



**Welcome the stranger.
Protect the refugee.**

**Statement submitted to the Subcommittee on Immigration and the National
Interest of the Committee on Judiciary of the U.S. Senate**

**Hearing: “Oversight of the Administration’s FY 2017 Refugee Resettlement
Program”**

September 28, 2016

The story of refugees in America did not begin with the Syrian conflict. It did not begin with the 1980 Refugee Act. Nor did it begin in the aftermath of WWII when the world watched in horror the devastation that resulted from closing borders to those in need, and responded by ratifying the 1951 Refugee Convention. The U.S. has represented a place of refuge since the pilgrims, who were English Protestants seeking freedom to practice their religion. Irish Catholics, Russian Jews, Cubans, and Vietnamese, just to name a few, are all groups who have since come to America as refugees and have left their mark on American culture and society, making it what it is today

HIAS, the Jewish global nonprofit refugee agency, is proud of its role in the story of refugees in America. Created in 1881, HIAS began as an aid organization providing assistance to newly arrived Jewish immigrants. Today, guided by history and values, HIAS—along with eight other national agencies—resettles refugees regardless of religion, race, or nationality in the United States. Refugees resettled in the U.S. receive assistance and a chance to rebuild their lives in freedom, dignity, and safety. In return, communities are enriched, and oftentimes revitalized, by refugees.

Recently, the positive impact of refugees has been eclipsed by fear and attitudes of nationalism. This has come at a time when the number of forcibly displaced people globally is the highest it has ever been. Now is not the time to give into fear or isolate ourselves.

National security and refugee resettlement are not mutually exclusive. Refugees are subject to the highest level of security checks of any population immigrating to the U.S. Refugees are chosen based on vulnerability and referred by the United Nations to the U.S.—they do not choose where they are resettled. Once a refugee is referred to the U.S. for resettlement, his or her biographic and biometric data is collected. Highly trained officers conduct in-depth interviews to confirm a refugee’s identity and eligibility. This information is then compared to U.S. law enforcement and intelligence databases. If there is doubt about a refugee’s story or intentions for coming to the U.S., they are denied admission to our country. Before refugees arrive in the U.S., they are provided with cultural orientation designed to

help them better understand our country, cope with potential challenges, and integrate into their new communities. The security screening process is constantly being examined and updated as new information becomes available.

Resettlement does not only benefit refugees, who are often the victims of terrorism, but it also provides value to U.S. security. Maintaining our proud legacy of resettling refugees in the U.S. undermines the rhetoric of terrorist groups that claim refugees are not welcome in our country. Refugee resettlement also helps to provide stability to allies hosting refugees.

Anti-refugee, anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim, and other forms of nationalist beliefs are not shared by most Americans. Across the country, we see generosity and openness to refugees. Take for example the members of Temple Shalom in Chevy Chase, Maryland. After learning about the global refugee crisis, this synagogue formed a refugee task force to decide how they, as a group, could help refugees. They decided they would help fulfill the immediate needs of a newly arriving family from Syria. The congregation furnished an apartment, stocked the pantry, and made the family a welcome meal for their first night in their new home. A small group met the family of six at the airport. Since then, they have been committed to helping the family familiarize themselves with their new community by doing things like helping them learn English and teaching them about public transportation in the area. All small things, but when combined they have a huge impact.

This is just one example of how the majority of Americans feel about refugees. Over 184 synagogues have joined Temple Shalom in pledging their support for refugees, promising to take action and support refugees in their communities. This is the story we continue to share because it reflects who we are and how our nation started. Our robust refugee resettlement program relies not only on community support, but also on the support from the government. It is important that the refugee resettlement program continue to receive support from Congress in the form of legislation that improves and modernizes the operation of the program, as well as funding to ensure the necessary resources are available for processing refugee cases and providing services for refugees when they arrive. This support will ensure that we as Americans continue our legacy of welcoming refugees.