



January 15, 2018

His Excellency Benjamin Netanyahu
Prime Minister of the State of Israel

Dear Mr. Prime Minister,

We write to you on behalf of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and HIAS to raise our grave concerns over a reported Israeli government plan to deport tens of thousands of African asylum seekers from Israel, either by coercion or force.

Under this plan, Sudanese and Eritreans in Israel were given three months to leave the country or face indefinite incarceration. We understand that the option of deporting them by force is also being considered by the government. The sweeping nature of this deportation scheme, coupled with the extreme difficulty to access the Israeli asylum system is having a devastating impact on the refugee community in Israel and betrays the core values that we, as Jews, share.

ADL and HIAS have long advocated for the humane and viable solution to the difficult challenge of African asylum seekers and migrants. Our involvement in this issue is guided both by our unwavering commitment to the well-being and security of Israel, as well as by our Jewish values and heritage as refugees.

For many years, Israeli society has grappled with the difficult challenge of finding a viable and humane solution to this issue. ADL and HIAS have advocated for realignment of Israel's refugee policies with international norms, including the 1951 Refugee Convention. This includes pursuing policies which seek to approve asylum requests of refugees who are genuinely fleeing from violence and persecution in their countries of origin, and, consistent with the Refugee Convention, allowing asylum seekers and refugees the legal opportunity to earn a living in Israel until it is truly safe for them to return home.

Our objections to the new Israeli government plan stem from numerous reports which indicate that those asylum seekers who previously left Israel have been unable to return safely to their home countries, and many have encountered violence and inhumane living conditions in countries they have sought refuge in. Testimonies of people who were relocated by Israel to third countries in Africa indicate that they did not find durable protection there and risked their lives by taking dangerous onward journeys through conflict zones in South Sudan, Sudan and Libya to seek protection elsewhere. Some have drowned at sea en route to Europe, while others were reportedly detained, tortured and extorted by human traffickers.

Those forced to leave Israel under the current Israeli government plan will likely face similar conditions and challenges.

As American Jews, one of our greatest concerns is the well-being and security of Israel; we want to see it prosper and overcome all of the challenges its precarious location imposes on it. We also care about our shared Jewish values and refugee heritage—a very human concern that reaches across borders and distances—and unifies us as a people.

We therefore strongly urge the Israeli government to refrain from implementing this plan. We recognize this issue remains challenging and contentious, not just on the governmental level but also across Israeli society. Addressing this issue in a humane and responsible manner remains no easy task, but it is the Jewish and ethical thing to do.

We would welcome any opportunity to discuss these issues with you.

Sincerely,



Jonathan Greenblatt
CEO and National Director
Anti-Defamation League



Mark Hetfield
President and CEO
HIAS