

# Swiss Jews condemn President's one-sided account of country's war record in Holocaust address

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**BERN (EJP)---Comments by Swiss President Ueli Maurer in an address to mark International Holocaust Memorial Day have evoked outcry from the country's Jewish community, after the leader failed to address the wartime government's complicity in rejecting refugees seeking escape from Nazi persecution.**

In a statement Sunday, the Swiss President insisted Switzerland had remained “a country of freedom and law” during WWII, as he hailed its record for having provided a safe haven for the persecuted.

However, a joint response by the Swiss Federation of Jewish Communities (SIG) and the Liberal Jews of Switzerland (PLJS) Monday regretted the President's “one-sided message, which represents Switzerland in a solely positive light”.

Highlighting the right-wing leader's predecessor's 1995 admission in of the inadequacy of Switzerland's refugee policy, the statement concluded that Maurer “ignored the weaknesses and errors of Swiss policy during the Second World War”.

“It is unfortunate that the President did not mention today (Sunday) the Switzerland's critical conflict with its own past and in particular its refugee policy.”

The government-commissioned-Bergier report found in 2001 that Switzerland had rejected many refugee applications despite learning of the Nazi's final solution plans as early as 1942.

Sascha Zala, head of the Diplomatic Documents of Switzerland (DDS) research project told Swiss broadcaster SRF newly-published documents prove beyond doubt that “as of May 1942, information about the killings of Jews reached Bern”. The news agency further reported Sunday that despite receiving this information three years before the end of the war, the apparently neutral government nevertheless agreed to a policy instituting the mass return of civilian refugees to their home countries in August of that year.

As a neutral state near Germany, Switzerland was easy to reach for refugees from the Nazis. However, Switzerland's refugee laws, especially with respect to Jews fleeing Germany, were strict and have caused controversy since the end of World War II.

From 1933-1944 asylum for refugees could only be granted to those who were under personal threat owing to their political activities only, it did not include those who were under threat due to race, religion or ethnicity.

On the basis of this definition, Switzerland granted asylum to only 644 people between 1933- 1945 - of these, 252 cases were admitted during the war. Between 10,000 and 24,000 Jewish civilian refugees were refused entry, despite Switzerland earning a reputation for harbouring more Jewish refugees than any other country.

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