

Content Resources for National Day of Jewish Action for Refugees



The most powerful thing you can do in this moment is to organize a gathering and speak out about why this Executive Order barring refugees matters to you as a Jewish community – in whatever format lends itself best to your community’s resources.

Suggested Program

This is an outline of the program we suggest:

- Opening speaker to welcome frame and give context for the particular moment we’re in and get the crowd energized
- Speaker on our historical connection as Jews to the refugee crisis
- Chant connected to historical background: “Never again means never again for everyone.”
- If you have a connection to a local refugee, you might consider inviting that person to tell his/her personal story in order to make a link between the Jewish historical connection to the refugee crisis and contemporary refugees. If applicable, ask this person to talk about how this ban affects him/her and his/her family.
- *Kriyah* Ritual
- Moment of song (invite a local Jewish musician or cantor)
- If you are inviting a local politician to speak, this is an appropriate juncture for him/her to speak.
- Speaker on the Jewish values that undergird our responsibility to the stranger
- Chant connected to Jewish values: “Love, not fear. Refugees are welcome here.”
- Speaker giving a closing call to action to get involved with the movement of American Jews supporting refugees
- Closing Chant: “When refugees are under attack, what do we do? Stand up, fight back!”

As you plan your action, think about the tone you want to set – is your action a high-energy rally or is it more of a somber and reflective vigil? The outline above is a template from which you can plan your local action and is designed to create the energy of a rally. We understand that capacity is quite different in different locations, so we encourage you to put together a program that works with the resources at your disposal. For instance, you might combine all the speaking roles and the role of leading *kriyah* and ask one person (a local rabbi or Jewish lay leader) to take that role. You might also consider inviting a local Muslim leader and/or Holocaust survivor to speak. You can also supplement any speaking with readings or additional songs, using some of the suggestions below. The outline above is just a suggestion from which to draw inspiration.

Every city and town has an iconic gateway, arch, or door. Pick a photogenic location in front of a gate or door, where you can legally hold a gathering. You might also hold your event in front of the doors of a local synagogue or powerful symbolic gathering place in your community.

Talking Points for Speakers

Opening

- This Executive Order is un-American and flies in the face of Jewish values. The Jewish community is rising up with a strong, united voice to say that America must not close its doors on refugees.
- We are in a devastating moment in history. We have not seen such restrictions on refugees and immigrants since the 1920s. Yet, today there are more refugees than at any time in history with 65 million refugees and displaced people worldwide, which means it is more important than ever before that the U.S. continue welcoming refugees.
- The United States was founded to provide freedom and safety to the persecuted, and the widespread outrage in response to the ban reflects that America understands that welcoming refugees strengthens our nation.
- Helping refugees upholds our values as Americans and sets an example for the nations of the world to follow. What America does matters internationally.
- Welcoming the stranger is also a core Jewish value.
- Public displays of support for refugees and against this Executive Order make a difference. People showing up and using their voices to say “we stand with refugees” and “we welcome refugees” matters.
- Today, on this National Day of Jewish Action, we are one of many communities across the nation brought together by HIAS to stand up against the Executive Order and boldly say that we welcome refugees to our nation.
- HIAS, the Jewish community’s refugee agency, has been welcoming refugees to our shores for more than 135-years. Many of those new arrivals were our parents, or great grand-parents, or cousins or neighbors. We must continue to welcome refugees to our country.

Jewish History

- We don’t have to go back very far to be reminded of why the United States should never again let fear dictate who is allowed to find safety on our shores.
 - The Immigration Act of 1921 limited the immigration of Europeans because of a fear that people from southern and eastern European countries would not adapt well to American society and would also threaten the United States.
 - The law dictated that no more than 3% of the total number of immigrants from any specific country already living in the United States in 1910 could migrate to America during any year.
 - Because of this law, many Jews fleeing persecution in Eastern Europe were turned away from the United States.
 - In the 1930s, refugees fleeing the Holocaust were marked as security threats to the United States and denied entry, and many were turned away from our shores.
 - We know the devastating effects this had as Jews were murdered across Europe. The U.S. was not responsible for the Holocaust, but they were responsible for closing their doors to innocent people and denying them a pathway to safety.
- (If the person speaking has a family history of fleeing violence and persecution to come to the United States, this would be an appropriate juncture at which to add their personal story.)
- This devastating Executive Order is history repeating itself.

- In this moment, America must avoid the shame brought upon the U.S. when we shut our doors to Jews fleeing the Holocaust. Instead, the doors of our country must remain open to today's refugees.
- If we say "Never again," it has to mean "Never again for everyone."
- *This speaker should close by inviting participants to join in this chant: "Never again means never again for everyone."*

Jewish Values

- Judaism believes that every human being is created *b'tzelem Elohim* – in the image of God – and is, therefore, equally deserving of dignity and protection, regardless of nationality or religion.
- The value of *pikuach nefesh* – saving a life – is a core Jewish value that teaches we are to do all that we can to protect human life. This means we have a Jewish obligation to protect refugees, people whose lives are literally at risk.
- Judaism's most central text, the Torah, is crystal clear when it comes to how it says we are to treat the stranger in our midst.
- We are commanded to welcome, protect, and love the stranger.
- Our obligations to the stranger are reiterated more than any other commandment or value in the Torah – according to the Talmud, they are repeated in various ways thirty-six times.
- Unlike many commandments for which we are given no explanation, we are told that we are to love the stranger because we were strangers in the land of Egypt.
- This value is foundational to who we are as a people.
- *This speaker should close by inviting participants to join in this chant: "Love, not fear. Refugees are welcome here."*

(For additional Jewish texts off of which to base your remarks, download "HIAS Refugee Torah (Abridged)" at www.hias.org/resources)

Call to Action

- The vibrant Jewish American movement in support of refugees led by HIAS, the world's oldest, and only Jewish, refugee resettlement organization, is the embodiment of the values of welcoming, loving, and protecting the stranger.
- Several hundred congregations across the country have signed onto HIAS' Welcome Campaign to say that they support welcoming refugees to our nation and to commit to taking action on behalf of refugees.
- Nearly 2,000 American rabbis have signed onto a letter organized by HIAS to elected officials in support of keeping the doors of the U.S. open to refugees of all ethnic and religious backgrounds.
- Tens of thousands of American Jews are advocating on behalf of refugees.
- *This is an appropriate juncture at which to tell participants about local efforts to support refugees in your community.*
- *End with a rousing call for attendees to join together in the week ahead to fight for and welcome refugees to America.*
- *As you finish the call to action, lead everyone in a closing chant: "When refugees are under attack, what do we do? Stand up, fight back!"*

Kriyah Ritual

How to Perform the Ritual

Invite a *minyan* (10 people) to the stage to tear *kriyah* using large *kriyah* ribbons made from thick black ribbon. Directions for creating these ribbons can be found below. Extend invitations in advance to community leaders to be part of the minyan. A speaker begins the ritual by offering the reading below, after which all ten people who are performing the ritual will tear their ribbons simultaneously. Conclude the ritual with a song.

Reading for the Ritual

This cruel Executive Order will inflict suffering on thousands of people and will lead to catastrophic loss of life if those in need of refuge are denied entry into this country.

In Jewish tradition, when a loved one dies, it is traditional to tear a garment to express our grief. We do this to mourn the loved ones who have been torn from our lives and to show that the loss has torn our heart. When our tears are not sufficient to express our outrage and grief, we tear our clothes as we call out in outrage and devastation.

Today, we tear our garments as we mourn the lives that will be lost due to this cruel and devastating Executive Order. We tear to express our grief over the potential death of thousands of refugees because the doors of the United States are no longer open. They flee violence and persecution but cannot find safety.

We tear for the thousands of refugees now resettled in the United States who would have risked death had they remained in their homelands, like Mohammad Ay Toghlo and Eidah AL Suleiman who fled Syria after witnessing the murder of their pregnant daughter and the kidnapping of their oldest son.

We tear for the thousands of refugees whose lives now hang in the balance without the promise of refuge in the United States, like Mohammad and Eidah's son, daughter-in-law and grandchildren, who remain in Lebanon desperately awaiting resettlement.

We tear for the thousands of people who will continue to flee violence and persecution in search of safety only to find doors slammed shut.

We tear for all of them, for the lives that will be lost.

Additional Notes

1. If you are planning a large action, you can make large *kriyah* ribbons by sewing together two pieces of 4-inch width black ribbon, which can be purchased at an art supply store or on Amazon.com. If you are planning a smaller ritual, you might consider using the small *kriyah* ribbons provided by Jewish funeral homes.
2. If you are planning a larger action, you might invite a *minyan* of leaders to perform *kriyah* at the front of the group as outlined above. If you are planning a smaller action, you might invite 2-3 people to

perform *kriyah* in front of and on behalf of the group or you might consider handing ribbons out to all those in attendance and performing *kriyah* all together.

Chants

1. Never again means never again for everyone.
2. Love, not fear. Refugees are welcome here.
3. When refugees are under attack, what do we do? Stand up, fight back!

(For a recording of these chants, visit www.hias.org/resources)

Songs

Pitchu Li

פְּתַחוּ לִי שַׁעֲרֵי צְדָק אָבֹאֲבָם אוֹדֶה יְהוָה :
זֶה הַשַּׁעַר לַיהוָה צְדִיקִים יָבֹאוּ בוֹ :

*Pitchu li sha'arei tzedek avo-vam odeh Yah.
Zeh ha'sha'ar l'Adonai tzadkim yavo'u vo.*

Open the gates of righteousness for me, that I may enter and praise God.
This is the gateway to God that the righteous will enter through.

Ozi v'Zimrat Yah

עֲזִי וְזִמְרַת יְהוָה וַיְהִי לִי לִישׁוּעָה
Ozi v'zimrat Yah va'y'hi li li'shu'ah.

God is my strength and song; God will become my deliverance.

Mi Chamocha

מִי כָמוֹכָה בְּאֵלִים יְהוָה מִי כָמוֹכָה נֶאֱדָר בְּקֹדֶשׁ נוֹרָא תְהִלַּת עֲשֵׂה פֶלֶא :
Mi chamocha ba'eilim Adonai? Mi kamocha nedar bakodesh – nora t'hilot oseh feleh?

Who is like you, oh God, among the gods that are worshipped? Who is like You, majestic in holiness, awesome in splendor, working wonders?

This Land Is Your Land

This land is your land, this land is my land
From California to the New York island;
From the red wood forest to the Gulf Stream waters
This land was made for you and me.

As I was walking that ribbon of highway,
I saw above me that endless skyway;
I saw below me that golden valley:
This land was made for you and me.

I've roamed and rambled and I followed my footsteps
To the sparkling sands of her diamond deserts;
And all around me a voice was sounding:
This land was made for you and me.

When the sun came shining, and I was strolling,
And the wheat fields waving and the dust clouds
rolling,
As the fog was lifting a voice was chanting:
This land was made for you and me.

Partisan's Song

(May also be read instead of sung.)

Yiddish

Zog nit keynmol az dugayst dem letzten veg,
Ven himlen blayene farshteln bloye teg;
Vayl kumen vet noch undzer oysgebenkte shuh,
Es vet a poyk tun undzer trot - mirzaynen do!

Fun grinem palmenland biz land fun vaysen shney,
Mir kumen un mit undzer payn, mit undzer vey;
Un voo gefalen iz a shpritz fun undzer blut,
Shpritzen vet dort undzer gvure, undzer mut.

Es vet di morgenzun bagilden undzcdem haynt,
Un der nechten vet farshvinden mitncfaynt;
Nor oyb farzamen vet di zun in demcka-yor,
Vi a parol zol geyn dos leed fun door tzu door.

Geshriben iz dos leed mit blut und nit mit bly,
S'iz nit keyn leedl fun a foygeloym der fry;
Dos hut a folk tzvishen falendi-ke vent,
Dos leed gezungen mit naganes in dihent.

Zog nit keyn mol az du gayst demletzten veg,
Ven himlen blayene farshteln bloye teg;
Kumen vet noch undzer oysgebenkte shuh,
Es vet a poyk tun undzer trot -- mirzaynen do!

As I went walking I saw a sign there
And on the sign it said "No Trespassing."
But on the other side it didn't say nothing,
That side was made for you and me.

In the shadow of the steeple I saw my people,
By the relief office I seen my people;
As they stood there hungry, I stood there asking
Is this land made for you and me?

Nobody living can ever stop me,
As I go walking that freedom highway;
Nobody living can ever make me turn back
This land was made for you and me.

English

Never say that this is the end of the road.
Wherever a drop of our blood
fell, there our courage will grow anew.
This song, written in blood, was sung by a people fighting
for life and freedom.
Our triumph will come and our resounding footsteps will
proclaim "We are here!"

From land of palm-trees to the far-off land of snow.
We shall be coming with our torment, with our woe;
And everywhere our blood has sunk into the earth
Shall our bravery, or vigor blossom forth.

We'll have the morning sun to set our day aglow;
Our evil yesterdays shall vanish with the foe.
But if the time is long before the sun appears,
then let this song go like a signal through the years.

This song was written with our blood, and not with lead;
It's not a song that summer birds sing overhead;
It was a people, amidst burning barricades,
That sang this song of ours with pistols and grenades.

So never say you now go on your last way,
Through darkened skies may now conceal the blue of day,
Because the hour for which we've hungered is so near,
Beneath our feet the earth shall thunder, "We are here!"

Readings

New Colossus

By: Emma Lazarus

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.
"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!

Home

By: Warsan Shire

no one leaves home unless
home is the mouth of a shark
you only run for the border
when you see the whole city running as well

your neighbors running faster than you
breath bloody in their throats
the boy you went to school with
who kissed you dizzy behind the old tin factory
is holding a gun bigger than his body
you only leave home
when home won't let you stay.

no one leaves home unless home chases you
fire under feet
hot blood in your belly
it's not something you ever thought of doing
until the blade burnt threats into
your neck
and even then you carried the anthem under
your breath
only tearing up your passport in an airport toilets
sobbing as each mouthful of paper
made it clear that you wouldn't be going back.

you have to understand,
that no one puts their children in a boat
unless the water is safer than the land
no one burns their palms
under trains
beneath carriages
no one spends days and nights in the stomach of a
truck
feeding on newspaper unless the miles travelled
means something more than journey.
no one crawls under fences
no one wants to be beaten
pitied

no one chooses refugee camps
or strip searches where your
body is left aching
or prison,
because prison is safer
than a city of fire
and one prison guard
in the night
is better than a truckload
of men who look like your father

no one could take it
no one could stomach it
no one skin would be tough enough

the
go home blacks
refugees
dirty immigrants
asylum seekers
sucking our country dry
niggers with their hands out
they smell strange
savage
messed up their country and now they want
to mess ours up
how do the words
the dirty looks
roll off your backs
maybe because the blow is softer
than a limb torn off

or the words are more tender
than fourteen men between
your legs
or the insults are easier
to swallow
than rubble
than bone

than your child body
in pieces.
i want to go home,
but home is the mouth of a shark
home is the barrel of the gun
and no one would leave home
unless home chased you to the shore
unless home told you
to quicken your legs
leave your clothes behind
crawl through the desert
wade through the oceans
drown
save
be hunger
beg
forget pride
your survival is more important

no one leaves home until home is a sweaty voice
in your ear
saying –
leave,
run away from me now
i don't know what i've become
but i know that anywhere
is safer than here

refuge

By: JJ Bola

refuge imagine how it feels to be chased out of home. to have your grip ripped. loosened from your fingertips something you so dearly held on to. like a lovers hand that slips when pulled away you are always reaching. my father would speak of home. reaching. speaking of familiar faces. girl next door who would eventually grow up to be my mother. the fruit seller at the market. the lonely man at the top of the road who nobody spoke to. and our house at the bottom of the street lit up by a single flickering lamp where beyond was only darkness. there they would sit and tell stories of monsters that lurked and came only at night to catch the children who sat and listened to stories of monsters that lurked. this is how they lived. each memory buried. an artefact left to be discovered by archaeologists. the last words on a dying family member's lips. this was sacred. not even monsters could taint it. but there were monsters that came during the day. monsters that tore families apart with their giant hands. and fingers that slept on triggers. the sound of gunshots ripping through the sky became familiar like the tapping of rain fall on a window sill. monster that would kill and hide behind speeches, suits and ties. monsters that would chase families away forcing them to leave everything behind. i remember when we first stepped off the plane. everything was foreign. unfamiliar. uninviting. even the air in my lungs left me short of breath. we came here to find refuge. they called us refugees so we hid ourselves in their language until we sounded just like them. changed the way we dressed to look just like them. made this our home until we

lived just like them and began to speak of familiar faces. girl next door who would grow up to be a mother. the fruit seller at the market. the lonely man at the top of the road who nobody spoke to. and our house at the bottom of the street lit up by a single flickering lamp to keep away the darkness. there we would sit and watch police that lurked and came only at night to arrest the youths who sat and watched police that lurked and came only at night. this is how we lived. i remember one day i heard them say to me they come here to take our jobs they need to go back to where they came from not knowing that i was one of the ones who came. i told them that a refugee is simply someone who is trying to make a home. so next time when you go home, tuck your children in and kiss your families goodnight be glad that the monsters never came for you. in their suits and ties. never came for you. in the newspapers with the media lies. never came for you. that you are not despised. and know that deep inside the hearts of each and every one of us we are all always reaching for a place that we can call home.