



## Related Articles

### AJC's Statement on Immigration

As adopted by the Board of Governors on December 9, 2002

#### I. Introduction

American Jews have consistently maintained a deep interest in United States immigration and refugee policy. According to Jewish tradition, "strangers" are to be welcomed and valued, as we were once "strangers in the land of Egypt." From its founding in 1906, the American Jewish Committee (AJC) has been a strong voice in support of immigration, participating actively in many of the major immigration debates of our time: opposing reductions in the flow of legal immigrants; supporting increased "family unification" immigration; supporting efforts to reduce the flow of illegal immigration within the context of established civil liberties protections; supporting generous immigration policies regarding refugees who are fleeing persecution, as defined by U.S. law; opposing the denial of government benefits to non-citizen legal immigrants; and supporting programs designed to educate and integrate new citizens.

Today, AJC finds itself faced with the reality of a changed set of circumstances. In the years leading up to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the borders of the United States were relatively open. The economy was booming and immigration was looked upon favorably. With Mexico's newly elected president, Vicente Fox, the United States was working toward an accord to facilitate immigration between our two nations. But after nineteen radical Islamic terrorists entered the country to carry out the tragic events of 9/11, U.S. immigration policy has come under fire and is now at the forefront of political debate.

Understanding the significance of these events, AJC recently began a process of reexamining its policy positions on immigration. Upon extensive reflection and debate, AJC reaffirms its commitment to fair and generous immigration policies, as fundamentally good for the United States and consistent with Jewish values. At the same time, AJC is committed more than ever to the need to increase the security of our nation's borders and to better incorporate newcomers into American society and culture.

#### II. Reaffirmation of Prior Policy Positions

The American Jewish Committee firmly believes that current legal immigration levels should not be reduced and that doing so would not solve our nation's security problems and would put American society at risk in the long run. AJC further believes that serious attempts should be made to ensure that, within current levels, all those who wish to immigrate to the U.S. have the opportunity to do so. History has demonstrated that immigrants enrich this nation economically and culturally, and immigration remains a central ingredient to retaining America's economic strength and its proud tradition of democratic pluralism. A fair and generous immigration policy reflects our highest values as Americans of freedom, opportunity, and family cohesion, and also benefits us materially.

#### III. Increased Security Measures

The American Jewish Committee continues to support fair and generous immigration policies for those who desire to work hard and contribute in a positive way to American society. At the same time, we recognize the urgent need for reform of our visa, border and admissions systems, in order to keep out those who wish to do us harm. Reform measures AJC supports include, but are not limited to, the following:

- A) Increased and Updated Border Security. There must be (1) greater intelligence sharing regarding potential terrorists amongst the nation's intelligence and gatekeeper agencies, (2) increased use of state-of-the-art anti-fraud technology to create counterfeit-resistant passports and visas, and analyze suspect documents, (3) layers of security with multiple screening points for those departing for and arriving in the U.S., and (4) improvements in the system that tracks foreign nationals who enter and leave the U.S., including the vigorous monitoring of those who enter with student, visitor, or employment visas; matching of entries into and exits from the U.S. in order to better alert the government to those who stay in the U.S. beyond the terms of their visas; and improved enforcement of applicable laws for those who overstay their visas.
- B) Visa Reform. (1) Non-immigrant and immigrant visa applications to the U.S. by citizens or residents of countries that sponsor or are seedbeds for terrorism, as identified by the U.S. State Department, must receive greater scrutiny than other foreign nationals, (2) there should be an increase in the number of personnel who screen and review visa applications, and improved training for those who do so, and (3) the investigation of visa applicants presenting themselves to the State Department's consular services should be subject to additional oversight by a federal agency.
- C) Restructuring Immigration Functions. The recent delegation of responsibilities currently held by the INS to the new Department of Homeland Security is but the first step in the lengthy and daunting task of restructuring that is crucial to our nation's security. While we support the separation of enforcement and adjudication/service functions into two separate branches, we are disappointed that this was not accompanied by the creation of a discrete immigration division headed by a strong central authority responsible for coordinating and implementing these related responsibilities. We hope and urge that means will nevertheless be found to improve coordination of these functions with updated technology and information, and that immigration policy will be implemented in a fashion that both affords fair treatment to immigrants and protects national security interests.
- D) Increased Funding and Support. None of the above can be accomplished without significant government resources, including immediate and significant increased funding for such measures.

#### IV. Acculturation of New Immigrants

AJC believes that fundamental to a sound immigration policy is the successful acculturation of immigrants, and urges greater efforts to facilitate newcomers' adjustment to American society. Acculturation efforts should convey an understanding of and appreciation for American democratic institutions, patriotism, and constitutional principles, including equality under the law and due process. At the same time, without a vigorous commitment to pluralism and a respect for immigrant cultures, America risks increasing ethnic tension and resentment. Both the successful incorporation of immigrants and a respect for pluralism are necessary to preserve the "American dream" and sustain democracy.

Consistent with these beliefs, AJC supports the creation and/or reinvigoration of, as well as increased funding for the following programs and practices designed to effectively acculturate immigrants, including:

A) American Values Education. Increased support for programs for adults and children such as Hands Across the Campus, a program administered by AJC's Arthur and Rochelle Belfer Center for American Pluralism that is utilized by public schools across the country, with its core "American values" curriculum that emphasizes the importance of understanding democratic ideals, civic values, and pluralism for both native-born and immigrant children.

B) English Acquisition. Greater emphasis on the importance of learning English by newcomers—adults and children—with greater funding for such programs so that all who wish to do so have the opportunity to learn English upon their arrival in the U.S. or soon thereafter.

C) Community Participation. Recognition that acculturation cannot be accomplished without the significant participation of community institutions.

###

[Home](#) | [About Us](#) | [Media Center](#) | [International Activities](#) | [Anti-Semitism](#) | [Domestic Policy](#) | [Jewish Living](#) | [Interreligious/Interethnic](#) | [Contribute](#) | [Careers @ AJC](#) |  
Copyright 2007 The American Jewish Committee