

HIAS

A woman with short blonde hair, wearing sunglasses and a dark jacket with a rainbow scarf, is shouting into a red and white megaphone. She is surrounded by a crowd of people, some wearing winter hats. In the background, a blue banner with purple text is visible. The scene is set in front of a building with large windows.

Countering Arbitrary Detention

**A Moral and Tactical Toolkit for Countering the Expansion
of Immigration Detention Facilities**



Background

Detention centers and immigration enforcement field offices are rapidly expanding while safe and legal pathways for immigrants and forcibly displaced people to enter and remain in the U.S. are shutting down. This rapid expansion of detention centers and field offices increases the capacity for abuse, infringement of rights, and pressured self-deportation without due process.

These policy choices around expansion fail to address the broken aspects of the U.S. immigration system. They fail to enhance public safety. And they are being funded by deep cuts to the social safety net that benefits citizens and non-citizens alike.

While the Department of Homeland Security has attempted to obfuscate details of the expansion of detention infrastructure from public view, organizations and media outlets are working to shed light on it.

🔗 See [Wired Magazine's listing of 150+ new or expanded detention and administrative facilities.](#)

Faith communities are on the front lines responding to this crisis. This toolkit provides resources and a guide for faith communities to challenge the expansion of detention facilities and direct public attention to the legal abuses and overreach that happen within them.

A Note on Partnership and Coordinated Efforts

Coordinating efforts with other faith and civic partners has the greatest potential for impact by maximizing pressure and visibility. If you have not identified a local network spearheading these efforts, we recommend that you reach out to faith communities that you know of or **search this directory** for organizations that will have a sense of the local landscape. If no such network or organization exists in your area, we encourage you to connect your efforts with aligned faith communities.

It is possible that existing responses in your community may not be using the full spectrum of available tactics that could be impactful. We recommend that you first plug into and support existing grassroots organizing by local organizations, mutual aid networks and faith communities. If there are additional means to amplify the efficacy of existing organizing that other local leaders have not considered or have not had the ability to execute, you and your community may be able to propose and help with additional capacity, access or resources. *Deference to the*

communities most impacted by these policies is essential given their higher exposure to risk and consequences of activism.

Simultaneously, we want to acknowledge that coalitional work can be difficult and even derailed on account of disagreement about other political issues. While there may be some redlines that you wish to establish and hold, coalitions working to ensure the rights of all are essential for Jewish safety.

 **See “Rebuilding Coalitions Toward a Just Future for All” by Abigail Levine**

For this work, we encourage you to seek out and understand the full range of what is encompassed in joint activism (i.e. whether the coalition has any stances on foreign policy or parameters/ constraints for what may be included in joint action). That information can then inform your approach to partnership in that coalition.

 **You may also reach out to takeaction@hias.org for additional consultation and resources for navigating these dynamics.**



Annelia von Wolfersdorff/HIAS

Strategic Actions for Consideration

Given the well-documented wide-spread inhumane conditions, legal abuses and rising deaths occurring in these detention facilities, the ultimate goal of this toolkit is to assist communities as they work to legally and peacefully prevent the expansion and operation of facilities and offices that enable arbitrary detention. When prevention is not possible, the goal of delaying their opening narrows the window of opportunity for abuses to occur. When delay is not possible, raising awareness and bearing moral witness can contribute to long-term seed change in the culture and ultimately in policy.

Conditions will vary in communities across the country necessitating tailored local responses including your network's capacities and strengths, whether expanded facilities are planned or already operational, the support and/or ability to persuade local elected officials and law enforcement, and the existence of identifiable points of pressure for connected corporate partners.

- **The Vera Institute has identified examples of approaches that demonstrate all of these angles.**

Strategic Actions

Advocacy

The **National Immigrant Justice Center's** talking points and research on immigration detention and enforcement detail the consequences of current policies and recommendations for alternatives. As you engage in advocacy with elected officials and other audiences, in addition to the moral argument of violations of human rights, consider tactical approaches that cite negative implications for neighborhoods and communities surrounding facilities. These can include environmental impact, consumption of available resources, strain on infrastructure, and impact on nearby residents, businesses and schools.



Strategic Actions

Corporate Pressure

Corporate partnerships enable immigration arrests and detention through rental contracts and provision of other services. We recommend that you identify through public records the owners of the facilities leased for administrative or detention purposes by immigration enforcement and assess if there is an opportunity for impact. Those corporate entities most likely to respond to local pressure are locally based and would be significantly impacted through direct appeal, negative publicity or a boycott campaign.

 For additional guidance and consultation on this approach, contact takeaction@hias.org.



Bearing Moral Witness and Faith Vigils

Faith and civic leaders have organized vigils and prayerful rituals at existing facilities across the country. Some communities have chosen consistent weekly or monthly events and use the vigils to expand the range of people who are connected to the issue. Others do one-off events designed to garner maximum media attention and highlight other elements of the community's activism. A peaceful and prayerful

frame helps to mitigate potential for escalation and keep the focus on the immorality of the actions you are targeting. Given the potential for direct engagement with immigration enforcement officials at these locations, we encourage organizations and individuals to do a risk assessment before participating. **HIAS' Guide for Supporting Immigrant Neighbors** provides an outline of risks to consider.

Resources

- ➔ **This Planning Guide by the American Friends Service Committee provides planning recommendations for the strategic and practical components of your vigil.**
- ➔ **These complete toolkits from Free Families and Worker's Circle provide detailed outlines and content recommendations in addition to general planning guidance.**

In addition, we want to highlight Jewish ritual content from HIAS to consider:

- ➔ **Nisim B'chol Yom Morning Blessings**
- ➔ **Contemporary and Historical Prayers for our Country with Immigration Themes**
- ➔ **HIAS also offers a range of appropriate text studies for longer formatted sit-in programs.**

Additional Resources

HIAS is part of an ecosystem of non-partisan organizations working to uphold the rights and dignity of immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers. We want to highlight the **National Immigrant Justice Center** and **American Immigration Council** as sources of reputable research and policy recommendations that align with our

values. While HIAS does not endorse all policy objectives of the **Detention Watch Network**, they are a national leader in combatting the arbitrary detention of immigrants. You may want to consult their website to be aware of existing campaigns and popular framing of issues.



**HIAS stands for a world in which
forcibly displaced persons find
welcome, safety, and opportunity.**

[hias.org](https://www.hias.org)

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