

Arab Americans look to Liberal Jews in US to push for entry of Syrian refugees



Syrian Muslim Refugees

Source: JTA

At one time I was a member of the national board of the [Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society](#) (HIAS) in the early 1980's when the priority was helping Jews escape from tyranny in Russia, Ethiopia and Syria. There are reported to be less than a dozen elderly Jews left in Syria. HIAS was also involved in processing Vietnamese boat people refugees in the US. That was over three decades ago. HIAS is one of the [11 Voluntary Agencies](#) (VOLAGS) under the [State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration](#) (PRM) and [Department of Health and Human Services Office of Refugee Resettlement](#) pushing to bring to the US 100,000 Syrian refugees streaming out of the more than 5 million displaced internally and in external camps in Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan.



HIAS has joined with Arab American advocacy groups and immigration lawyers, some controlled by Muslim Brotherhood leaders, like those on the [Syrian American Council](#), to bring predominately Muslim Syrian refugees to America. As we have seen in the flood of an estimated 400,000 Syrian refugees, a vanguard of whom have entered the broken open borders of the Shengen system of EU countries, the predominate demographics are [young men](#). Among who may be ISIS sympathizers that may add to the already daunting problems that FBI Director Comey

had said already faces us in all 50 states.

President Obama announced last week an increase in the annual allotment of 10,000 Syrian refugees to be resettled here. The current total PRM allotment under the [Refugee Act of 1980](#) is 70,000. The PRM updated a [list of local resettlement agencies](#) in more than 180 communities throughout the US being screened as potential recipients of these Syrian and other UN designated refugees. One of those on the PRM listed is Catholic Charities in my community of Pensacola in northwest Florida.

A Pew Trust [study](#) revealed that 1.7 Muslim immigrants were admitted to the US over the US over the period from 1992 to 2010. Upwards of 250,000 Muslim refugees have already been admitted under the US Refugee Resettlement Program from conflict zones in the Middle East, Eastern and sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia since 1990. One refugee family assisted by the program in Boston were the Chechen Tsarneavs, whose sons, Tamerlane and Dzhokhar, who became [Jihadist terrorists](#) who perpetrated the heinous Boston Marathon bombing. We have written extensively about assimilation and national security problems of Somali refugees in the US, especially the problems in the Twin Cities of Minneapolis-St. Paul, Columbus, Ohio and other émigré communities. Some of these communities have spawned émigré fundamentalist fighters who joined terrorist groups [Al Shabaab in Somalia](#) and [ISIS in Syria and Iraq](#). Some of these émigré jihadis have returned to the US and been [arrested and convicted](#) for material support for terrorism. Now the threat may be self motivated jihadists who perpetrated attacks such as in [Garland, Texas](#) and the deadly attack on Marine and Naval reservists in [Chattanooga, Tennessee](#).

On 9/11 the Jewish Telegraph Association (JTA) reported these developments in an article, "[Arab Americans look to Jews for help on Syrian refugees:](#)"

Over the last few days, HIAS, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid

Society, launched a [petition drive](#) calling on President Barack Obama to swiftly open America's gates to an additional 100,000 Syrians, and the president of the Union for Reform Judaism wrote to the president and congressional leaders calling for a coordinated international response.

"Our great nation must respond immediately by providing safety, food, shelter, refuge, and dignity," wrote the Reform leader, Rabbi Rick Jacobs. "How can a nation built by refugees from political persecution turn our back on refugees fleeing religious and political persecution?"

Omar Hossino, the Washington-based Syrian American Council's public relations director, singled out HIAS as being particularly helpful.

"HIAS has been consistently calling for more resettlement and pushing back against the discriminatory rhetoric opposing opening the doors to Syrian refugees," he said.

This week, HIAS president Mark Hetfield held a conference call with American Jewish organizational officials to talk about his agency's decision to join with Arab-American leaders in critiquing U.S. policies that limit the numbers of refugees settled in the United States to about 70,000 per year.

Only about 1,500 Syrian refugees have been admitted since the start of the civil war in 2011. Obama announced Thursday that the United States soon would take in 10,000 refugees, but Hetfield said that number was inadequate.

"We are dealing with a global humanitarian crisis to which the entire world must respond," he said in a statement issued within hours of Obama's announcement. "If Germany can open its doors to 800,000 asylum seekers, the U.S., with a population four times the size of Germany's and a history as a nation of immigrants and refugees, can take

100,000.”

Hetfield appealed to regional Jewish groups to act on the grassroots level to help absorb refugees.

Akram Abusharar, a Gaza-born U.S. immigration attorney who handles approximately 80 Syrian asylum cases per month, said HIAS’s involvement was a boost to his cause.

“The Jewish community has more capacity to move the politicians on this issue than the Arab-American community,” he told JTA in an interview.

But more recently Hossino has tracked an uptick in opposition to bringing Muslim immigrants to the United States – especially among Republican candidates and members of congress. In television appearances last weekend, Republican presidential candidate Carly Fiorina said the United States has “done its fair share” when it comes to the refugee crisis. Sen. Rand Paul asserted that the U.S. “can’t accept the whole world” and should adopt a cautious stance towards resettlement.

Hetfield, in the conference call, said concerns about the Muslim and Arab identity of the refugees are misplaced, reminding listeners of similar reasoning when some nations in the 1930s blocked Jewish immigration from Germany.

So why is HIAS joining with other willing NGOs like the [US Conference of Catholic Bishops](#), [Lutheran World Refugee and Immigration Services](#), [Church World Services](#) and the [International Rescue Committee](#) promoting a flood of Syrian Refugees to come to the US? Is it a humanitarian gesture of openness? Or is it the fees they receive from processing refugees and asylees who fit the UN and US Citizenship and Immigration Service [definition](#) that determines who qualifies to be admitted for asylum under the Refugee Act of 1980? Those refugees that are admitted under the US resettlement programs receive a smorgasbord of federal and state welfare,

medical, housing and other benefits that some migration specialists' estimate could exceed 10 to 12 billion dollars annually. That taxpayer burden might double if HIAS and other VOLAGs, with the assistance of the Obama White House, succeed in dramatically increasing the allotments for Syrian Refugees over the next several years.



Syrian Christian Refugees

If anyone among the displaced Syrian refugees deserves priority it is the Syriac Christians and other non-Muslim religious minorities with existing Diaspora communities in the US. Communities that might provide private sponsorship assistance. Those traditional private sponsorship programs like the [Canadian federal effort](#) have demonstrated the ability to rapidly absorb refugees who share basic values traditional with our society. We also have the examples of Jewish philanthropists like the venerable UK publisher, 95 year old [Lord George Weidenfeld](#), a holocaust survivor, spearheading the [Safe Havens Fund](#) actively supporting efforts to spare a fraction of these threatened Christian and non-Muslim Middle East minorities. HIAS could expand upon Weidenfeld's example.

HIAS, Jewish Federations and the leaders of the Reform Movement should carefully vet Arab American 'partners' before sallying forth on humanitarian grounds to admit more Syrian and predominately Muslim refugees. Especially, when there are threatened Middle East Christians and other non-Muslim minorities that deserve preference. That is demonstrated by the [Safe Havens Fund](#) of Lord Weidenfeld, who received the [Theodore Herzl Award of the World Jewish Congress](#).