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**National Jewish Community  
Relations Advisory Council**

**Joint Program Plan 1992-1993**



# NJCRAC Plenary Session

## Issues Briefing Papers

February 1993

National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council  
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# National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council

As the public affairs arm of the organized American Jewish community, the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council (NJCRAC), is the leading Jewish policy-making body on the broadest range of domestic and international issues. The NJCRAC is a unique partnership of 117 local and 13 national agencies throughout the United States. Affording equal status to all NJCRAC member agencies, national and local, the NJCRAC provides the vehicle for community views to impact on national level issues and decisions.

Created in 1944 by the General Assembly of the Council of Jewish Federations, the NJCRAC has proven an effective mechanism that has enabled the diverse agencies that comprise the Jewish community relations field to work together in a coordinated network. The NJCRAC process allows local and national agencies to maximize the effectiveness of their individual and collective efforts by planning policies together and coordinating their programs in the best interest of the total Jewish community.

The entire range of Jewish community relations concerns are addressed through the NJCRAC process: from interpreting developments in Israel, to promoting equality of opportunity for all in American society; from securing support for oppressed Jews around the world, to ensuring freedom of religion and separation of church and state in the United States; from combating anti-Semitism here and abroad, to promoting positive cooperation and understanding between America's many religious, ethnic and racial groups. Consensus on these issues usually emerges through the NJCRAC's distinctive ongoing deliberative process.

The NJCRAC wishes to thank the following organizations for their assistance in preparing this material: B'nai B'rith, the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, the New York Association for New Americans (NYANA), the Religious Action Center for Reform Judaism, and the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

All of the positions articulated in this material reflects the policy positions of the NJCRAC.

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## PROTECT REFUGEES AND SUPPORT RESETTLEMENT

### BACKGROUND

There are over 17 million refugees in the world today, a significant increase from 10 years ago. Most are women and children. All need the assistance and protection of the international community. A very small number, less than 1%, are candidates for resettlement to the United States because of historic humanitarian concern and family or other special ties. We remain committed to protecting refugees throughout the world and to sustaining and improving current admission and resettlement programs.

### WHAT SHOULD BE U.S. POLICY ON REFUGEE ADMISSIONS, INCLUDING SOVIET JEWS?

The number of refugee admissions and allocations are determined by the president in consultation with the Congress. In FY93 122,000 refugee admissions are authorized, including 40,000 Soviet Jews. Most of these refugees have family in the United States, and all have established that they face persecution and discrimination in their homeland. It is essential to sustain this level of refugee resettlement, at least for the next several years. Persecution and violence against Soviet Jews is escalating, especially in the republics. We should also consider increasing admissions from Africa and Haiti, where war, famine and human rights violations endanger many.

### HOW CAN WE IMPROVE RESETTLEMENT SERVICES ONCE REFUGEES ARRIVE IN THE U.S.?

The Jewish community successfully resettles refugees through the Matching Grant Program, a public-private partnership which precludes welfare for 4 months after arrival, during which refugees receive intensive language, employment, acculturation and other resettlement services to speed adjustment and encourage self sufficiency. Most refugees resettled by the Jewish system get jobs within their first 4 - 6 months in the U.S. and have no need for public assistance. These outcomes can be improved if the Matching Grant Program were extended from 4 to 8 months or more. Also, private voluntary agencies need more authority to "case manage" the resettlement effort, and refugees need health insurance which is not lost if a job is taken.

### HOW MUCH FEDERAL FUNDING IS NEEDED TO PROTECT REFUGEES AND ACHIEVE SUCCESSFUL RESETTLEMENT?

In fiscal year 1993, \$381 million was appropriated for resettlement of 122,000 refugees. This represents a significant cut from 10 years ago, with both private agencies and state governments forced to assume greater responsibility. The federal government should provide greater assistance to states where refugees resettle, and adjust the federal share of the Matching Grant program to reflect increased costs and inflation over the past 10 years.

## SPECIAL SUPPLEMENTAL FOOD PROGRAM FOR WOMEN, INFANTS, AND CHILDREN (WIC)

### WHAT IS WIC?

Established in the early 1970s, WIC provides highly nutritious food and nutrition education to low-income women who are pregnant or breast-feeding and to their children up to age five. The program links the distribution of food to other health services, including prenatal care.

### BACKGROUND

WIC has received strong bi-partisan support in Congress for many years. There is widespread support in Congress for full funding of WIC. President Clinton also called for the full funding of WIC during the election campaign. The conference report on the fiscal year 1993 budget resolution stated that, "the sense of the Congress is to remain on the five-year path to reach full funding consistent with the CEOs recommendations." (The report was referring to the statement of five CEOs who testified before the House Budget Committee in March 1991 and called for full funding of WIC by fiscal year 1996.)

In January 1993, two WIC funding Bills were introduced in the Senate. Senators Patrick Leahy, (D-VT), Chairman of the Senate Agriculture Committee and a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee, and Senator Dennis DeConcini, (D-AZ), a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee, introduced S. 22, the Maternal and Child Investment Act of 1993. S. 22 mandates Congress to provide specific funding levels for EITC for fiscal years 1994, 1995 and 1996. The funding levels contained in S. 22 are the funding levels projected by the Congressional Budget Office to be needed to increase WIC so that it is fully funded by fiscal year 1996. The Bill converts WIC from a discretionary program to what is called "mandatory appropriations." This means that the full funding levels contained in the Bill must be provided rather than levels determined by the Appropriations Committee each year.

### WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF WIC?

Participation in WIC reduces by 15 percent to 25 percent the chance that a high-risk pregnant woman will deliver a premature or low-birthweight baby. It increases the likelihood that these women will receive early, regular prenatal care and that their children will get regular pediatric care and immunizations. Not surprisingly, it is the mothers and children at greatest risk -- those who are poor, minority, and poorly educated -- who benefit most.

## WHAT ARE THE PROGRAM'S COST?

The average cost of providing WIC services to a woman during her pregnancy is estimated to be less than \$250; the costs of sustaining a low-birthweight baby in a neonatal intensive care unit are many times that amount every day. WIC's cost-effectiveness has been clearly demonstrated. Because it significantly reduces the chances of prematurity and low birthweight and the extraordinary costs of neonatal intensive care that these conditions typically require, the savings can be substantial. Despite its demonstrated success, however, WIC has never been fully funded.

## WHO IS COVERED BY WIC?

It currently serves an estimated 4 million persons out of an eligible population of 7 million.

## RECOMMENDED ACTION

WIC should be expanded to serve all financially needy pregnant and nursing women, infants, and children at nutritional risk.

The goal for fiscal year 1994 is to secure the level of funding needed to keep WIC on track to reach full funding by 1996. Currently, about 40 percent of those eligible are not served due to funding limitations. WIC is funded at \$2.86 billion for fiscal year 1993. USDA estimates an average of 5.8 million women, infants and children can be served this fiscal year. The Congressional Budget Office estimates there are some 9.6 million women, infants and children eligible for WIC this fiscal year.

Based on a new estimate released by the Congressional Budget Office in January 1993, the levels of funding needed to increase WIC funding during the next three years so that it is fully funded by fiscal year 1996 are:

- \$3.3 million in FY 1994.
- \$3.7 million in FY 1995.
- \$4.1 billion in fiscal year 1996.

Urge Members to send letters to the Chairman of the House and Senate Budget Committees and the Chairmen of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees and the Agricultural Appropriations Subcommittees to request \$3.3 billion in the budget resolution and the appropriations bills.

*Having to  
full feeding*

## HEAD START

### WHAT IS HEAD START?

This Federal program provides disadvantaged preschool children with preschool education, health and nutrition services, social services for the whole family and opportunities for parent involvement and support.

Head Start helps to ensure that children are healthy. In 1990-1991 97 percent of Head Start children received medical screening and treatment, and 96 percent were immunized.

Head Start is run by non-profit organizations including community agencies, schools, and religious institutions as well as local governments.

### WHO DOES HEAD START SERVE?

Head Start serves the most disadvantaged children - 90 percent of children enrolled in each program must be in families with incomes below the federal poverty level.

The majority of Head Start children are three and four years old. However, the program also reaches families with infants and toddlers through Parent and Child Centers and migrant programs.

Head Start serves a diverse population:

- 33 percent of Head Start children are white;
  - 38 percent are African American;
  - 22 percent are Hispanic;
  - 4 percent are Native American; and
  - 3 percent are Asian.
- 
- 13 percent of Head Start children have disabilities.
  - 55 percent of Head Start families are headed by a single parent.
  - Almost one out of every two Head Start children have a head of household who works outside the home.

### WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF HEAD START?

Children participating in Head Start are less likely to be retained in grade or placed in special education classes.

Head Start gives parents an important boost. Thirty six percent of Head Start staff are parents of current or former students. In 1990, over 606,000 parents volunteered in their

local Head Start program.

### **HOW MUCH DOES THE PROGRAM COST?**

In FY 1993, approximately 720,000 children or slightly over one third of those eligible will participate in Head Start at a cost of \$2.8 billion.

Although 2.5 million disadvantaged youngsters are potentially eligible for Head Start, only 18 percent of those children are lucky enough to be admitted. Many of the others are waiting for an open slot. Poor children are far less likely than more affluent children to have the opportunity to enroll in an early childhood development program. In 1986 fewer than four out of every 10 four-year-olds with family incomes below \$10,000 a year were enrolled in a preschool program. In contrast, two out of three four-year-olds whose families had incomes of \$35,000 a year or more attended such programs.

### **ACTION RECOMMENDED**

- 1) Urge the Congress to increase funding for Head Start to ensure that it reaches all eligible children.
- 2) Ensure that Head Start provides increased services to infants and toddlers and that the program quality is strengthened.

## EARNED INCOME TAX CREDIT (EITC)

### BACKGROUND

The earned income tax credit for low-income working families with children has become one of the nation's most popular anti-poverty initiatives; it enjoys broad bipartisan support and President Clinton has endorsed a further expansion. The EITC was established to offset regressive payroll taxes on low-income working families, and effectively boosts low wages and helps families become more economically self-sufficient.

### WHAT DOES THE EITC COST - HOW DOES IT WORK?

In 1992, nearly 14 million families received EITC benefits totaling \$11.4 billion. Families benefiting from the EITC received an average credit of \$820. The EITC is pro-work and pro-family, being provided only to parents who work and who live with their children. In addition, the credit is "refundable," meaning that families that earn too little to owe income tax still receive it; if they file a tax return, the IRS mails them a check. (Since most of the working poor do not owe federal income taxes, nonrefundable credits do not benefit them.) And unlike welfare payments that can drop one dollar for each additional dollar earned, EITC payments rise with earnings until a family's income reaches about \$7,500, thereby encouraging employment among those who otherwise work little if at all. Currently, families with full-time minimum wage workers have net incomes that fall well short of the poverty line. The EITC will provide more assistance to the working poor and, serve as an offset to deficit-reduction measures that would otherwise place too much of a burden on this group.

### ACTION RECOMMENDATION

- 1) Expand the EITC and the minimum wage sufficiently that families with full-time workers will not be poor.
- 2) The EITC needs to be adjusted for family size. Family needs increase with family size. The poverty line and welfare benefits do as well. But wages do not. As a result, as the number of children in a low-wage family grows, the family falls steadily farther below the poverty line -- and wages become increasingly less competitive with welfare. Census data show that 60 percent of all children in working poor families live in families with three or more children.

To help address this problem, Congress added a family-size adjustment to the earned income tax credit in 1990. But the adjustment is too small. The basic EITC benefit for a family with two or more children is only \$160 a year higher than the benefit for a family with one child. A restructured EITC would boost the benefit for families with two children

and create a third tier for families with three or more children.

This will offset some of the costs of expanding the EITC --- and also to simplify it.

3) The two supplemental EITC credits enacted in 1990 should be dropped. These are an extra credit for families with a child under age and a credit for families that incur premium costs for a health insurance policy that covers a child. Neither supplemental credit represents sound policy, and both complicate the EITC while costing significant sums.

Any expansion of the EITC designed to offset the regressive effects of policies to reduce the federal deficit should ensure that the expansion is large enough to provide a net gain for working poor families to accomplish these three priorities.

## FOREIGN AID

### WHY \$3 BILLION IN U.S. FOREIGN AID TO ISRAEL?

The United States and Israel share fundamental interests in the post cold war Middle East; a common commitment to promoting democracy, pursuing the peace process, and countering Arab and Islamic extremists opposed to regional reconciliation. Helping Israel thrive is in the best interests of the United States, and U.S. foreign aid is critical to that effort.

Beyond its material value, U.S. foreign assistance provides Israel with the confidence and military deterrence necessary for taking the risks for a lasting peace in the Middle East. Securing Mideast peace is a vital U.S. objective. U.S. foreign assistance promotes regional peace by underscoring the legitimacy, stability and permanence of the state of Israel.

### WHY FOREIGN AID IN GENERAL?

Foreign aid is a basic instrument of American foreign policy. For nearly half a century, America's overseas assistance programs have helped advance U.S. security, political, economic, and humanitarian interests. By assisting U.S. allies and trade partners around the world, fostering democracies and democratic ideals and providing our friends with the means to sustain themselves economically, politically and militarily, foreign aid remains a cost-effective tool of statecraft.

### WOULDN'T WE BE BETTER OFF SPENDING THESE FUNDS IN OUR OWN COUNTRY?

Overseas assistance also generates significant economic returns at home. At less than 1% of the federal budget, foreign aid has a powerful multiplier effect on the U.S. economy, creating exports, jobs, tax revenues and other economic benefits that greatly outweigh its budgetary cost. America's main economic competitors are well aware of the benefits reaped from foreign aid, and allocate significant resources to their foreign assistance programs.

Foreign aid helps maintain America's competitive edge in the race for markets, exports, and jobs by promoting the purchase of U.S. products, fostering business relationships, attracting foreign customers, increasing exposure to U.S. firms, and breaking down trade barriers. Foreign markets through competitive financing, loan guarantees, political risk insurance, feasibility studies and technical assistance --all export promotion services included in the foreign aid bill.

Foreign aid helps countries purchase American products in the United States. Seventy-three percent of all Foreign aid funds are spent in the U.S. on the purchase of American goods, helping to generate exports and jobs, and improve the U.S. trade balance. More than \$9.2 billion in direct economic and military aid was reinvested in the U.S. economy in 1991, creating over 180,000 jobs.

## THE RELIGIOUS FREEDOM RESTORATION ACT

### WHAT IS THE RELIGIOUS FREEDOM RESTORATION ACT?

A bill to restore the protection for free exercise scrapped by the Supreme Court in Employment Division v. Smith (1990).

### WHAT IS THE ISSUE IN SMITH?

Whether the sacramental use of peyote by members of the Native American Church was protected under the free exercise clause of the First Amendment, which provides that "Congress shall make no law...prohibiting the free exercise of religion." Instead of deciding that narrow issue, the Supreme Court broadly redefined the free exercise clause, sharply limiting the Constitutional protection afforded all religious people in America.

### WHAT WAS THE RULE OF LAW BEFORE SMITH?

That government could restrict religious practices only if it could demonstrate a "compelling" reason, and only by using the least restrictive means possible. This balancing test weighed the government's interest against the individuals's religious liberty interest in the context of each particular case.

### WHAT IS THE NEW RULE OF LAW ANNOUNCED BY JUSTICE SCALIA IN SMITH?

If prohibiting the exercise of religion is "merely the incidental effect of a generally applicable and otherwise valid provision, the First Amendment has not been offended." Thus, the government no longer has to justify most burdens on religious exercise. The free exercise clause now offers protection only if a particular religious practice is singled out for discriminatory treatment.

### ISN'T THE THREAT OF SMITH MORE THEORETICAL THAN REAL?

No. More than 60 cases have been decided against religious claimants since Smith. Orthodox Jews have been subjected to autopsies in violation of their families' religious faith; unpopular churches have been denied to meet even in commercial areas; Catholic hospitals have lost their accreditation for refusing to provide abortion services.

### WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF RFRA?

To restore the traditional compelling interest test, and ensure its application in all cases where the exercise of religion is burdened.

**ISN'T SMITH JUST ABOUT DRUG USE?**

No. The Supreme Court announced a new rule of law in Smith that will apply to all free exercise of religion cases. This new rule strips the free exercise clause of its protection for religion.

**IS RFRA ABORTION NEUTRAL?**

Yes. Neither pro-life nor pro-choice groups will be advantaged by RFRA.

**WHAT KIND OF SUPPORT EXISTS FOR RFRA?**

RFRA is enthusiastically supported by more than fifty religious and civil liberties groups spanning the political and theological spectrum. Never has a broader coalition been assembled to support Congressional legislation. All of these organizations have been willing to lay aside their deep liberty for all Americans.

**INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS**  
**U.S.POLICY REGARDING BOSNIA/ HERZEGOVINA**

**BACKGROUND**

Bosnia and Herzegovina is a Balkan republic of 4.3 million people established in February 1992 that was formerly part of a unified Yugoslavia until two years ago. The Balkan region has been synonymous with lethal ethnic and religious feuds, conquests and atrocities dating back before the Tenth Century. First to withdraw from Yugoslavia were Slovenia and Croatia; their independence rekindled old hatreds. Nationalism in Croatia was met by threats from Serbs in the remnant of Yugoslavia to defend Croatia's Serbs. The resulting warfare became a land grab with Yugoslavia's army today holding one-third of Croatia and Bosnia.

**WHAT STARTED THE PRESENT CONFLICT IN BOSNIA?**

A majority vote for independence for Bosnia was met by Bosnian Serb violence, the provision of arms from Yugoslavia (Serbia) and military engagements.

**WHAT IS THE ETHNIC COMPOSITION OF BOSNIA?**

Until the conflict began Bosnia was 43% Muslim Slavs, 31% Serb and 17% Croat.

**WHAT IS THE WAR'S EFFECT ON PEOPLE?**

Ferocious bombings and the siege of Sarajevo and other major Croat and Muslim areas have killed thousand of civilians and left hundreds of thousands of refugees. An "Ethnic Cleansing" program reminiscent of the Nazis, is a euphemism for torture, murder, mass rapes, pillaging and terrorizing people into fleeing their homes. While all sides have engaged in brutalities, the Serbs have been the major instigators and the perpetrators of atrocities and war crimes. over 150 thousand people have been killed and they have held thousands of men, women and children starving in concentration camps and created 1.5 million refugees. Through the efforts of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), the small Jewish community in Bosnia and some Muslims were rescued.

**WHAT HAS BEEN THE REACTION OF WORLD GOVERNMENTS?**

Since the onset of Yugoslavia's breakup in 1991, the European Community (EC) has shied away from responsibility to stop the conflict. The EC refused to employ either effective economic sanctions against Serbia, the main proponent of war and conquest. The Europeans have also resisted military intervention and a "No Fly Zone" over Bosnia. They are only willing to offer humanitarian aid. A United Nations force has been dispatched to the region to keep open food supply lines. However, it was failed to stop major conflicts including the outright murder of Bosnia's Muslim Vice President.

## WHAT IS THE CURRENT STATE OF NEGOTIATIONS FOR PEACE?

The round of negotiations to bring about a political settlement conducted by former Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and the EC's Lord David Owen produced a plan to divide Bosnia into ten provinces of varying ethnic composition; it has roundly been attacked as condoning Serbian conquests and condoning the odious Serbian "ethnic cleansing" policy. Critics believe this approach will not produce peace, but will condone aggression and invite more conflict in other regions of the former Yugoslav Republic. President Clinton's administration is seeking EC approval of a more aggressive role.

## WHAT HAPPENS IF WAR CONTINUES?

There is a general fear of a domino effect. This means that the ethnic Albanian Kosovo Province could be the next victim, followed by Macedonia, the southern most province. War in these regions could bring in Greece, Albania and Bulgaria to defend their ethnic compatriots or to defend areas that they have both coveted. This could also bring Turkey, the largest regional power, into conflict.

## WHAT APPROACHES COULD END THE CONFLICT?

There is a strong feeling that air strikes at strategic sites in Serbia, accompanied by sanctions, would have ended the conflict. However, there is little enthusiasm for this approach in Europe, and slackening interest in the United States. This leads to a more desperate option: the lifting of the arms embargo would allow Muslims to benefit from supplies to confront well-armed Serb forces.

## WHAT HAS BEEN THE STAND OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY ON THIS CONFLICT?

Horrified by the ease in implementing "ethnic cleansing" as well as by growing world indifference, Jewish organizations have raised moral concern for the fate of the Bosnians, and for other Yugoslavs as well. They have joined interreligious coalitions, which include Muslims. Several national and local agencies have advocated military action as well as the lifting of the arms embargo.

## RESTORE HAITIAN DEMOCRACY AND END FORCIBLE REPATRIATION OF HAITIAN REFUGEES

### BACKGROUND

In February of 1991 Jean Bertrand Aristide was inaugurated as Haiti's first democratically elected president, ending years of arbitrary authoritarian and military rule. President Aristide received 67% of the vote in elections where the presence of nearly 1,000 international observers guaranteed safety and prevented fraud and corruption.

On September 30, 1991, the Haitian military forces staged a violent coup forcing President Aristide to flee the country. International observers estimate that at least 3,000 Haitians have been killed, and the U.S. State Department confirms that today widespread violence, repression and human rights abuses instill great fear in the Haitian people.

During President Aristide's rule, some human rights problems continued to exist, and some people fled from Haiti. But the problems under Aristide were less grave than the regime that preceded him and much less serious than the current violations in Haiti. In the months leading up to the election of president Aristide and the 8 months he held office before the coup, very few Haitians attempted to leave their country by boat. In the 8 months following the coup almost 40,000 Haitian boat people were intercepted by the U.S. coast guard. Of these, approximately 1/3 were determined by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) to have a credible fear of persecution, and were admitted to the U.S. temporarily to pursue local asylum claims. On May 24, 1992, President Bush ordered that all Haitians be automatically returned without even a hearing to determine if they faced danger at home.

After promising in the presidential campaign to end the "illegal and immoral" policy of automatic repatriation of Haitian boat people, on January 15, President-elect Clinton announced an "interim and temporary" extension of the Bush policy of automatic repatriation. On January 16 the Bush Administration, with the concurrence of President-elect Clinton, increased the number of ships intended to intercept Haitian boat people.

### WHAT SHOULD BE U.S. POLICY ON THE RESTORATION OF DEMOCRACY AND PRESIDENT ARISTIDE?

President Clinton has stated his commitment to the restoration of democratic rule and President Aristide, and has supported new U.S. initiatives to achieve these goals. The first step, essential to this effort, is the deployment of up to 1,000 international human rights observers throughout the countryside to restore security and curb violence and human rights abuses. The Haitian military is resisting this international presence. If the military refuses to cooperate, the U.S., along with the Organization of American States (OAS) and other international bodies, should support a U.N. embargo to prevent importation of oil, arms and luxury goods which the Haitian military elite use to sustain repression and their way of life.

## WHAT SHOULD BE U.S. POLICY ON HAITIAN REFUGEES?

The decision of President Clinton to continue automatic repatriation and to blockade Haiti to stop boat people is indeed illegal and immoral, as candidate Clinton argued. The blockade represents a "floating Berlin wall" which is unprecedented in American history. This policy violates fundamental principles, long supported by the American Jewish Community, which require freedom of emigration of Soviet Jews and all other oppressed people.

Consistent with his campaign pledge, President Clinton should order hearings for Haitian boat people to identify in a fair manner those with a credible fear of persecution who are entitled to at least temporary protection until it is safe to return to Haiti. These hearings and safe haven can be provided at Guantanamo or third countries in the region. Haitians who do not pass fair U.S. or U.N. screening processes can be kept in specially maintained enclaves in the Caribbean or returned if international observers are deployed to monitor treatment and ensure protection.



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## COMBATTING POVERTY AND PROMOTING SELF-SUFFICIENCY:

### AN AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE STRATEGIC AND ACTION PLAN

The American Jewish Committee has reaffirmed its commitment to a program in social policy three times in recent years: at the 1986 Annual Meeting, in a Board of Governors resolution of December 1991 and in an Annual Meeting statement on the urban crisis and the Los Angeles riots of 1992.

Social policy is a very broad term that can encompass a wide array of actions. This paper does not address important social policy concerns such as health care and housing. It rather targets programs related to alleviating poverty and promoting self-sufficiency, areas on which AJC has a long track record and can continue to make an impact if we focus our resources effectively. This planning document seeks to identify specific goals and strategies for implementing AJC action on poverty and opportunity by responding to four specific questions: What major goals do we seek to accomplish? Who are the poor that are the target population for our efforts? What programs will we endorse to meet our goals? Can AJC make a real difference in this field?

This paper aims to set out a broad vision of what AJC can accomplish on social policy but to do so in a way that takes into account federal budget and political realities, as well as AJC's limited resources. We will only take on what we can accomplish effectively. It would be irresponsible and inadequate to deal with social policy in a piecemeal fashion, without a vision of what we want to achieve. But it would be equally irresponsible to take on all issues at once. We will rather adopt a realistic, step-by-step approach for realizing our policy goals.

#### I - Goals

As in other areas of AJC action, the major goals of the social policy program relate to what we aim to achieve substantively, the interests and values of the Jewish community, the concerns of our coalition partners, the need for breadth and bipartisanship in our positions and our concern for the cities and communities in which we live. Specifically, our major goals for social policy include:

- 1) To combat poverty, promote jobs and self-sufficiency, reinforce the value of work, and support the family as the primary institution for nurturing children through advocacy of effective and realistic policies.

- 2) To protect and promote Jewish interests in several direct ways:
  - By supporting and securing adequate protections and services for the considerable number of Jewish poor still living in large metropolitan areas.
  - By supporting programs vital to the functioning of Jewish federation agencies in fields such as vocational, child support and family services.
  - By enhancing Jewish participation in vital concerns of metropolitan areas where we live in large numbers and whose social trends affect us directly.
  - By expressing Jewish values and serving as an authentic Jewish voice on an issue on which our tradition has much wisdom to convey.
- 3) To reach out to ethnic, racial and religious coalition partners so that strong alliances can be built on matters of real importance to them and to the Jewish community.
- 4) To adopt social policy positions that are not ideologically driven but that rely on objective research and adopt the best ideas whether they are labeled liberal or conservative.
- 5) To assume a leadership role in the Jewish community in social policy issues, based on consensus positions which AJC will develop.
- 6) To emerge as a major national voice on social policy, gaining influence similar to what AJC has achieved in the immigration, civil rights and church-state fields.
- 7) To utilize both national and chapter resources in implementing our social policy priority.

## II - Who Are the Poor, Why Are They Poor and Can Policy Help Them?

One problem the nation faces in developing effective policy to combat poverty is that the problem appears so overwhelming that nothing we do seems to offer the promise of progress. Urban areas are so burdened with destitution, homelessness, drug addiction, crime and other problems that despair has set in among large sectors of the public that any meaningful action can be taken. Moreover, many people believe that the poor shun work and reject mainstream American values. Yet, experience shows that well-conceived policy can make a real impact on these problems.

It is important to look closely at the actual profile of poverty in the U.S. Most of the poor are white, the overwhelming majority do not live in concentrated ghetto neighborhoods, many of them work and a disturbing number are children. Moreover, public policy has succeeded in significantly reducing poverty among some groups, such as the elderly and the disabled. Knowing the following facts about poverty can form the basis for an effective strategy to combat it:

- The official poverty rate in the U.S. fell from about 23% of the population in 1960 to about 14% today. According to the Census Bureau, about 35.7 million Americans lived in poverty in 1991, defined, for example, as at or below an annual income of \$13,924 for a family of four, \$6532 for an elderly individual, or \$9165 for a non-elderly couple. This drop in the poverty rate was not continuous. Poverty rates came down steadily until about 1975; they have increased moderately since then. (There are different measures for poverty in addition to the "official" rate. Some of these alternative measures assume that the official rate is too high because it leaves out non-cash government benefits. Others argue that it is too low because, they believe, it is based on unrealistically low estimates of what the poor need for basic expenses. The key point is that whatever rate is used, the trend in poverty remains the same and is now increasing.)
- At least half of the adult poor work, many at full-time jobs. About 40% of poor families with children are two parent households; over half of them have at least one full-time worker. Their earnings are not sufficient to pull their families out of poverty.
- Public policy has systematically attacked poverty among the elderly and has succeeded. Poverty rates among persons over 65 have declined from 33% in 1960 to 16% in 1980. Rates of poverty among the disabled have also declined.
- Poverty is rising, however, among children. 40% of the poor are now under age 18. While the poverty rate is 14% for all Americans, it is 20% for children.
- The overwhelming majority of the poor do not live in concentrated urban ghettos. If ghetto neighborhoods are defined as census tracts with at

least 40% poverty rates, fewer than 10% of the nation's poor live in them.

- Poverty is growing significantly in female-headed households. In 1960, a quarter of the poor lived in female-headed households; in 1987 about 40% did. The poverty rate for female-headed households exceeds 50%.
- All of these problems are worse among blacks and minorities. White poverty rates hover around 10%, Hispanic poverty rates approach 30%, and over 30% of blacks are poor. Ghetto neighborhoods, as defined above, are 85-90% black and Hispanic (still, only about a quarter of black poor live in ghetto neighborhoods). Among children being born today, 73% of whites will spend no time in poverty and only 3% will live in poverty for at least 7 of their first 10 years. By contrast, only 23% of black children will experience no poverty and 34% will be poor for at least 7 of their first 10 years. Nevertheless, most of the poor are white and more than two-thirds of blacks are not poor.
- Policy can have a positive impact on disadvantaged black youth. Research indicates that employment rises and poverty falls among young poor black males when economic conditions in their areas improve. Suburban poor black populations also have higher employment rates than comparable inner city black poor, indicating that they take jobs where available. This population is not unreachable, but responds like others to economic opportunity.
- These figures present a decidedly mixed picture. The poor are not all enmeshed in a tangle of unsolvable problems on which policy can make no impact. Poverty trends, in fact, move in several different directions at once. Christopher Jencks, perhaps the least ideological of all prominent poverty researchers, argues against the notion of a monolithic underclass. Rather, Jencks demonstrates that factors thought to affect the size of the underclass have varied widely during the 1970s and 1980s: long-term joblessness and the percentage of births to unmarried mothers have gotten worse; the proportion of single mothers collecting welfare has leveled off since 1975; high school graduation rates have risen in the 1970s and 1980s, for blacks faster than for whites, and basic reading skills have improved; the proportion of teens having babies and the overall rate of poverty have shown

little movement in the past decade.

Overall, these data should both provoke concern over the significant problems they indicate and give hope that policy has worked to reduce poverty among some groups and that others can be targeted for policy help in the future. If many poor already work, for example, policy can be developed to enhance their earnings and discourage welfare. If many of the poor are children, health and educational initiatives could improve their future prospects. Based on what we know about poverty, we face not an entirely intractable problem, but a difficult but achievable challenge to improve the lives of the poor by tailoring policy to specific groups in need.

### III - An Effective Policy Agenda

A comprehensive policy approach to poverty must have several components. It must provide opportunity for poor children to rise out of poverty, encourage work rather than welfare, assure that those who work earn sufficiently to escape poverty, and protect the poor, especially children, from deprivation, hunger and homelessness.

No one policy can accomplish all these goals simultaneously. Rather a broad roster of programs is needed, each geared to a specific aspect of poverty, and each supporting the other in a comprehensive plan.

It is also important that the plan be bipartisan and draw from the best ideas advanced by liberal administrations (e.g. the Job Corps) and conservative administrations (e.g. housing vouchers), so that a viable consensus can be built on initiatives to help the poor and promote their self-reliance.

Setting out a broad comprehensive plan does not mean that the agency's resources will be stretched by advocating for several programs at once. At any one time, our efforts will focus on supporting only one or two initiatives under serious consideration. But in working on any segment of the plan, it is important to keep in mind the full view of what we aim to achieve. Over several years, we hope to have worked on all our objectives.

Finally, any plan we support must meet the standards of previously adopted AJC policy such as our guidelines on church-state implications of funds for services under sectarian auspices or for use in religious institutions.

Major parts of a broad social policy plan would include:

A) Welfare and Self-Sufficiency Programs:

1. Protect basic food, housing and support programs, further cuts in which would especially hurt poor children.
2. Invest in programs to improve the health and education of young children. These include: Head Start programs for preschool youth; women, infant and children's health programs; community health centers; and child immunizations.
3. Capture greater child support payments from absent parents, almost always fathers. This can be done by strengthening efforts to establish paternity at birth, deduct child support payments from fathers' wages, just as we now deduct social security taxes, and relieve mothers of the necessity to go to court in a difficult and often futile effort to force support payments. Fathers must accept responsibility for their children, and should be required to do so by public policy.
4. Operate effective transition programs from welfare to work by enrolling recipients in job training and vocational programs while they receive governmental assistance and supplying child care and transportation services to make this training possible. Programs in place to promote welfare to work transitions are hampered by low funding and ineffective regulations and should be made more effective. Experience has shown that these transition programs can produce modest but measurable gains in helping welfare recipients achieve self-sufficiency. The goal of policy should be clearly to reduce welfare and place those able to work in jobs.

B) Human Capital and Job Promotion Programs

- 1) Support job creation and job training programs to enhance the skills of the poor and make them employable. These programs should not concentrate, as some have in the recent past, on those already most job-eligible among the poor but should, like the Job Corps, aim to improve the skills of people who suffer

significant disadvantages but could, with effective training, become productive workers in mainstream jobs.

- 2) Promote urban investment strategies such as urban enterprise zones that give tax and other incentives for businesses to locate in targeted inner-city neighborhoods. These programs should be accompanied by job training to assure that local residents qualify for the jobs made available. Public investments should be channelled through local mediating institutions such as community development corporations and utilize market-based mechanisms such as housing vouchers and low income housing tax credits.
- 3) Support improvements in elementary and secondary education, especially in the inner cities, through enhanced teaching and curriculum standards, equitable school financing, choice among public schools and values education.
- 4) Support a package of proposals to give greater support and professional development to child care agencies, whose services are increasingly needed as families break up. Enhanced child care would provide needed support for agencies of Jewish federations around the country, in addition to services for other communities.

C) Make Work Pay More Than Welfare

- 1) It is vital to assure that taking a job will bring greater benefits than remaining on welfare, which many jobs do not pay enough to accomplish. To make work pay, the earned income tax credit, which now enhances the earnings of over 13 million Americans, should be expanded and instituted, as six states do now, on a state as well as national level; the child care tax credit, which many single mothers need to make work possible, should be made refundable for poor working families; and families should not have to pay the severe penalty of losing health care when they leave welfare to take jobs. These measures, which have strong bipartisan support, can effectively alleviate need and reduce the welfare rolls by raising the earnings of the substantial numbers of poor families now

earning below or slightly above the poverty level.

Taken together, these policies, which can only be achieved gradually over several years, draw on the best of conservative and liberal ideas and seek to promote self-sufficiency and decent support for the poor, especially families with children.

#### IV - AJC Potential

The American Jewish Committee has the potential to play as significant a role in the social policy field as we do now in immigration or civil rights. We would utilize our traditional tools of public education, issue advocacy on a national and local level, coalition-building, and media exposure to pursue this program. The following recent events demonstrate the viability of AJC efforts in this field:

- 1) Within AJC: Chapters have moved quickly to implement the social policy priority. Los Angeles, Houston and New Jersey have planned a public education campaign on social policy issues. Seattle, New York, Westchester and Long Island are focusing on policy advocacy efforts. Denver helped launch a city summer jobs program and Kansas City instituted an urban assistance fund and volunteer corps. Social policy offers an excellent opportunity for a chapter-national cooperative program.
- 2) Within the Jewish Community: AJC was a prime sponsor of a well publicized and attended conference for the Jewish community on combatting poverty that received support from leading federations and community relations agencies around the country, as well as from the Rockefeller Foundation. Social policy is an issue on which AJC has already assumed communal leadership and on which we can continue to improve our ties to large federations.
- 3) On the National Policy Scene: AJC played an effective and visible role in defeating 1992 proposals for a balanced budget amendment which would have had devastating effects on domestic as well as foreign policy. This experience demonstrates that we can achieve national influence in promoting policies we adopt in this field. Significant U.S. communities are suffering from poverty and unemployment and look to AJC for coalitional support, as we look to them for backing

on matters of core Jewish interests.

- 4) With Coalition Partners: Social policy forms a major topic of the black-Jewish dialogue that AJC has been conducting with the Joint Center on Political and Economic Studies and has figured prominently in our discussions with Hispanic and Asian groups. In 1992, it is a vital topic for ethnic, racial and religious coalitions with groups important to us.

In short, if we adopt the goals and action recommendations listed above, we have the potential for effectively implementing them in chapter cities, within the Jewish community, with our coalition partners and on the national policy scene.

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