

## HIAS POLICY RESOLUTION

### *Protection of Children in the Immigration Process*

For 120 years, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) has championed vulnerable migrants and sought to provide protection and care during the difficult immigration process. Based on this concern, HIAS representatives worked to assist Jews fleeing persecution whose entry into the United States was threatened by health, language and other barriers. This commitment is also at the heart of HIAS' commitment to refugees – both those in dangerous locations throughout the world and those seeking safety and a new life in the United States.

At present, one of the most vulnerable groups of migrants is children who arrive unaccompanied in the United States. Each year, the Immigration and Naturalization Service detains approximately 5000 unaccompanied undocumented immigrant children, a majority being held in various types of detention facilities while they undergo removal or asylum proceedings. While some of these children are released within weeks, others are held for many months while their cases are processed. During their incarceration, some of these children are housed with violent juvenile offenders and suffer from isolation and disciplinary measures that include shackling and solitary confinement.

HIAS is particularly concerned that many of these children are involved in complex immigration cases – including applications for political asylum – without the benefit of assistance from an adult or representation by legal counsel. Because of these obstacles, children are left in dire conditions in detention and risk being removed from the United States, even in cases where they may suffer persecution on return to their home country.

As part of an effort to provide a more secure welcome for unaccompanied immigrant children, HIAS applauds Senator Diane Feinstein (D-CA) for intro-



ducing the Unaccompanied Alien Child Protection Act Of 2001. Among the provisions of this important legislation are measures to: create a new Office of Children's

Services within the Department of Justice to ensure that Federal authorities recognize the special needs and circumstances of unaccompanied alien children when making decisions regarding their custody and repatriation; establish minimum standards for the custody of unaccompanied alien children; ensure that unaccompanied alien children in immigration proceedings have access to appointed counsel and guardians *ad litem*; and strengthen opportunities for permanent protection of these children when such protection is warranted.

HIAS resolves to support efforts to protect unaccompanied children who are seeking a safe future in the United States. These children should be provided with the resources they need to navigate the difficult immigration process, and should be quickly moved out of detention into safe circumstances where they can receive the care they need.

*Approved, HIAS Board of Directors, March 5, 2001.*