

## Va'ad Ha-Hatsala

Rescue Committee of United States Orthodox Rabbis, established in November 1939 by the Union of Orthodox Rabbis of the United States and Canada. Its goal was to rescue rabbis and *yeshiva* students who had fled Poland for Lithuania after World War II broke out.

For the first two years of its existence, the *Va'ad* sent aid to 2,500 rabbis and students in Lithuania, at that time under Soviet control. The committee helped 650 of these refugees emigrate during the first half of 1941. Some made it to the United States or Palestine, but most ended up in Shanghai, China, where they stayed for the rest of the war. Some of the rabbis who arrived in the United States became active in the *Va'ad's* activities.

After the United States entered the war in December 1941, the *Va'ad* focused on helping the refugee scholars in Shanghai and hundreds of scholars who had sought refuge in Soviet Central Asia. The committee sent them money and packages, which helped them continue their study routines despite the difficult conditions.

In 1942 the news of the mass extermination of European Jewry was made public. The *Va'ad* then turned its attention to the rescue of Jews in Eastern Europe. They pressured the US government to help save the Jews; one of the committee's major activities was a protest march of 400 Orthodox rabbis to the White House on October 6, 1943. This effort helped contribute to the creation of the War Refugee Board.

From 1939--1943, the *Va'ad* had concentrated on rescuing *yeshiva* students and rabbis only. In January 1944, when the extent of the destruction in Eastern Europe was made known to committee leaders, they decided to work on rescuing all types of Jews. Throughout 1944 and 1945 the *Va'ad* engaged in relief and rescue activities through its offices in Switzerland, Sweden, Turkey, and Tangier. The committee also kept in contact with Orthodox leaders in Slovakia and Hungary. In February 1945 the *Va'ad* succeeded in rescuing 1,200 prisoners from Theresienstadt and sent them to Switzerland. After the war, the *Va'ad* assisted survivors of the Holocaust.