

Westerweel, Joop

(1899--1944), Dutch teacher who rescued Jews during the Holocaust. After his death, Westerweel was designated as Righteous among the Nations by Yad Vashem, and a forest was planted in Israel in his name in 1954.

Around the time that the German occupiers began deporting Dutch Jews to their deaths in extermination camps in 1942, Westerweel got to know a group of young Zionists (*halutsim*) living at a farm near his home. He and their counselor, Joachim ("Schuschu") Simon, joined forces to organize an underground movement in order to hide the young people and spare them from being deported. In early August they found hiding places for 60 of the *halutsim*. Then Westerweel and Schuschu began organizing an escape route for them, through Belgium and France to Switzerland and Spain.

In the fall of 1942 Schuschu traveled to France to make contact with the Jewish underground there. In December 1942 and January 1943 the first groups of *halutsim* were smuggled into France via Belgium; they were then able to move on to freedom in Spain. In January Schuschu was arrested by the Nazis in the south of the Netherlands during one of his many trips to France to set up escapes. While in prison, he managed to inform his co-activists of his arrest, and then took his own life. After this loss, Westerweel's rescue operation increased to 20 members.

In February 1944 Westerweel himself accompanied a group of *halutsim* to the border between France and Spain in the Pyrenees Mountains. In a moving farewell, he asked that upon their arrival in Palestine, they remember and commemorate those of their comrades who had not made it. Less than a month later, Westerweel was caught by the Germans while trying to sneak two young *halutsim* over the Dutch border into Belgium. He himself did not make it: he was taken to the concentration camp at Vught, where he was tortured but never let slip any information about his fellow rescuers. On August 11 he was executed. However, his group continued on, smuggling nearly 200 Jews into France, including 70 *halutsim*.