

## Spotlight on HIAS (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society)

The Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) is one of nine Voluntary Agencies (VOLAGs) actively involved in resettling refugees in the U.S. The organization, founded in 1881, helped Jewish refugees settle in New York who fled “pogroms in Russia and Eastern Europe.” HIAS expanded its mission in the 1980s to assist non-Jewish refugees and asylum-seekers once they enter the U.S. and resettle them in local communities.

The VOLAGs are pushing back to undermine the administration’s efforts of “extreme vetting” and in reducing the annual ceiling of refugees who are admitted to the U.S. Pressure groups utilize the mass media to stoke support among “social justice warriors” and ally with left-wing groups to exert power and influence over U.S. refugee policy.

The Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society is one of the primary groups that sued the administration from day one about the so-called Muslim ban. HIAS President Mark Hetfield claims that, “Never before has HIAS itself sued the U.S. government, let alone the President of the United States. Until today. Our history and our values, as Jews and as Americans, require us to fight this illegal and immoral new policy with every tool at our disposal — including litigation.”

The organization has become radical in recent years, using extremist language to rally adherents: Isidore Hershfeld of the HIAS has described U.S. refugee policy reformers as “anti-alien fanatics.”<sup>1</sup> Now, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society is urging its followers to participate in anti-Trump rallies, and advises supporters to politicize their agenda by:

- “Proactive organizing, coordinated nationally but strongly rooted in local action, to prevent resettlement backlash.”
- “Partner with immigrant advocates to provide mutual support.”
- “Track anti-refugee legislation so the resettlement agencies can quickly respond.”
- “Research local anti-refugee leaders by partnering with groups such as Center for New Community and Southern Poverty Law Center to determine if they belong to organized anti-immigrant or anti-Muslim organizations.”

HIAS underwrites refugee settlements in local communities, and in 2016 the average grant was under \$700,000. However, there is strategic targeting to organize its networks: the Carolina Refugee Settlement Agency in Charlotte received \$964,000; over \$1.1 million went to the Jewish Family Service of San Diego; and \$2.5 million in grants went to US Together in Columbus, Ohio.

According to David Robinson, a former acting director of the U.S. State Department’s refugee bureau, writing about the refugee contractors: “the federal government provides about ninety percent of its collective budget” and its lobbying umbrella “wields enormous influence over the Administration’s refugee admissions policy. It lobbies the Hill effectively to increase the number of refugees admitted for permanent resettlement each year.... If there is a conflict of interest, it is never mentioned.”<sup>2</sup>

Mark Hetfield describes how the new, militant, HIAS works: “We have been a partner with the U.S. government [and] we’ve gotten a lot of funding from them [but] we are now fighting them. The U.S. government is the enemy. We had to change from being part of the establishment to being part of the insurgency. The reason it’s been a good experience is that we have our entire community behind us. We set a fundraising record today.”<sup>3</sup>

Fundraising is going well. According to its 2017 IRS records, the group grossed \$45,910,121, and shelled out a whopping \$20,686,120 in salaries and benefits for HIAS employees. Nice work if you can get it. Mark Hetfield is pulling down a salary package worth \$336,323 running this charity, Rita Silverman, in charge of grass roots organizing, earns \$299,335 in pay and benefits, and Farhan Irshad, the Chief Operating Officer, collects \$198,450 in wages plus \$51,842 in benefits. Among its 76 paid staffers, nine other employees make in excess of \$100,000.

Investigative reporter Jim Simpson (see page 24) notes that HIAS has received \$186 million from the U.S. Treasury in the last ten years. In 2017, Uncle Sam donated \$24,493,763 in taxpayer dollars to the organization. Curiously, last year the contributions from the public added up to \$17,361,702 — underwriting just 80 percent of the group’s payroll — making the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society employees government welfare recipients.

Ann Corcoran of Refugee Resettlement Watch, has observed, “If we cut off federal funding for refugee contractors we would have a significant down payment for the border wall!”<sup>4</sup> ■

### Endnotes

1. <https://www.jta.org/1932/03/23/archive/united-states-government-criticised-at-annual-meeting-of-hebrew-immigrant-society-in-new-york-for-it>

2. <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a432218.pdf>

3. <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/01/why-trumps-refugee-ban-is-so-unprecedented/514916/>

4. <https://refugeeresettlementwatch.wordpress.com>