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HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS AND RESCUER FROM GREECE REUNITE AT YAD VASHEM

THE JEWISH FOUNDATION FOR THE RIGHTEOUS BRINGS TOGETHER SURVIVORS AND THE WOMAN WHO SAVED THEM DURING WORLD WAR II

(3 November 2019 – JERUSALEM) Two Holocaust survivors now living in Israel and their Greek rescuer were reunited today in the Hall of Names at Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Center in Jerusalem, in a program initiated by the U.S.-based Jewish Foundation for the Righteous (JFR). The emotional reunion took place in the presence of nearly 40 descendants of the survivors who are alive today because of the heroic actions taken 76 years ago.

Survivors **Sarah Yanai (née Mordechai)** and **Yossi Mor (previously Mordechai)**, were reunited after decades with one of their rescuers, **Melpomeni Dina (née Gianopoulou)**. Both were born in Veira, Greece, a small town of 600 Jews located near Thessaloniki and today, reside in Ramat Hasharon and Be'er Sheva respectively.

For almost two years, [Melpomeni Dina \(née Gianopoulou\)](#), along with her sisters, [Efthimia](#) and **Bithleem (later Sumbasi)**, and members of the **Axiopoulos** family, **Nikos, Petros** and **Polixeni Axiopoulos, Evlambia Tokatlido (née Axiopoulos)** and **Makrina Ananiadou (née Axiopoulos)**, gave refuge to and provided for the Mordechai family: **Miriam (Mari)**, and her children: Sarah (b. 1933); **Asher** (b. 1935); **Shmuel** (b. 1938); **Rachel** (b. 1940); and **Yossi** (b. 1942). Due to the heroism and sacrifice of both the Gianopoulou and Axiopoulos families, most of the immediate Mordechai family members survived the war.

Efthimia Gianopoulou, Melpomeni's older sister, first met the Mordechai family while studying to become a seamstress with Mari Mordechai. Since Efthimia

was impoverished and orphaned at a young age, Mari did not charge her for the lessons. Efthimia grew close to the Mordechais and visited them regularly, even after they went into hiding. After their original hiding location was compromised, Efthimia arranged for them to move to her home in Veria, where she lived with her two younger sisters, 15-year-old Bithleem, and 14-year-old Melpomeni. There, in one room, they accommodated seven members of the Mordechai family.

The three sisters shared their food rations with the Mordechai family and sheltered them despite the risk to their own lives. Since food supplies were scarce and very expensive, Bithleem and Melpomeni cultivated a piece of land they owned in a swamp near Yiannitsa, around 40 kilometers from Veria. They would return from working the land, carrying the provisions on their backs for all 10 people.

After Shmuel died at age six, and the family's hiding place was discovered by the authorities, Melpomeni's family helped the Mordechai family flee to the Vermio mountains, continuing to provide for them until the end of the war.

On 12 April 1994, Yad Vashem recognized Melpomeni Dina as one of the Righteous Among the Nations. The Axiopoulos were recognized a few years earlier in 1989.

"Though we have met many survivors and their rescuers over the years, I never cease to be amazed by the bravery of the thousands of non-Jewish rescuers, the Righteous Among the Nations, who risked their lives and often the lives of their families to save Jews from death during the Holocaust," said JFR Executive Vice President Stanlee Stahl. "This year, the reunion took place in Jerusalem at Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Center, together with living survivors, their children and grandchildren, all who are alive today thanks to the heroism of Melpomeni and her sisters, making the reunion all the more meaningful. We are eternally grateful for these Righteous Among the Nations, and through our work, hope to share their stories of courage and compassion," she added.

The JFR continues its work of providing monthly financial assistance to more than 265 aged and needy rescuers living in 18 countries. Since its founding, the JFR has provided more than \$40 million to these noble men and women - helping to

repay a debt of gratitude on behalf of the Jewish people. Its Holocaust teacher education program has become a standard for teaching the history of the Holocaust and educating teachers and students about the significance of the Righteous as moral and ethical exemplars.

"Even 75 years after the end of the Second World War, Yad Vashem receives hundreds of requests each year to recognize non-Jews who risked their lives then to save Jews during the Holocaust," states Director of the Righteous Among the Nations Department Dr. Joel Zisenwine. "These rescuers are sparks of light during a period of darkness and devastation and provide a source of inspiration to us all these years after the Holocaust."

One of Yad Vashem's principal duties is to convey the gratitude of the State of Israel and the Jewish people to non-Jews who risked their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust. Rescue took many forms and the Righteous Among the Nations came from different countries, religions and walks of life. To date, Yad Vashem has recognized over 27,000 Righteous Among the Nations, 355 of whom are from Greece.

Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Center, established in 1953 by at the Israeli parliament, (Knesset), is dedicated to Holocaust remembrance, education, documentation and research. Yad Vashem is at the forefront of unceasing efforts to safeguard and impart the memory of the victims and the events of the Shoah period; to document accurately one of the darkest chapters in the history of humanity; and to grapple effectively with the ongoing challenges of keeping the memory of the Holocaust relevant today and for future generations.