

On the morning of 27 July 1940...



CHIUNE (SEMPO) SUGIHARA

On the morning of 27 July 1940, Chiune Sugihara, a young career diplomat in the Japanese Foreign Service, looked out of the consulate windows in Kaunas (Kovno) in Lithuania, to see some 200 Jewish refugees from Poland outside the gate. Each day the numbers grew.

They came to beg Sugihara for transit visas to escape Poland and travel across the Soviet Union to Japan. Sugihara sought permission from Tokyo to issue the visas and was refused. Nonetheless, he decided to assist the desperate Jews, saying: "I may have to disobey my government, but if I don't, I will be disobeying God."

Working feverishly day and night, Sugihara wrote out visas by hand. When ink supplies became low and replacement impossible in war-time Lithuania, he watered down the remaining ink and kept writing. On 28 August the consulate closed and Sugihara was relocated to Berlin. In one short month he had issued approximately 6,000 visas. Because of his bravery, today there are more than 40,000 descendants of the refugees he saved.

On his return to Tokyo after the war, he was dismissed from the diplomatic service for disobeying orders. However, a group of Sugihara survivors located him and saw him honoured as one of the Righteous Among the Nations. Posthumously, Japan apologised for his dismissal and paid tribute to his humanitarian deeds.

*Courage to care*