



PRESS RELEASE

January 24, 2013

Celebrating the Legacy of Swedish Rescuer Raoul Wallenberg

*One man can make a difference
The legacy of Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg and Rwandan rescuers*

In Kigali, the Embassies of Sweden and the United States, in collaboration with the Aegis Trust and the Institute of Research and Dialogue for Peace (IRDP), have organized two events celebrating the centenary of the birth of Raoul Wallenberg, the Swedish diplomat who saved tens of thousands of Jews during the Holocaust, as well as the deeds of Rwandan rescuers who chose to stand up against genocide. The events will take place January 24 and 25. A third event, for Rwandan schools, will be held on January 26 with assistance from the Aegis Trust.

“In 1944 Wallenberg saved the lives of countless Jewish people in Budapest from the Nazis,” says Jean de Dieu Mucyo, Executive Secretary of Rwanda’s National Commission for the Fight Against Genocide (CNLG). “His actions, like those of rescuers during the Tutsi genocide in Rwanda, 1994, show that one person’s courage and ability can make a difference.”

On Thursday, January 24, an event at the Kigali Genocide Memorial will highlight both Wallenberg’s legacy and that of Rwandan rescuers. The event will include testimony from Rwandan rescuer Sula Karuhimbi, who saved over 20 people during the genocide, and a panel discussion on the relevance of these lessons today. An exhibition celebrating the life of Raoul Wallenberg will also be inaugurated at the event, and will remain open to the public at the Kigali Genocide Memorial until February 10.

Panelists at the event will include Professor Pierre Rwanyindo, Director, Institute of Research and Dialogue for Peace (IRDP); Dr Stephen Smith, Executive Director of USC Shoah Foundation and co-founder of Aegis Trust; Michael Wernstedt, grandnephew and member of Raoul Wallenberg Differencemakers, and Carl Wilkens, former head of Adventist Development and Relief Agency International in Rwanda and founder of World Outside My Shoes. The only American to remain in Rwanda during the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsis, Wilkens was instrumental in helping to save the lives of hundreds of children, women and men who had taken refuge at the Gisimba orphanage in Kigali.

“Wallenberg famously said of his rescue of Jews during the Holocaust, ‘to me, there’s no other choice,’ says Professor Rwanyindo. “Similarly, rescuers like Wilkens and Karuhimbi do not see

themselves as heroes, but simply as ordinary people who did what they should for others whose lives were in their hands.”

“The life and work of Raoul Wallenberg is a lesson for humanity. There is no more appropriate place to reflect on the meaning of his actions than in Rwanda where we are still learning about our failure to act in times of crisis. The USC Shoah Foundation is pleased to partner with our Rwandan colleagues to bring the many witnesses in the Visual History Archive as a powerful voice of conscience,” says Stephen Smith, USC Shoah Foundation Executive Director.

The film "*Good Evening Mr. Wallenberg*," which depicts Wallenberg's final weeks in Budapest, will be screened at the Lemigo Hotel on January 25. The film viewing will be free and open to the public.

On January 26, the Islamic Culture Centre, with assistance from the Aegis Trust, is bringing children from different schools in Rwanda together to learn and gain inspiration from the story of Raoul Wallenberg and stories of rescue in 1994. This event will involve different activities and speeches, including talks about how one person can make a difference and plays by the children. Around 600-1,000 children are expected to attend. For many this will be the first time they have learned about the Holocaust.

Raoul Wallenberg is one of the most famous and admired Swedes in the world. A diplomat and businessman, Wallenberg was appointed to the Swedish diplomatic mission in Budapest in June 1944 with funding and support from the American War Refugee Board. His job was to launch a rescue operation for Jews, and he became head of a special department. By issuing protective Swedish passports and renting buildings, "Swedish houses," where Jews could seek shelter, he saved tens of thousands of lives. In January 1945, Wallenberg was imprisoned by Soviet forces. His fate remains unknown. Russia claims he died in a Soviet prison on July 17, 1947. However, many witness reports suggest he may have been alive much later. His memory is preserved through books, music and films, and many buildings, squares, streets, schools and other institutions bear his name. The year 2012 was the centenary of Raoul Wallenberg's birth.

“Few of us will ever be called upon to show such courage,” says Dr James Smith, Chief Executive of the Aegis Trust, “but all of us should do what we can to help prevent genocide in the future.”

For more information on the events on January 24 and 25, please contact Susan Falatko, Public Affairs Officer at the United States Embassy in Kigali, at FalatkoSK@state.gov or +250 252 596-553.

For more information about the event on January 26, please contact Rachel Cummings, Projects Coordinator, The Aegis Trust, at rachel.cummings@aegistrust.org +250 (0) 786 834 102