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News Release

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THREE EXPERT PANELISTS TO LEAD “JEWISH PITTSBURGH AND THE REFUGEE CRISIS: A COMMUNITY CONVERSATION”

Pittsburghers will have an opportunity to hear experts’ insight on international and local refugee issues by attending “Jewish Pittsburgh and the Refugee Crisis: A Community Conversation,” 7–9 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 25. The program — to be held at the Jewish Community Center of Greater Pittsburgh, 5738 Forbes Ave., Squirrel Hill — will examine whether we can be welcoming to refugees and still maintain a safe community. Three panelists — Aryeh Sherman, Mark Hetfield and Michael Kenney, PhD — a group with expertise in refugee resettlement and terrorism, will contribute informed views and invite attendees’ questions.

Four organizations will co-sponsor the program: the Community Relations Council of the Jewish Federation of Greater Pittsburgh, Jewish Family & Children’s Service of Pittsburgh, the Holocaust Center of Pittsburgh and the Jewish Community Center (JCC) of Greater Pittsburgh.

“As American Jews, it is important to engage the community in a conversation about refugees,” said Cindy Goodman-Leib, chair of the Federation’s Community Relations Council (CRC). “Welcoming the stranger is an integral part of our tradition. More than 30 times throughout the Torah, we read about the importance of being welcoming. Additionally, many Jewish families have come to the United States as refugees, fleeing persecution and violence. At the same time, we must be mindful of our community’s safety and security. This program will help to inform us as we respond to today’s refugee crisis.”

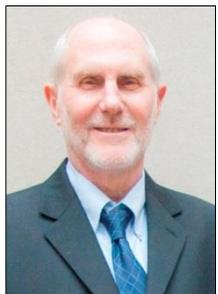
“In speaking to our constituents in the community, we’ve come to realize that many people have limited information about the refugee crisis,” says CRC Director Josh Sayles. “An educated community is an empowered community. We are taking it upon ourselves to inform Pittsburghers about the difference between refugees and immigrants, the process of vetting refugees, and the potential challenges and dangers, if any, of welcoming them into our community. We feel the best way to accomplish this goal is in the form of a community conversation.”

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The extensive knowledge of the three panelists at the Feb. 25 program will help program attendees understand the logistics and challenges of the refugee crisis.



Since 1999, Aryeh Sherman has served as president and CEO of Jewish Family & Children’s Service of Pittsburgh (JF&CS), a nonprofit agency. Among other services, JF&CS provides resettlement and naturalization assistance for the foreign-born. Earlier in his career, Mr. Sherman served as a field representative in the Western Galilee of Israel for Save the Children Federation. He worked in Philadelphia as a division director, Jewish Employment and Vocational Service, and he served as executive director of Family Service of Philadelphia.



Mark Hetfield is president and CEO of HIAS, a global agency that helps refugees of all faiths and ethnicities. HIAS, which before 2012 was known as the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, partners with the United Nations Refugee Agency and the U.S. Department of State. Mr. Hetfield’s 25-year career began at HIAS in Rome and has included posts with the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service in Washington, D.C., and Haiti. He is the senior advisor on refugee issues at the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom. In November 2015, Mr. Hetfield testified on the resettlement of Syrian refugees before the House Immigration Subcommittee.



Michael Kenney, PhD, assumed his post as associate professor of international affairs at the University of Pittsburgh in 2011. Dr. Kenney is also a fellow at Penn State’s International Center for the Study of Terrorism, a position he has held since 2008. A Homeland Security Post-doctoral Scholar at Stanford University in 2004, Dr. Kenney has written widely on the topics of terrorism, homeland security and drug-control policy. He has received research grants from, among others, the National Institute of Justice, the Office of Naval Research and the National Science Foundation.

“Jewish Pittsburgh and the Refugee Crisis: A Community Conversation” — to be held in Levinson Hall at the JCC, Squirrel Hill — will be free and open to the public. Registration, available online at www.jfedpgh.org/refugee, is requested but not required. To submit questions to the panelists before the program, contact Eric Probola, 412.992.5247 or eprobola@jfedpgh.org. Mr. Probola can also provide by-phone registration and program details.

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The Jewish Federation of Greater Pittsburgh, one of 151 independent Federations associated with The Jewish Federations of North America, raises and allocates funds to build community locally, in Israel and around the world. With the vision of a thriving, vibrant and engaged Jewish community, the Jewish Federation of Greater Pittsburgh aims to carry out its work in the context of cooperation and inclusiveness. For more information, visit www.jfedpgh.org.

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