



MACCABI WORLD UNION Department of Education

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י"ז ניסן תשע"ט

יום השואה והגבורה – YOM HASHOAH – HOLOCAUST DAY *The extraordinary story of Zakynthos' Jewish community*

Dear friends,

The fate of the Jewish residents of Zakynthos, Greece, is a powerful example of what can happen when an entire community chooses action over indifference, despite the risks.

In September 1943, Nazi ships of death were making stops in the ports of the Ionian Islands. They had stowed 2,000 Jews from Corfu in their holds and another 400 from Cephalonia, and were heading for Zakynthos. The mission of the SS squads was to round up all of the members of the Zakynthos Jewish community in the region and sail them to the western port city of Patra, where they would be transferred onto trains for Auschwitz.

At Zakynthos, the Nazis' commandant ordered Mayor Loukas Karrer to submit a list with the names of all the Jews that lived on the island, together with details of their assets. He had 24 hours to do so. Mayor Karrer called Metropolitan Bishop Chrysostomos for his help. While the Bishop negotiated for their lives, most of the island's Jews fled into the remote mountain villages, where they were hidden by their Greek non-Jewish residents. The Bishop and the Mayor had informed the leader of the Jewish community, Rabbi Isaac Ganis, of the German plans, prompting a massive operation to hide the island's Jews in villages, farms and the homes of Christians.

Both Mayor Loukas Karrer and Metropolitan Bishop Chrysostomos returned to the Nazi commandant with an envelope before the deadline expired. The commandant opened the envelope but the paper within contained just two names: the Bishop's and the mayor's. Bishop Chrysostomos then said: "Here are your Jews."

The Nazi commander was stunned. He sent an urgent message to Berlin requesting new orders. A year later, Mayor Loukas Karrer and Metropolitan Bishop Chrysostomos defied again another demand to deport the Jews of Zakynthos, saving them. In the months that followed and until the departure of the German troops, no one betrayed the Jews of Zakynthos, no one confessed to knowing where they were hiding, and as a consequence not one single Jew of the 275 that lived in the island was deported to the concentration camps – unlike the 80% of Jews in Greece who were killed in the Holocaust.



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Our actions in the face of injustice and hatred always matter. The people of Zakynthos and their political and religious leaders, Mayor Loukas Karrer and Metropolitan Bishop Chrysostomos, proved that.

During this Yom HaShoah, may God grant that we shall remember the extraordinary content, flowering creativity and productivity of the individual lives and Jewish communities so brutally uprooted, and may God bless the lives and actions of the saviors.

May God always protect the State of Israel!

And may we always remember, bless, honor and perpetuate by our deeds the lives of the Six Million, for we are their Living Memorial.

Chazak ve'ematz!

**Rabbi Carlos A. Tapiero
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