

September 24, 2001

Dear:

The Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), the Jewish community's international migration agency, shares all America's horror and sorrow at the September 11th terrorist attacks on our country. As our government begins to develop new approaches to combat terrorism, including the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2001, I am writing to urge that a deliberative process be undertaken that will both strengthen our security and protect the essential character of the United States.

Based on our 120 year history, during which we have helped 4.5 million migrants to create new lives in freedom and safety in the United States and other countries of refuge, we are concerned that in the crucial effort to confront terrorism, the United States may pass legislation that will retreat from our country's historic commitment to refugees and other immigrants. At this very difficult time, we must remember that terror attacks are not about immigration policy, but about assaults on the fundamental values of our nation. Those who arrive here intent on violence do not represent the millions of refugees and immigrants who have come to America because of what it stands for – freedom and opportunity.

We hope that you and your colleagues will give all proposals addressing the threat of terrorism full and careful consideration.

When considering the issue, we note that the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) already possesses broad power to detain and deport aliens who engage in or support terrorism. We also understand that technological improvements, information sharing between agencies and enhanced border enforcement are being considered. These steps should help protect our country from infiltration by foreign terrorists.

However, if additional legislation is ultimately enacted in this area, we strongly encourage the Committee to consider several key principles including:

The definition of terrorism should be crafted to cover violent individuals and groups, and those who assist them, but not be overly broad so as to include the innocent who do not pose a threat to our national security;

The power to deprive an immigrant of liberty, such as certification as a terrorist, should belong to the Attorney General and not be delegable to a lower level INS official;

These decisions should be made based on an explicit evidentiary standard rather than a mere suspicion of guilt;

These crucial decisions should be reviewable by an independent adjudicator;

Immigrants should not be indefinitely detained without charge;

Laws should not apply retroactively to activities that were legal at the time of action; and

A specific time limit, or sunset provision, should be included for any new provisions justified by the current emergency situation.

By addressing the grave dangers of terrorism in a manner that preserves the United States' democratic principles and the role that immigration plays in our national identity, Congress can strengthen our security, honor the victims of these terror attacks and demonstrate to terrorists that they cannot undermine America's core values and institutions.

I have attached a Policy Resolution approved today by HIAS' Board of Directors addressing these crucial issues. Thank you for considering our views on this very important matter.

Sincerely,

Leonard Glickman
President and CEO

Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), 333 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY 10001

HIAS Policy Resolution

Response to the September 11th Terror Attacks

The Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), the American Jewish Community's international migration agency, strongly condemns the September 11 terror attacks against our nation. As an organization that

has assisted over 4.5 million migrants to create new lives in freedom and safety, we abhor these horrendous acts of evil against the very values that we, like all Americans, hold dear.

Our thoughts and prayers are with all of the victims of this tragedy who have suffered such enormous losses. HIAS extends its deepest admiration and gratitude to the fire fighters, police, medical personnel, other emergency workers and the thousands of volunteers who have struggled tirelessly - and in so many cases given their lives - to save the victims.

HIAS reflects with sorrow that the terror, death and fear that have long afflicted Israel now confront the United States. The Jewish people - who have suffered from violence, persecution and hatred over the millennia - understand that terrorism must be confronted with strength and a deep commitment to providing security for all. Justice demands that those responsible for perpetrating these acts of terror - and those who assist them - be punished for their crimes.

Fully mindful of our country's security concerns, HIAS remains committed to the essential values of our free society - among them being the welcoming of refugees and other immigrants who have created the mosaic of peoples that is America. We note that whether it is Oklahoma City, New York City or the Pentagon, terrorists can come from within or from outside the United States, and that at this very difficult time, we must remember that terror attacks are not about immigration policy, but about assaults on the fundamental values of our nation. Those who arrive here intent on violence do not represent the millions of refugees and immigrants who have come to America because of what it stands for - freedom and opportunity.

Just as Jews have suffered discrimination and prejudice based solely on religious and ethnic hatred, HIAS is concerned that in the battle against terrorism, Arab-Americans, Muslim-Americans and other ethnic and religious minorities in our country may be scapegoated for these terrible crimes. At such a difficult and challenging time for our country, America's democratic values and civil liberties must be protected.

As the United States government and the American people prepare to confront the difficult days ahead, HIAS supports President Bush's call to fight terrorism while also protecting the free, open and pluralistic character of American society - which stands as the direct antithesis of the values of the terrorists. These actions will discourage terrorism by strengthening security precautions, honor the victims of these terror attacks and demonstrate to terrorists that they cannot undermine America's core institutions.

HIAS resolves to honor the victims of the attack and the contributions and sacrifices of the rescuers, and to recommit our organization to its mission of refugee protection and support for vulnerable migrants around the world. HIAS urges the United States to continue to provide welcome to refugees and other immigrants in the months and years to come.

Approved, HIAS Board of Directors, September 25, 2001