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**Statement of  
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American Jewish Committee**

**Submitted on behalf of the American Jewish Committee to  
The Senate Judiciary Subcommittee  
on Immigration, Refugees and Border Security**

**Hearing on  
Renewing America's Commitment to the Refugee Convention:  
The Refugee Protection Act of 2010**

**May 19, 2010**

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The American Jewish Committee (AJC) strongly supports the Refugee Protection Act of 2010 (S.3113), introduced on March 15, 2010, by Senators Patrick Leahy (D-VT) and Carl Levin (D-MI). The legislation marks the 30th anniversary of the Refugee Act of 1980, which established procedures for the United States to meet its obligations to refugees and asylum seekers under the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol.

From its founding in 1906, AJC has been a strong voice in support of fair and generous treatment of immigrants, participating actively in many of the major immigration debates of our time and supporting policies that assure that the United States fulfill its role as a haven for refugees fleeing persecution. The long experience of the Jewish people as refugees from many lands and in many periods of our history has made us acutely aware of the need for those fleeing persecution or extreme hardship to find refuge and safety in the United States. AJC believes that enforcement and border policies must be consistent with humanitarian values and with the need to treat all individuals with respect, even as they allow the United States to implement its immigration laws and identify and prevent the entry of criminals, and of persons who wish to do us harm or otherwise pose a risk to our national security.

The Refugee Protection Act of 2010 seeks to ensure that refugees and asylum seekers with *bona fide* claims are protected by the United States. Specifically, the bill would eliminate the requirement that asylum applicants file a claim within one year of arrival and reform the expedited removal process. The bill also seeks to reform the immigration detention system to ensure that asylum seekers and others have access to counsel, medical care, religious practice, and family visitation. Additionally, the bill would establish a nation-wide, secure “alternatives to detention” program and codify the current Department of Homeland Security policy that asylum seekers be considered for release (“parole”).

Moreover, and importantly, the Refugee Protection Act would amend current law to ensure that asylum seekers and refugees are not unfairly denied protection and admission to the United States under the current overly broad definitions of “terrorist organization” and “terrorist activity,” as set forth in the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA). AJC strongly supports effective enforcement tools that bolster our national security by identifying and preventing entry of those that would do us harm. However, changes in the law following the events of September 11, 2001, resulted in innocent activity, or coerced actions, being labeled as material support to terrorism, with the consequence that critical humanitarian protections have been denied or delayed for thousands of legitimate refugees and asylum seekers who pose no danger to the United States and who have committed no acts of wrongdoing. S.3113 would address this situation, while leaving in place provisions of law that prevent the granting of refugee or asylee status to those who do pose a threat to the United States or are guilty of terrorist acts.

As a faith-based organization, we call attention to the moral dimensions of public policy and pursue policies that uphold the human dignity of each person, all of whom are made *b'tselem elohim*, in the image of G-d. We engage the immigration issue with the

goal of fashioning an immigration system that facilitates humanitarian protections in the interest of serving the dignity and rights of every individual, even as it safeguards our nation from those who would do us harm. It is our prayer that the legislative process will produce a just refugee system of which our nation of immigrants can be proud.

AJC appreciates the opportunity to submit this statement and welcomes your questions and comments.