

Commemorating the S.S. St. Louis

June 6, 2017

Planning Guide for Local Actions

The past few months have brought many cruel and outrageous attacks on the refugee program. They are unprecedented in recent U.S. history, but the Jewish community knows all too well that they resonate deeply in some of the darkest moments of our own communal memory.

On June 6, HIAS will convene community vigils around the nation on the anniversary of the day that the U.S. turned away the refugees aboard the S.S. St. Louis. These vigils are an important opportunity to take a public stand for refugees, and to send a message to elected officials that history must not be allowed to repeat itself for today's victims of violence and persecution.

Use this guide to plan your own local actions.

The Vision

On the evening of June 6, there will be somber and powerful vigils held in communities across the United States as our community honors the anniversary of the S.S. St. Louis and bears witness to the tragic parallels to contemporary attacks on refugees.

The vigils will also explicitly ask our Members of Congress to publicly stand for refugees. The two executive orders on refugees, (which were halted by the courts) are a clear signal of the types of policies that our government intends to pursue regarding refugees. In the coming months, we must stand against policies that endanger refugees, and insist on the U.S. legacy of welcome.

The vigils will be planned and led by Jewish communities, using guidance from HIAS. We encourage you to customize the vigil to fit your own setting and community.

Date and Time

We are planning fast! Ideally, your action will take place on **Tuesday, June 6** (which is the anniversary of the day that United States turned away the S.S. St. Louis). We recommend holding the vigils in the evening at twilight.

If this date and time is not possible for your community, we encourage you to plan an action a different evening.

Location

If possible for your community, we encourage you to send a powerful message by holding the vigil on the sidewalk outside of the office of your Member of Congress. Public gatherings on sidewalks do not require a permit as long as you are not blocking foot traffic.

If this option is not feasible, please hold the vigil outdoors in a public location, such as a City Hall or a public park. Request permits or permissions as necessary for that location. *NOTE: You may need to rush your request for a permit. This is essential to explore immediately.*

Program Content:

HIAS is developing a powerful ritual moment involving yahrtzeit candles to draw attention to the tragic loss of life that can result from not allowing refugees a pathway to safety. On May 12, HIAS will send this complete ritual to the leaders of all vigils, which you will be able to use in its entirety.

Consider augmenting the program with speakers who can communicate their moral outrage about the attacks on refugees, from a Jewish perspective. We encourage you to invite to speak rabbis, representatives from local Jewish organizations, local Jewish politicians, people who were refugees or whose families were refugees and people who are deeply involved in refugee work, including staff members from local resettlement agencies.

Engagement with Members of Congress:

As our intention is to encourage Members of Congress to be vocal advocates for refugees, please reach out to your Member of Congress to invite them to attend (and even deliver brief remarks) at your vigil. In most cases, the Member of Congress will not actually be able to attend. However, we encourage you to send the invitation regardless of whether or not you think their attendance is likely, particularly if you plan to hold the vigil outside of their office.

HIAS can provide a sample invitation letter that you can use to invite your Member of Congress.

Partnerships:

Consider organizing this vigil in partnership with other congregations or organizations in your area.

We encourage you to [check the list of Welcome Campaign congregations](#) on the HIAS website to identify other synagogues in your area who can partner on your action.

You can reach out to local Jewish organizations, or even local interfaith partners. HIAS will be talking with several national Jewish organizations that have local branches, to encourage them to join local actions.

Publicity

HIAS is creating a webpage that will list the actions taking place around the country. We will share it broadly starting in mid-May.

We recommend that you set up a Facebook event for your local action. We will link to that on our site.

In addition to inviting your own congregation, you can publicize more broadly by reaching out to community groups, post on local listservs, and using social media.

Collateral Materials:

Signs that say “Refugees Welcome” and “My People Were Refugees Too” can be accessed and downloaded [here](#). We encourage you to consider having them professionally printed.

We are also able to send HIAS stickers to certain actions, until our supply runs out!

Photos, Media, and Social Media:

In order to showcase the events that are taking place nationwide, we would appreciate if you can develop a plan to quickly send us the photos from your events. These can be sent to us directly, or you can post them on social media and tag HIAS.

We encourage you to invite local media (and Jewish media) to cover the event. Media can be a powerful tool to amplify your message, and showcase the deep support in your local area for refugees.

We also encourage you to promote your event on social media, using the hashtag #JewsforRefugees and #RefugeesWelcome. Closer to the date, we will follow-up with additional social media guidance.

Getting Started!

Interested in hosting a St. Louis vigil? Here are the **first** steps you should take.

- 1) Let us know! Fill out [this form](#) so that we can be in touch with you.
- 2) Join a “How To” call on Tuesday May 16th at 4pm EST.
- 3) Decide on a time and a location. Secure a permit, if necessary, for that location.
- 4) Create a facebook event.
- 5) Decide whether you will invite other organizations to partner with you, and invite them.
- 6) Invite your Member of Congress to attend.
- 7) Work within your synagogue’s protocols – put it on the calendar, in the newsletter, and any other logical steps.

All remaining materials (including the ritual itself) will be sent by May 12. We are very much looking forward to working with you on this important program.