

HIAS POLICY RESOLUTION

Refugee Protection: Providing Assistance and Safe-Haven to the World's Most Vulnerable

One of the central components of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) and its 124-year history of service to over 4.5 million migrants in the United States and around the world has been its commitment to refugees and other victims of persecution. One crucial aspect of HIAS' refugee protection activity since the late 1970s has been to coordinate the resettlement of over 400,000 Jewish and non-Jewish refugees in communities throughout the United States where they now live in freedom and security. Both American traditions and Jewish teachings emphasize welcoming the stranger. The Jewish commitment to this central value is seen in the 36 references to this principle within the Torah. Jewish tradition also instructs us in principles of Piddyon Shevuyim (redeeming the captive), Chesed (kindness), and Hachnasat Orchim (hospitality), which support a compassionate response to the problems of refugees.

Over the years, HIAS' refugee work has benefited from close cooperation with other refugee resettlement, assistance and processing agencies; with international organizations like the UN High Commissioner for Refugees; and, through a public-private partnership, with the United States government. HIAS commends the Administration, as well as numerous Members of Congress from both parties, for taking a leadership role on refugee protection, and for United States' crucial contributions to overseas refugee assistance and the admission of refugees into this country.

HIAS is greatly concerned about the continuing plight of the 11.5 million refugees and nearly 21.3 million internally displaced people throughout the world. HIAS notes that, despite offering permanent resettlement to the largest number of refugees of any single country, the United States' annual admissions of refugees has fallen significantly during the



past decade. The U.S. resettled 52,875 refugees in FY 2005 marking a dramatic increase over the years following 9/11 when fewer than 29,000 were admitted each year. However, this is still far fewer than the 132,000 refugees resettled in FY 1992.

HIAS is gravely concerned about the protection and assistance needs of victims of rape, genocide and other persecution – including Darfurian refugees who have sought safe-haven in Chad – who rely on the United States and the international community for their lives and safety. Additionally, HIAS is alarmed that legitimate policies designed to bar the admission of individuals who provide “material support” to terrorists are resulting in the denial of protection to bona fide refugees from Colombia, Burma and other countries.

RESOLUTIONS

HIAS resolves to renew its commitment to finding durable solutions to this complex and multi-faceted humanitarian crisis. HIAS will educate its grassroots supporters and engage in advocacy to promote an even greater role of leadership for the United States in the field of refugee protection.

While assistance from private voluntary organizations such as HIAS is essential to address the world refugee crisis, the magnitude of the dangers faced by refugees necessitates that the governments of the world expand their commitment to refugee protection. HIAS calls on the U.S. government to renew its commitment to leadership in this area and provide sufficient resources for this mission. HIAS recommends that the U.S. Administration request and that Congress appropriate at least \$985 million for the Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA) account and at least \$50 million for the Emergency

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Refugee and Migration Assistance (ERMA) account for FY 2006. Additionally, HIAS recommends that for FY 2006, \$667 million be provided to the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) of the Department of Health and Human Services. ORR is the principal agency responsible for assisting refugees once they have arrived in the U.S. – as well as asylees, torture survivors, victims of human trafficking and unaccompanied alien children – and ensuring a smooth integration into local communities. While these funding levels clearly cannot meet all refugee needs, such allocations would allow for increases in support of refugees abroad and restoration of refugee admissions to the level envisioned by President Bush in his report to Congress in 2001. This would be an important step in the right direction, and would honor our nation's traditional commitment to refugees, both in the U.S. and abroad.

In addition to providing increased funding for refugee assistance and resettlement, HIAS recommends that the following important policy concerns be addressed.

HIAS encourages Congress and the Administration to take immediate steps to ensure that legitimate refugees from Colombia and other parts of the world are not prevented from receiving protection through the use of “material support for terrorism” provisions of law.

HIAS, and other private voluntary agencies with direct ties to U.S. constituencies, have long provided crucial overseas refugee processing activities through a Joint Voluntary Agency (JVA) model. Not only does a JVA provide efficient services for refugees and the U.S. government, but this model is also unique in its focus on refugee advocacy and its ability to develop grassroots support for the U.S. refugee program. Unfortunately, in recent years the U.S. government has moved away from this dynamic public-private partnership and now often uses an international inter-governmental agency instead of a JVA for overseas

processing. HIAS calls on the U.S. government to reverse this trend, and to use a JVA when processing refugees abroad.

Crucial to the success of the U.S. refugee program has been the public-private partnership in refugee resettlement. Part of this program is a system of reception and placement (R&P) grants given by the U.S. government to private voluntary agencies to help cover the cost of a refugee's first month in the United States. Because of increased monitoring and other requirements placed on agencies providing these services, HIAS calls on the U.S. government to raise the amount provided to refugee resettlement agencies through the R&P program to cover such expenses.

In the former Soviet Union and Iran, areas of special concern for HIAS, the U.S. refugee program has assisted over 500,000 refugees to resettle in the United States over the past 20 years. The admission of these refugees, primarily members of religious minorities such as Jews and Evangelical Christians, has been facilitated through the Specter-Lautenberg Amendment, legislation that recognizes their membership in a historically persecuted group. Due to the continued persecution, harassment and discrimination faced by members of these groups – including anti-Semitism and the targeting of minority religious faiths – HIAS calls upon Congress to extend this legislation. Furthermore, HIAS commends the leadership of Senator Arlen Specter (R-PA) and Senator Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ) for their dedication to this legislation and the cause of religious minorities in the former Soviet Union and Iran.

In the face of the global refugee crisis, HIAS resolves to seek comprehensive solutions that utilize the expertise and resources of the private voluntary agencies, the United States government, and the international refugee community.

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