

As published in the [New York Daily News](#)

Why American Jews are Rallying for Muslims

By Allan Chernoff

On January 27, 1945 Soviet troops liberated an 11 year old girl named Rena from the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp. Spared from the gas chambers, her dream of living freely without constant fear of persecution or death suddenly was no longer a fantasy; she now had hope that dream might soon be realized. But the gates of the United States did not swing open for Jewish refugees at the end of World War II, even for those with relatives in the U.S., just as they had been tightly guarded in 1939 when it was clear the Jews of Europe were in great danger and in 1942 when Washington learned the Nazis were perpetrating mass murder. It would take her nearly five years of struggle, enduring more humiliation and persecution in Poland and Germany, before she would have the opportunity to live in complete freedom with her family in the United States, even after the Nazis had forced her into slave labor; starved and tortured her; and murdered her father, brother, and dozens of relatives.

This family history, common among American descendants of European Jews, is why the plight of Muslims today strikes a chord with American Jews.

Jews, particularly those whose parents and grandparents are Holocaust survivors, know what it is to seek refuge. After a millennia-long history of being singled out for our religious beliefs, we know what it is to dream of freedom without fear of persecution. This is why we so deeply treasure America and its promise of liberty. And, this is why we are so outspoken in opposition to President Trump's executive order banning Muslims of certain countries from entering the United States, halting immigration from war-torn Syria, and suspending all refugee admissions. That it was done on International Holocaust Remembrance Day, January 27, which my mother celebrates as her "second birthday", the date she was given a second chance at life, makes it even more painful, a tragic irony.

There are few words sweeter to American Jews than the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." It says we are all equal, we are all respected and accepted. It says the

government, including the president, may not discriminate against people of any religion. This is why organizations across the Jewish political and religious spectrum, from [Orthodox](#) to [Conservative](#) to [Reform](#), from the [American Jewish Committee](#) to [ADL](#), are protesting the president's immigration ban on Muslims. Never mind the fact that Muslim leaders in some of the targeted countries have condemned Jews and threatened Israel. Even so, Jews will fiercely defend the constitution and the American way of life.

We are doing more than just protesting. My synagogue, in partnership with two other neighboring Jewish congregations, has just proudly [resettled](#) a family of Syrian Muslims in our New Jersey community, as other synagogues have done across the U.S. The Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, [HIAS](#), is among the leading refugee agencies that have been working on behalf of Syrians, Muslims and Christians, since Bashar Al-Assad declared war on his people.

For Jews, "Never Again!" is more than a pledge against mass murder. It is a commitment to fight discrimination and persecution against people of any background, not just Jews.

Of course we all want to be protected against terrorism. But President Trump's immigration ban is no way to secure our nation against terrorism. To the contrary, it is only serving to confirm our enemies' false claims that America is at war with Islam. The world's Muslims need to know that right now American Jews are standing with them.

In his determination to fight terrorism, President Trump must remain cognizant of the need to both respect the constitution, and maintain humanity in his heart. Just as American Jews are acutely aware of the perilous existence refugees confront, President Trump should know that the next refugee from Syria seeking to enter the United States may be an 11 year old girl trying to survive, who simply dreams of a life free from persecution and the constant fear of death.

--

Allan Chernoff, author of [The Tailors of Tomaszow: A Memoir of Polish Jews](#), is CEO of [Chernoff Communications](#). He is a former senior correspondent for CNN and CNBC.