

# EVIAN CONFERENCE

After Germany annexed Austria in March 1938, President Franklin D. Roosevelt called for an international conference to promote the emigration of Austrian and German refugees and create an international organization whose purpose would be to deal with the refugee problem. The President invited delegates from thirty-two countries, including the United States, Great Britain, France, Canada, six small European democratic nations, the Latin American nations, Australia, and New Zealand. The conference was convened in Evian, France from July 6–16, 1938. Its declared goal was to deal with the refugee problem, however, Roosevelt made it clear that no country would be forced to change its immigration quotas, but would instead be asked to volunteer changes.

During the conference, it became painfully obvious that no country was willing to volunteer anything significant to help the refugees, whom everyone understood were Jewish refugees. The British delegate claimed that Britain was already fully populated and suffering from unemployment, so it could not take in a larger number of refugees. His only new offer consisted of allowing British territories in East Africa to take in small numbers of refugees. The French delegate declared that France had reached “the extreme point of saturation as regards admission of refugees.” Myron C. Taylor, the American delegate, allowed that the United States would make the previously unfilled quota for Germans and Austrians available to these new refugees. Other countries claimed the Depression as their excuse for not accepting refugees. Only the Dominican Republic, a tiny country in the West Indies, volunteered to take in refugees—in exchange for huge amounts of money. The world’s democracies had made it extremely clear that they were not willing to help European Jewry.

The only operative step taken at the conference was the establishment of the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees (ICR). Its goals were to help safe haven candidate countries develop opportunities for refugee settlement, and to try and convince Germany to allow organized emigration. However, ICR member countries did not give the organization either the funding or the authority it needed to make a real difference.



## About Photo

U.S. delegate Myron C. Taylor delivers a speech at the Evian Conference on Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany. Evian-les-Bains, France, July 15, 1938.

Photo courtesy National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD

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## BERMUDA CONFERENCE

By the end of 1942, reports revealed that the Nazis intended to exterminate European Jewry. Both in the United States and Britain, Jewish and non-Jewish groups demanded that their governments take a stand against the atrocities. The two governments then planned a conference to address public opinion. They chose inaccessible Bermuda as the conference's venue in order to control the number of reporters and representatives of non-governmental organizations attending. Members of the Joint Distribution Committee and the World Jewish Congress were not permitted to attend. The conference was convened on April 19, 1943. Its declared goal was to deal with the issue of wartime refugees.

The organizers severely limited the issues that could be discussed. They insisted on downplaying the persecution of the Jews and the "Final Solution," and presented the issue of refugees only in its more universal aspects. Furthermore, the Americans refused to consider changing their strict immigration quotas to let in more Jewish refugees, while the British refused to consider Palestine as a safe haven for Jewish refugees. They would not even discuss sending food packages to concentration camp prisoners. The Americans also betrayed their lack of seriousness by not sending a high-ranking delegation with the authority to make decisions.

At the conference itself, the attendees spent much time talking about renewing the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees (ICR), which had been created at the 1938 Evian Conference for the purpose of negotiating with the Germans about refugees. However, the point was moot because, as negotiating with the Nazis was no longer an option, no one was willing to fund the committee. No other solution suggested was deemed acceptable by the two governments, either. Thus, nothing was accomplished, and the Bermuda Conference did not save one Jew.



### About Photo

Delegates to the refugee conference in Bermuda.

Left to right: George Hall, British delegate; Dr. Harold W. Dodds, Chairman of the US group; Richard K. Law, British Undersecretary of State for Foreign Affairs; Rep. Sol Bloom, New York; Osbert Peake, British Undersecretary for the Home Office.

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# THE REFUGEE

Felix Nussbaum, 1939



## About Painting

Felix Nussbaum (1904-1944), *The Refugee (European Vision)*, 1939. Oil on canvas. Collection of the Yad Vashem Art Museum, Jerusalem. © Yad Vashem. All Rights Reserved.

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