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JCFS and HIAS Chicago Stand with Refugees and Immigrants; Oppose Executive Order on Immigration

Chicago, Illinois – January 31, 2017 For over 100 years, Jewish Child & Family Services and HIAS Chicago have welcomed the stranger. We have supported more than 40,000 refugees and immigrants of varying backgrounds as they have sought refuge and freedom and built new lives in America. Regardless of faith, ethnicity or national origin, our commitment has been steadfast. We strive to support each individual as they transition from strangers in a new land to contributors to their community to proud United States' citizens.

It is because of our commitment to welcome the stranger—a value central to our Jewish faith—that we stand firmly in opposition to the Executive Order signed January 27, 2017, which halts all refugee resettlement for 120 days, suspends Syrian resettlement indefinitely, limits immigration from Iraq, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen and significantly reduces the ceiling for refugee admissions.

As Jews, we understand first-hand what it means to be oppressed, to be persecuted and forced to flee our homes. We know the harm done by the closing of borders because of fear, and we know the fate that likely awaits many of those who have been or will be turned away. But we also know what it means to be welcomed; to be given the opportunity to rebuild, integrate and strive for success. Because of this, we stand for those who are kept out today—the most vulnerable of refugees who have been waiting years, sometimes decades, to arrive at our shores.

In the coming weeks, HIAS Chicago was committed to resettling the following individuals:

- A family of five from Iraq who have been waiting to be resettled for more than four years
- An elderly woman from the Ukraine whose family is anxiously awaiting her arrival in Chicago
- Two cousins in their early 20s who escaped violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo and fled to Tanzania in 1999, and
- Young parents from Syria whose three children have spent half their lives living as refugees in Turkey.

As a result of this Executive Order, none are allowed to board a plane for the United States and all are trapped in limbo.

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HIAS Chicago is not alone in awaiting their arrival. Over 200 community volunteers representing nearly a dozen synagogues have organized to welcome these individuals, raising funds, collecting furniture and household goods and training volunteer mentors to support integration.

Such is the spirit of our community: warm, generous, rooted in justice and committed to welcoming the stranger. We ask you to join us in upholding these virtues during this challenging time. Advocate for that those who have been barred by calling your member of Congress and asking that they speak out against this Executive Order. Send a message directly to the Administration telling them that this policy threatens American values and history. Extend a welcoming hand to those who have recently made the United States their home.

We read in Leviticus: When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not wrong him. The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

We must do all that we can to help these now-strangers arrive in Chicago as promised. Thank you for joining us in that effort.

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