



# A Jewish Vision

## FOR THE FUTURE OF AMERICAN IMMIGRATION & REFUGEE POLICY

JULY 5, 2005

*Three hundred and fifty years ago,* the first Jewish immigrants arrived in America seeking freedom and opportunity. While initially facing hostility and deportation, these 23 Jews from Brazil established what has become one of the strongest Jewish communities in history. Today the American Jewish community includes both native-born American Jews and foreign-born Jews from Russia and other former Soviet states, Argentina, South Africa, Australia, Iran, Israel and many other countries around the world. These new Jewish refugees and immigrants came to the United States seeking freedom from persecution and opportunities for religious liberty, as well as to receive education at universities and yeshivas, reunite with family members and assume religious and other professional occupations. Jewish immigrants benefited from these freedoms and opportunities, and, in the process, made contributions to American society – economically, politically, culturally, and in many other ways – far beyond their numbers.

Jewish religious and ethical values provide a firm foundation for Jewish involvement in immigration and refugee policy. Central Jewish teachings emphasize protection of the stranger, as seen in the over 36 references to this principle within the Torah, including: “When strangers sojourn with you in your land, you shall not do them wrong.

The strangers who sojourn with you shall be to you as the natives among you, and you shall love them as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Leviticus 19:33-34). Jewish tradition also includes principles of *Piddyon Shevuyim* (redeeming the captive), *Chesed* (kindness), and *Hachnasat Orchim* (hospitality) that create a solid framework for a compassionate response to the needs of immigrants and refugees.

Based on these core values, and recognizing that other immigrants would also benefit from, and be of benefit to, American society, the Jewish community has – over the 350-years history of its presence on American shores – been actively engaged in the struggles of new immigrants and in the development of the nation’s immigration policy. From the 1880s to early 1920s, the Jewish community strongly opposed efforts to curtail immigration and institute a national origin quota system. The community’s opposition continued after these harmful principles were included in the immigration acts of 1921 and 1924 – with devastating effects during the Holocaust – and until these quotas were eliminated in 1965. The Jewish community championed the cause of refugees following World War II, and advocated for the Refugee Act of 1980 that created today’s refugee resettlement system. Additionally, in recent years many Jewish organizations worked to restore due process protections and access to public benefits

*This statement remains open for endorsement by Jewish organizations. For more information, or to sign on, email: [biasdc@bias.org](mailto:biasdc@bias.org). HIAS Washington DC • 2020 K Street NW • Suite 7700 • Washington, DC 20006  
202-828-5115 • Fax 202-828-4144 • [www.bias.org](http://www.bias.org)*

that were eliminated for legal immigrants in draconian legislation enacted in 1996.

In the period since the attacks of September 11, 2001, many in the Jewish community and the broader American public have reviewed the nation's immigration and refugee policies. Immigration restrictionists have put forth scenarios that blame immigrants for the nation's ills and attempt to conflate immigration with terrorism. Concern for national security is not inconsistent with fair immigration policies. To the contrary, intelligent immigration reform can and should play an important role in enhancing national security. This balanced approach avoids the false conclusion that immigration is a danger to our country – a conclusion that would undermine fundamental Jewish community interests including security concerns, religious and ethical values, positive community relations and access to the United States for Jews from around the world – while acknowledging the prominent role that national security must play in national policies in these difficult times.

In light of these important Jewish interests, the undersigned agencies encourage a thoughtful and serious discussion of immigration and refugee protection issues within the Jewish and American public and action by the U.S. government to develop policies that are consistent with the following principles:

*Immigration* – Sensible and generous immigration policies serve essential American interests including economic and social development, family reunification, and humanitarian values. These interests should be the basis for decisions relating to levels of immigration and categories of migrants permitted to seek admission and obtain permanent residence and citizenship in the United States. Segments of the American population have greeted each new immigrant group with distrust and concern, but immigrants have over time integrated into the society and made important contributions to America. Learning from the past, the United States should not establish limitations on immigration

because of exaggerated fears that today's immigrants will not become productive and patriotic Americans.

*Enforcement and Security* – Because the United States faces serious threats from terrorists and dangerous criminals intent on misusing the American immigration system, improved border security, visa reform, and interior immigration enforcement are important national goals. Changes to rules governing entry into the United States; issuance of visas at consulates abroad; intelligence sharing; investigation, detention and removal of migrants; tracking of foreign nationals; as well as other aspects of immigration enforcement should focus on those who wish to do us harm and not be based on the mistaken belief that all problems with the immigration system are part of a generalized terrorist threat. Security reviews are essential, but can be done effectively without creating unreasonable delays for applicants waiting to receive immigration benefits. Additionally, all individuals seeking admission should be afforded a meaningful appeals process if they are mistakenly identified as a threat under enhanced screening procedures. Protection of privacy, due process and other civil liberties should be integrated into immigration enforcement policies and procedures.

*Refugees* – It is in our national interest that refugees fleeing persecution continue to look to the United States as a champion of refugee protection. The United States should develop effective programs to assist and protect refugees in locations around the world, such as the Sudanese refugees in Chad who fled genocide in their homeland. The U.S. should also provide generous access to resettlement for refugees in need of this durable solution, including Jews from the former Soviet Union and Iran; and should offer compassionate and fair asylum policies that recognize the particular vulnerabilities of refugees who enter the United States seeking safe haven from persecution. Victims of gender violence, children, persecuted religious

minorities and other particularly vulnerable migrants should receive special attention and protection by the United States.

### *Comprehensive Immigration Reform -*

The existence of a population of approximately eight to twelve million undocumented migrants residing in this country is unacceptable, as are the hundreds of thousands more facing death and discrimination as they enter illegally each year seeking employment. Also unacceptable are the massive backlogs of immigrants waiting to be reunited with close family members, and immigration and labor law enforcement that has not served either to restrict undocumented migration, or to protect migrants. The “enforcement-only” approach of recent years has failed. Moreover, a massive effort to try to “close the border” and expel all undocumented migrants would be extremely costly and cause enormous social and economic disruption. In light of these facts, the best hope to prevent future undocumented migration would be an approach that is comprehensive and realistically related to economic realities. This plan should promote legal and orderly migration, provide a path to citizenship for undocumented migrants, improve immigration and labor law enforcement, and create new migration programs that will serve America’s security, social, economic and humanitarian interests. As this comprehensive plan is developed and implemented, the government should consider addressing the immediate and special needs of specific populations such as students, farm workers and others.

### *Public Benefits and Due Process*

*Restoration -* The harmful restrictions on access to public benefits and on the due process rights of legal immigrants - enacted as part of several pieces of legislation passed in 1996 - should be eliminated or significantly modified. The

United States benefits from immigrants’ and their children’s economic and social contributions and should not discriminate against these immigrants if they fall on economic hard times. Additionally, principles of proportionate punishment, reasonable use of detention and access to parole, judicial review and waiver authority to permit judges to ensure equitable results during removal cases should once again be applied to legal immigrants.

### *Immigration Services -*

As a nation of immigrants, the United States should ensure that all applications for immigration benefits be handled in a timely and consistent manner, and that the massive backlogs that have long plagued the system be eliminated. Immigrants, and their American families and employers, should receive the highest level of customer service from immigration authorities. Additionally, the immigration functions of the United States government must receive appropriate funding levels justified by such an important national priority.

### *Citizenship -*

The United States must augment its immigration policies with enhanced programs to ensure the full integration of newcomers. The naturalization process should meaningfully promote civic education and civic values and take into account the special needs of immigrants with lower educational levels, the elderly and the disabled. The government should offer assistance to immigrant communities and other knowledgeable private sector agencies to provide high quality job training, English language instruction and other services to prospective citizens. Through such changes these immigrants and refugees will be able to receive the assistance they need to secure the rights and responsibilities of American citizenship and to fully participate in the civic life of their new homeland.

## Signatories

### National Organizations

Agudath Israel of America  
American Association of Jews from Former USSR  
American Jewish Committee  
Anti-Defamation League  
Association of Jewish Family  
and Children's Agencies  
B'nai Brith International  
Bukharian Jewish Congress of USA and Canada  
Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society  
International Association of  
Jewish Vocational Services  
Jewish Council for Public Affairs  
Jewish Labor Committee  
National Council of Jewish Women  
Union for Reform Judaism  
Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations  
of America  
United Jewish Communities  
Workmen's Circle/Arbeter Ring

### Local Organizations

Community Relations Council of the Jewish  
Federation of San Antonio  
Fort Wayne Jewish Federation  
HIAS and Council Migration Service  
of Philadelphia  
Jewish Community Board of Akron  
Jewish Community Council  
of Metropolitan Detroit  
Jewish Community Relations Council  
of Des Moines  
Jewish Community Relations Council  
of Greater Miami  
Jewish Community Relations Council  
of Greater Washington  
Jewish Community Relations Council  
of Southern Arizona

Jewish Community Relations Council  
of Southern New Jersey  
Jewish Community Relations Council of St. Louis  
Jewish Community Relations Council  
of Los Angeles  
Jewish Community Relations Council of  
Minnesota and the Dakotas  
Jewish Council on Urban Affairs in Chicago  
Jewish Employment and Vocational Service  
of Philadelphia  
Jewish Family and Children's Services  
of Minneapolis  
Jewish Family and Children's Services of San  
Francisco, the Peninsula, Marin and  
Sonoma Counties  
Jewish Family and Children's Services of St. Louis  
Jewish Family Service Agency of Cleveland  
Jewish Family Services of Buffalo  
Jewish Family Services of Metropolitan Detroit  
Jewish Family Services of Southern New Jersey  
Jewish Family Services of Toledo  
Jewish Federation of Central Massachusetts  
Jewish Federation of Greater Buffalo  
Jewish Federation of Greater Des Moines  
Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles  
Jewish Federation of Greater Miami  
Jewish Federation of Greater Middlesex County  
Jewish Federation of Greater Monmouth County  
Jewish Federation of Greater New Haven  
Jewish Federation of Greater Rockford  
Jewish Federation of Greater Seattle  
Jewish Federation of Lehigh Valley  
Jewish Federation of Nashville  
Jewish Federation of Southern New Jersey  
Jewish Federation of St. Joseph's Valley  
Jewish Federation of the Berkshires  
Jewish Vocational Service of Minneapolis  
Madison Jewish Community Council  
Ohio Jewish Communities  
UJA-Federation of New York  
United Jewish Federation of Greater Toledo  
Youngstown Area Jewish Federation