

Speech: We must never forget diplomats who rescued Jews from Nazis: article by Boris Johnson

British officials are not given to expressions of righteous anger; the dispatches in my red boxes usually reflect the Foreign Office tradition of measured and judicious prose.

Thankfully, there are exceptions. As we approach Holocaust Memorial Day tomorrow, I've been paying tribute to British diplomats who voiced outrage over the persecution of Jews in Nazi Germany – and acted on their words. After the Kristallnacht pogrom cast Jews onto the streets in November 1938, our Charge d'Affaires in Berlin, Sir George Ogilvie-Forbes, sent the following telegram to London.

"I can find no words strong enough in condemnation of the disgusting treatment of so many innocent people," he wrote. "The civilised world is faced with the appalling sight of 500,000 people about to rot away in starvation."

Ogilvie-Forbes let his embassy passport officer bend the rules and issue travel documents to thousands of Jews, allowing them to escape Germany. Margaret Reid was one official who processed the permits.

Earlier, our Consul-General in Munich, John Carvell, secured the freedom of 300 Jews from Dachau in 1937. His counterpart in Lithuania, Sir Thomas Preston, helped hundreds of Jews escape to Sweden in 1940. This week, [their descendants came to the Foreign Office](#) to receive Hero of the Holocaust Medals, granting their forebears posthumous recognition.

The diplomat in Berlin who handed out thousands of travel documents was MI6 station chief Frank Foley (his duties as passport officer were his cover). Today, he is commemorated at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem as one of the Righteous Among Nations.

In truth, too few people in that era strained every nerve and sinew to help the Jews. It was left to individual diplomats of great moral courage to do what was possible, sometimes in breach of the rules.

As Holocaust Memorial Day approaches, we would be committing a grave error if we dared overlook its message. The bigotry and hatred that paved the way for the Holocaust has never wholly disappeared. You can find it today on the internet and sometimes in our public discourse.

Recent genocides have not always encountered a determined response. A United Nations inquiry found in 2016 that the persecution of the Yazidi minority in northern Iraq by Daesh (otherwise known as IS) amounted to the "crime of genocide". Yet some in this country resolutely opposed our military action

against Daesh.

Even today, the truth about the Holocaust is sometimes denied. Comparisons are drawn between Zionism and Nazism, including by people who should know better. Hence the importance of the commemoration this weekend; the tragedy is that it remains necessary.