

An Open Letter Concerning the Safety and Future of African Asylum Seekers

APRIL 5, 2018

His Excellency Benjamin Netanyahu
Prime Minister of the State of Israel

Dear Prime Minister Netanyahu,

As American Jewish organizations, we write with great concern for the safety and future of African asylum seekers in Israel. We share a deep hope that Israel, as a nation founded and settled by refugees, will protect victims of persecution who have fled their countries seeking safety.

We urge Israel to re-commit to an agreement with the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) to guarantee the safety of the 39,000 asylum seekers currently within their borders. We appreciate your acknowledgement of “the growing legal and international limitation” on forcibly deporting asylum seekers to countries that are not prepared to receive them. We hope that this acknowledgement means that Israel will not resume its plans to deport asylum seekers to unnamed countries in Africa.

In the wake of the Holocaust, Israel played a leading role in the creation of the United Nations Refugee Convention, which established the international framework for the protection of refugees around the world. We urge Israel to reflect the principles enshrined in that agreement and find a path forward for the refugees by providing full and fair asylum procedures and actively seeking options for third country resettlement.

Our shared Jewish tradition teaches us to welcome and protect the stranger. During this season when we remember that in the days of our ancestors, we too crossed the Sinai in search of freedom, we cannot give up on ensuring the safety of those fleeing persecution. While we were disappointed by the sudden reversal on the agreement with UNHCR, it is not too late. Israel can still take advantage of this opportunity to pursue a humane solution.

Sincerely,

Anti-Defamation League
HIAS
Jewish Council for Public Affairs
J Street
National Council of Jewish Women
New Israel Fund
Rabbinical Assembly
Reconstructing Judaism
Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association
T’ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights
Union for Reform Judaism