



## PRESS KIT

# 2023 – Commemoration of the 80th Anniversary of the Persecution of Denmark’s Jews

**In 1943, the German occupying power started their persecution of Danish Jews. Although many of them managed to escape to Sweden thanks to a large-scale effort on the part of the Danish people, almost 500 Jews were arrested and deported to Theresienstadt. This year it is precisely 80 years since these dramatic events took place. In 2023, this dark moment in history will be commemorated with a wide range of initiatives both in Denmark and abroad. In addition to several local initiatives, activities will be planned and coordinated in collaboration between the Danish Jewish Museum, Det Jødiske Samfund i Danmark [the Jewish Community in Denmark], Humanity in Action and the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.**

On 8 October 2023 There will be an official memorial service at the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen, followed by a two-day seminar in the city of Gilleleje for invited witnesses, politicians and researchers. Commemorating the 80th anniversary of the persecution of Denmark’s Jews is not just an important event in Denmark. It is also being commemorated in a number of other countries, who are remembering the story as a light in the darkness of the Holocaust. For example, this autumn will see the opening of a brand new exhibition at the Jewish Heritage Museum in New York – *Courage to Act: Rescue in Denmark* – targeted particularly at children and young people.

In Denmark, the event has become an important part of the story of Denmark’s role and actions during World War II. It is not simply a story of *rescue*. It is also a story of *escape*, in which Denmark’s Jews played an active role, and about their intense, horrific experiences during escape, exile and captivity that left scars on both their lives and souls.

We have devised a common visual identity and logo for the 80th anniversary commemoration to unite the numerous different initiatives. The visual identity was devised in collaboration and discussion with a number of key figures involved in the commemoration: in particular, Det Jødiske Samfund, Humanity in Action and the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

See the press material here: [Pressebilleder - 80-aaret](#)

## *Voices in the Void*

Monday 24 April saw the launch of the animated film *Voices in the Void* at the National Museum of Denmark. The film is about the escape of the then 14-year-old Bent Melchior and his family to Sweden in October 1943. The film both tells and updates the story and, together with brand new educational material, paves the way for debate about what we need to do if we are to prevent history from repeating itself.

The film was originally produced by Humanity in Action in the United States as the first part of a trilogy entitled *TRACES – Portraits of Resistance, Survival and Resolve*. The trilogy examines the nature of resistance to Nazi persecution during World War II in three different countries – Denmark, the Netherlands and Germany. *Voices in the Void* is about Denmark's resistance and can be watched as a film in its own right. In the film, we hear Bent Melchior himself telling the story – both in the English and now the Danish version. To find out more about the film, visit:

[https://www.80aaret.dk/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Voices\\_in\\_the\\_Void - one-pager - Long pitch - 12.04.23.pdf](https://www.80aaret.dk/fileadmin/user_upload/Voices_in_the_Void_-_one-pager_-_Long_pitch_-_12.04.23.pdf)

The film received its international premiere in Tel Aviv in December 2022 after screenings at a number of different film festivals throughout the world. Now comes a Danish version, developed by Humanity in Action Denmark, the Danish Embassy in Tel Aviv and the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The launch of the film is accompanied by educational material devised by the Ghetto Fighters' House Museum in Israel, with the Danish Jewish Museum as history consultants and supported by the Danish Agency for Culture and Palaces. Right now, all parties are working together with the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs to make both the film and the material available to the rest of the world as part of the 80th anniversary commemoration.

The film is publicly available on YouTube in both the Danish and English versions, and a screenable is available upon request from Humanity in Action. The educational material will also be freely accessible.

The international efforts have been complemented by a revised and updated version of the book about the subject (in English) by Therkel Stræde, an Associate Professor at University of Southern Denmark and one of the country's leading Holocaust researchers. It will be published by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs in collaboration with the Danish Jewish Museum.

## *Stolpersteine*

In Denmark too, both Jews and others who were persecuted for their religion, political beliefs, sexual orientation or contributions to the resistance, ended up as victims of Nazi crimes. In memory of those many individuals, *stolpersteine* (stumbling stones) will be laid outside their last known places of residence. They amount to the largest decentralised memorial in Europe – if not in the world. More than 90,000 stones have been laid worldwide. Denmark has laid more than 60 stones, and many more are on the way.

A new app now gives voice to the victims of Nazi crimes in Denmark. In the app you can listen to a victim's personal story in situ – on the pavement where you 'stumbled' across the stone. This outreach initiative is aimed at history enthusiasts and, particularly, schools, allowing pupils to explore history in public spaces. The first-hand accounts are fictionalised versions of historical sources and reports by relatives. It is a serious, valuable and highly effective form of communication that spotlights the personal story. The stories are read by actors or radio presenters. The app was developed by Historiens Hus [House of History – the City Archive in Odense], featuring content produced by the Danish Jewish Museum based on the authentic personal stories behind the stumbling stones. The project is funded by the Danish Ministry of Education.

Try the online app here: <https://snublesten.historienshus.dk/>

## Programme

In addition to the official commemoration, the 80th anniversary year will feature a huge range of activities throughout Denmark on every conceivable scale. It began with Auschwitz Day in January, followed by the film *Voices in the Void*. On 4 June the photo and portrait exhibition *Make a Difference* opened as part of the Jewish Cultural Festival. Two new memorials to escape and rescue will be erected – on the beach at Vedbæk, and in Lund in Stevns. In October, HamletScenen at Kronborg will premiere the play *Ekko fra Venedig* (Echo from Venice). There will also be a number of talks, debate events and publications.

Follow the programme here: [www.80aaret.dk](http://www.80aaret.dk).

## Quotes

### **Peter Hummelgaard – Danish Minister of Justice**

The Danish Minister of Justice was the keynote speaker at the premiere of *Voices in the Void*.

“There are certain stories, the message of which is so universal, that they extend far beyond time and place. One such story is the escape of Denmark’s Jews to Sweden in 1943. Our children and young people need to know the story. In our efforts to combat anti-Semitism, we must continue to teach them about the Holocaust and Jewish life. The values we learn as children are often the ones that remain with us for the rest of our lives. Learning respect for one’s fellow citizens – despite differences – is a crucial part of general education in school.”

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### **Janus Møller Jensen – Director of the Danish Jewish Museum**

“We’re facing an important dividing line. Gradually, the last-remaining witnesses to the story are disappearing. So, it’s more important than ever to hear and preserve the testimonies of the survivors, and to remember the events. This is distressingly topical in an age of continued war, persecution and refugee flows, when anti-Semitism still exists in Denmark too.

We have devised new material with a common symbol and a website to help make the commemoration more visible, and to provide a list of the numerous activities that will take place during 2023. We urge all cultural institutions to make use of it, to raise awareness of this important story and its commemoration.

The film is about a crucial moment in the history of Denmark – a moment that is hugely important – even today. We hope that the film and the new educational material can kindle debate about the values expressed back then, and persuade people how important it is to discuss them today.”

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### **Henri Goldstein – President of Det Jødiske Samfund.**

“80 years is a lifetime, but fortunately, since many of the refugees were just children in October 1943, many of them are still living. It’s important to use the anniversary to take the time to listen to them. A testimony from someone who was present is more powerful than even the most impressive retelling.

The story of October 1943 is an important story both for Denmark and its country’s Jews. For us Danish Jews, almost everyone has parents, grandparents or great-grandparents who were refugees. And we must never forget that for about 500 Danish Jews, October 1943 was the beginning of a year and a half in Theresienstadt – one and a half years of hunger, humiliation and uncertainty.

For Denmark, the partial rescue of the country's Jews constitutes one of the best-known and positive images of Denmark and Danish values abroad. The story of World War II may be one of dilemmas and contradictions, but October 1943 is inscribed in the history books as a moment when Denmark as a nation unequivocally took the right stand."

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#### **Mikaela von Freiesleben – Head of Secretariat, Humanity in Action Denmark**

"Humanity in Action was started by the Danish journalist Herbert Pundik, one of those who had to escape to Sweden in October 1943. He founded the organisation in order to investigate what the rescue of the Danish Jews can teach us and how we can continue to inspire young people to actively take a stand and take action when a situation calls for it. That is also the basis for *Voices in the Void* and the accompanying educational material."

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#### **Judith Goldstein – Humanity in Action USA**

"The 80th anniversary comes at an extremely important time. For over 26 years, Humanity in Action has highlighted the rescue of Jews in Denmark as a unique example of a country protecting a minority under duress. We have sought to understand the particular dynamics of the powerful Danish civic culture that rejected the roles of collaborators and bystanders. Today, protecting minorities, strengthening democratic practices and sustaining human rights are more challenging and important than in any of the previous years of our Humanity in Action's educational and public work with younger generations".

### **Practical information**

You can register events as part of the official commemoration of the 80th anniversary via the website [www.80aaret.dk](http://www.80aaret.dk) where you will also find the list of activities. This also provides you with access to the graphic material.

Link to press photos: [Pressebilleder - 80-aaret](#)

Please contact Laura Hoffmann Jensen from The Danish Jewish Museum for logos at [lhj@jewmus.dk](mailto:lhj@jewmus.dk)