delle difficoltà nell'organizzazione della rapida partenza di questi rifugiati per favore me lo faccia sapere.”

Versione integrale del messaggio di Roosevelt al Congresso (12.06.1944).

“To the Congress:

Congress has repeatedly manifested its deep concern with the pitiful plight of the persecuted minorities in Europe whose lives are each day being offered in sacrifice on the altar of Nazi tyranny.

This Nation is appalled by the systematic persecution of helpless minority groups by the Nazis. To us the unprovoked murder of innocent people simply because of race, religion, or political creed is the blackest of all possible crimes. Since the Nazis began this campaign many of our citizens in all walks of life and of all political and religious persuasions have expressed our feeling of repulsion and our anger. It is a matter with respect to which there is and can be no division of opinion amongst us.

As the hour of the final defeat of the Hitlerite forces draws closer, the fury of their insane desire to wipe out the Jewish race in Europe continues undiminished. This is but one example: Many Christian groups also are being murdered. Knowing that they have lost the war, the Nazis are determined to complete their program of mass extermination. This program is but one manifestation of Hitler's aim to salvage from military defeat victory for Nazi principles- the very principles which this war must destroy unless we shall have fought in vain.

This Government has not only made clear its abhorrence of this inhuman and barbarous activity of the Nazis, but, in cooperation with other Governments, has endeavoured to alleviate the condition of the persecuted peoples. In January of this year I determined that this Government should intensify its efforts to combat the Nazi terror. Accordingly, I established the War Refugee Board, composed of the Secretaries of State, Treasury, and War. This Board was charged with the responsibility of taking all action consistent with the successful prosecution of the war to rescue the victims of enemy oppression in imminent danger of death and to afford such victims all other possible relief and assistance. It was entrusted with the solemn duty of translating this Government's humanitarian policy into prompt action, thus manifesting once again in a concrete way that our kind of world and not Hitler's will prevail. Its purpose is directly and closely related to our whole war effort.

Since its establishment, the War Refugee Board, acting through a full-time administrative staff, has made a direct and forceful attack on the problem. Operating quietly, as is appropriate, the Board, through its representatives in various parts of the world, has actually succeeded in saving the lives of innocent people. Not only have refugees been evacuated from enemy territory, but many measures have been taken to protect the lives of those who have not been able to escape.

Above all, the efforts of the Board have brought new hope to the oppressed peoples of Europe. This statement is not idle speculation. From various sources, I have received word that thousands of people, wearied by their years of resistance to Hitler and by their sufferings to the point of giving up the struggle, have been given the will and desire to continue by the concrete manifestation of this Government's desire to do all possible to aid and rescue the oppressed.

To the Hitlerites, their subordinates and functionaries and satellites, to the German people, and to all other peoples under the Nazi yoke, we have made clear our determination to punish all participants in these acts of savagery. In the name of humanity we have called upon them to spare the lives of these innocent people.

Not with standing this Government's unremitting efforts, which are continuing, the numbers actually rescued from the jaws of death have been small compared with the numbers still facing extinction in German territory. This is due principally to the fact that our enemies, despite all our appeals and our willingness to find havens of refuge for

the oppressed peoples, persist in their fiendish extermination campaign and actively prevent the intended victims from escaping to safety.

In the face of this attitude of our enemies we must not fail to take full advantage of any opportunity, however limited, for the rescue of Hitler's victims. We are confronted with a most urgent situation.

Therefore, I wish to report to you today concerning a step which I have just taken in an effort to save additional lives and which I am certain will meet with your approval. You will, I am sure, appreciate that this measure is not only consistent with the successful prosecution of the war, but that it was essential to take action without delay.

Even before the Allied landing in Italy there had been a substantial movement of persecuted peoples of various races and nationalities into that country. This movement was undoubtedly prompted by the fact that, despite all attempts by the Fascists to stir up intolerance, the warm-hearted Italian people could not forsake their centuries-old tradition of tolerance and humanitarianism. The Allied landings swelled this stream of fleeing and hunted peoples seeking sanctuary behind the guns of the United Nations. However, in view of the military situation in Italy, the number of refugees who can be accommodated there is relatively limited. The Allied military forces, in view of their primary responsibility, have not been able generally speaking to encourage the escape of refugees from enemy territory. This unfortunate situation has prevented the escape of the largest possible number of refugees. Furthermore, as the number of refugees living in southern Italy increases, their care constitutes an additional and substantial burden for the military authorities.

Recently the facilities for the care of refugees in southern Italy have become so overtaxed that unless many refugees who have already escaped to that area and are arriving daily, particularly from the Balkan countries, can be promptly removed to havens of refuge elsewhere, the escape of refugees to that area from German-occupied territory will be seriously impeded. It was apparent that prompt action was necessary to meet this situation. Many of the refugees in southern Italy have been and are being moved to temporary refuges in the territory of other United and friendly Nations. However, in view of the number of refugees still in southern Italy, the problem could not be solved unless temporary havens of refuge were found for some of them in still other areas. In view of this most urgent situation it seemed indispensable that the United States in keeping with our heritage and our ideals of liberty and justice take immediate steps to share the responsibility for meeting the problem.

Accordingly, arrangements have been made to bring immediately to this country approximately 1,000 refugees who have fled from their homelands to southern Italy. Upon the termination of the war they will be sent back to their homelands. These refugees are predominantly women and children. They will be placed on their arrival in a vacated Army camp on the Atlantic Coast where they will remain under appropriate security restrictions.