

Graduate Spotlight

Every year, the International School for Holocaust Studies holds hundreds of educational activities, in a dozen languages, for over 300,000 students and educators in Israel and around the world. Featured here is one of the School's graduates, and what he has achieved since:



Urs Urech Switzerland

James Joseph McIntosh

■ After attending a seminar at Yad Vashem's International School for Holocaust Studies in 2012, Urs Urech, a history teacher from Baden, Switzerland, embarked on an ongoing series of activities for educators in the German-speaking cantons of his native country. In the years since first visiting Israel, he has led several groups of German-speaking Swiss educators coming to study at Yad Vashem. Back home, he established the Shoah Education Network, where teachers can exchange ideas to promote International Holocaust Remembrance Day.

As Switzerland's diversity increases, Urech sees the value and importance of teaching about the Holocaust across different religious faiths and nationalities. As such, he played a key role in bringing Yad Vashem's traveling exhibition "BESA" to three different locations in northwestern Switzerland. Named after an Albanian word meaning "promise-keeping," the exhibition details the stories of Albanian Muslims who risked their lives and those of their families to rescue Jews during the Holocaust. "The stories of the Muslim Righteous in Albania were eye-opening to the teenagers from the Balkans, whose parents were often refugees or immigrants," explains Urech. "Albanians who saved Jews during WWII have become their role models; they are proud Albanians living in Switzerland."

With respect to the Swiss Muslim community, Urech has been serving on the advisory board of a joint Jewish-Muslim group dedicated to countering antisemitism and Islamophobia, where he offers guidance on Holocaust-related topics. As part of a Jewish-Christian dialogue group, he has organized memorial activities

commemorating the *Kristallnacht* pogrom, a Nazi state-sponsored night of violence against Jewish people and property in the Third Reich that occurred on 9-10 November 1938. "Although many Jews were safe in Switzerland, thousands were turned away when the Swiss authorities

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closed the borders in 1942. We need to do more research in order to tell the stories of those who were lost and to teach students about that part of Swiss history,” stresses Urech.

Having met a Holocaust survivor during Yad Vashem's seminars, Urech has also organized numerous educational encounters between students and survivors. Besides making



■ Yad Vashem graduate Urs Urech at an exhibition about *Righteous Among the Nations* Carl Lutz, the Swiss Ambassador in Budapest who saved 62,000 Jews by handing out (unauthorized) Swiss passports during the Nazi occupation of Hungary

friends with some of them, he recognizes that highlighting the voices and personal stories of Holocaust survivors has a lasting and profound impact on their audiences, and endeavors to acquaint his students with as many survivors as possible. In addition, Urech has guided groups to Holocaust-related sites, including the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum and the old Jewish quarter of Krakow. He is currently developing a new teaching aid based on the biographies of Jewish children who immigrated or fled to Switzerland during WWII. "We are late in the game of Holocaust education," concludes Urech, "but more and more teachers and educators in Switzerland want to make a difference."

The author works in the European Department, International School for Holocaust Studies.