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Ordinary citizens hardest hit by anti-Israel boycotts

GILLIAN KLAWSKY

Boycotts are most detrimental to staff members, Cape Union Mart said at a meeting on 23 November with the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) and the Southern African Clothing and Textile Workers' Union (Sactwu) as it navigates ongoing pro-Palestinian boycotts of its products.

Cape Union Mart Chief Executive Philip Krawitz has long been a passionate advocate for job creation and its power to reduce poverty and crime in South Africa, saying that ultimately, it boosts foreign direct investment thereby growing the economy. "That's where it starts in making this country great, and I believe there's so much that we can do," he told other business leaders at a recent national event.

Yet, amidst the boycott of its stores spurred by anti-Israel extremists, the company's job creation and job retention efforts have come under significant threat. The meeting sought to limit such fallout, and clarify the facts surrounding the allegations against the Cape Union Mart Group and Krawitz linked to the conflict in the Middle East.

The group met Cosatu Western Cape Provincial Secretary Malvern de Bruyn; Sactwu Western Cape Provincial Secretary Deon Simons; and 13 Cape Union Mart Sactwu shop stewards, facilitated by Professor Brian Williams of the Justice and Peace Commission of the Roman Catholic Church. In a press release issued on

23 November, the Cape Union Mart Group revealed the information shared at the meeting.

"The Cape Union Mart Group has only contributed to humanitarian projects in South Africa," it said. "The company hasn't donated funds to any institutions outside of South Africa. The Cape Union Mart Group has never donated funds to Israel, the Israeli army, or any other army. Philip Krawitz, in his personal capacity, has also never donated funds to the Israeli army or any other army."

"Philip Krawitz is a philanthropist who supports purely humanitarian projects in South Africa and Israel, in his personal capacity. He has made contributions to poverty alleviation, peace, and reconciliation projects for several years, as is his constitutional right. The Cape Union Mart Group is committed to creating and protecting jobs within South Africa."

Speaking to the *SA Jewish Report*, a Cape Union Mart spokesperson said, "The meeting with Cosatu and Sactwu was beneficial in order to give the company an opportunity to clarify its truth. We also reaffirmed our position that continued boycotts may result in job losses. Cape Union Mart has 3 600 staff, of which 400 are

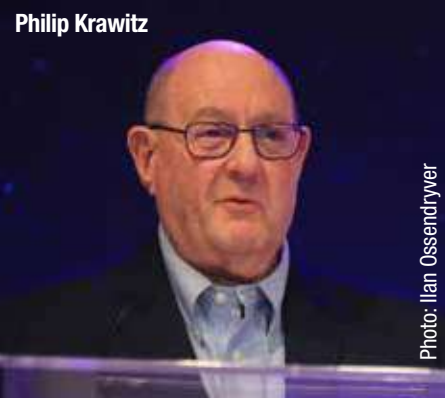


Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

Muslim."

Following the meeting, De Bruyn reaffirmed Cosatu's support for Palestine, but said it had wanted to hear Cape Union Mart's side of the story. Both Cosatu and Sactwu said they would continue to monitor the situation. In response to questions from the *SA Jewish Report* regarding possible resolution, the Cape Union Mart spokesperson was unable to comment given the sensitive nature of the discussions.

Meanwhile, as reported by the *Weekend Argus*, the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) coalition stuck to its guns in spite of the points raised during the meeting, calling Cape Union Mart's claims about not funding the Israeli army "disingenuous" and a "lie".

In response to an article published on the front page of the *Cape Argus* on 20 November, in which BDS co-ordinator Roshan Dadoo accused Cape Union Mart of supporting the Israel Defense Forces, Daniel Bloch, the executive director of the Cape South African Jewish Board of Deputies, defended the company, hitting out against the misinformation spread by BDS.

In the original article, Dadoo said, "We targeted Cape Union Mart because after 7 October, the owner, Philip

Continued on page 3>>

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Shalom in our soul



Rabbi Sam Thurgood
– head of Jewish life and learning at United Herzlia Schools

The past 50 days have given us a new appreciation of our Jewish greeting: "shalom". When I was a young boy, I was taught that "shalom" actually means three things: hello, goodbye, and peace, however, I realised some time ago that this actually isn't the case. Shalom never means anything other than peace, it's just that peace is something we want to wish on one another at every opportunity. We want to greet one another with a blessing of peace and part from one another with a blessing of peace.

There's no question that our desire for peace comes in part from our long and bitter history of oppression and pain, but it primarily reflects the characteristically Jewish sense of hope, the belief in a better tomorrow. We're the people who brought the world Yeshayahu's vision of when swords will be turned into ploughshares, and nation will not raise sword against nation, yet we're also a nation that's vastly pragmatic and understands the sacrifices necessary to achieve peace. Although the Christian doctrine of "turn the other cheek" is in fact sourced from our Jewish tradition – I'll be impressed if you can tell me where that quote is from – that perspective never dominated our worldview, and certainly not our security strategy. Rather, we took more seriously the words of Kohelet/ Ecclesiastes: "There's a time for war, and a time for peace."

The war that Israel is fighting is a war not for the sake of war but for the sake of peace, for the sake of our children to be able to live in safety and our elderly not to have to worry about rushing to the nearest bomb shelter; for children not to worry whether their parents

will come home, and for mothers and fathers not to fear for the safety of their young adults serving on the front lines.

It's a vision of peace for which we must bear much and sacrifice much, and our level of gratitude and respect for those making the larger part of that sacrifice must be commensurately heartfelt. But it also explains why, with so much difficulty and challenge, so much heartbreak and pain, we can also feel so inspired – by the way we step up and stand behind our brothers and sisters; by the way our people are so committed to what's good and right; but most of all by the vision we share of *shalom* – a *shalom* that will be a goodbye to some of the pains of the past

and a hello to a beautiful future.

We say the prayer for Israel, beginning with the request for Hashem's "sukkah of *shalom*" every week, but these past few weeks, we've all felt it much more powerfully in our *kishkes*. We all live at this moment in a sukkah of war, as it spreads over everything we do, everything we think, but with Hashem's help, we'll soon have that sukkah of peace in which we can bask, celebrate, and appreciate.

May Hashem bless us with the return of all hostages safely and soon to their families, and may we all have a lasting peace.

Shabbat Shalom.

Shabbat Times

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Rollercoaster ride of baby Avigail’s return from Gaza

TALI FEINBERG

The story of Avigail Idan, who was orphaned and kidnapped on 7 October while her siblings survived by hiding in a cupboard, has captured the hearts of everyone from President Joe Biden to Jewish communities the world over. But for South African Linda Friedland, who now lives in Australia, it’s personal.

Avigail, who is called “Gooli” by her family, is the niece of Friedland’s own niece, Ella Mor. The child was returned by Hamas in a deal with Israel on Sunday, 26 November, two days after she turned four. Avigail’s mother, Smadar, who was murdered on 7 October, is Mor’s sister-in-law. Mor’s husband, Nimi Mor, grew up on kibbutz Kfar Aza, and it was there that his sister and her family faced the unthinkable.

In many ways, the Idan family’s story captures the full horror of what Israelis endured on that day. It was at 06:00 Israeli time that Mor called

name mean’s ‘father’s joy’,” says Friedland. Even in their last moments together, her father protected his pride and joy.

Avigail crawled out from under his body, covered in blood. Three years old at the time of her kidnapping and an American citizen, she ran to the neighbouring Brodutch family, and was abducted by Hamas with them. She was released with this family about 50 days later.

Friedland says that the family lost contact with Micha’el (8) and Amalia (6) on 7 October, and endured agonising hours of not knowing their fate. They were finally rescued after 14 hours. However, the family continued to go through the nightmare of knowing Avigail was a hostage, the double funeral of her parents, and being a refuge for her siblings, who were evacuated to the north and are in the care of grandparents, aunts, and uncles.

Friedland says that over the past 50 days, she has absorbed her niece’s pain from afar, offering support for the family as they held each other up. She has been on a rollercoaster ride along with Avigail’s family, as they got no news about her fate, to hoping she would be released on her birthday, to the hours of agonised waiting when the hostage release was delayed on 26 November.

“The phone call I got from Ella saying Avigail was safe was in such contrast to the phone call on 7 October when this all began,” says Friedland. Biden also called the family, and later told reporters, “Thank G-d she’s home. I wish I was there to hold her.”

Many people feel the same, but Friedland emphasises that Avigail is now safely in the arms of

community.”

In the seven weeks that have passed, Friedland has felt the emotions that other Jews have felt, from anger to despair to heartbreak to frustration, but possibly more intensely as she felt so close to the situation.

“As a writer, my wildest imagination could never have plunged the depths of this real-life horror,” wrote Friedland on Facebook. “As Jews, we value life above all else. Saving one life is tantamount to saving the entire world. Our prayers continue for beloved Avigail, who has deeply touched the hearts of so many. It will be a long journey of physical and emotional healing for this sweet, innocent child who has endured repeated and multiple losses and traumas. A

three-year-old experiencing the death of her parents, being kidnapped, and kept in captivity alone for seven weeks is beyond even the most experienced trauma counsellor.

“We pray for Abigail and her siblings’ slow and steady healing from this unfathomable loss and trauma, and we pray too for her beloved grandparents, aunties, and uncles,” wrote Friedland. “Nothing can counter the enormous loss of their parents, their home, and their community. May they be enveloped in our love and always surrounded by warmth and healing. Precious Gooli, we’re all your family, and love you now and forever.”

If you want to help the Idan children, please donate here: <http://gofund.me/5b965104>



Avigail Idan

her aunt, Friedland, screaming that her nephew, Micha’el, had called to say that his parents were dead, he didn’t know where his baby sister was, and he and his other sister, Amalia, were hiding in a cupboard in their safe room alongside their mother’s dead body. At that time, the massacre wasn’t even in the news. But from that moment on, the Idan children and their family around the world have faced an endless nightmare.

Smadar was murdered in the early hours of 7 October, when her husband, Roe, a well-known newspaper photographer for Ynet and Yehidot Aharonot, went out to capture what was happening with his camera. He took some of the first photographs of terrorists invading the kibbutz, entering via gliders. When he returned home, he picked up Avigail, and was shot on his doorstep, protecting her body with his. “Her

loving family who will raise her as their own. “She’s surrounded by love, including her own family and the kibbutz community,” she says.

She says Avigail is “frail”, and wasn’t fed well in captivity and hasn’t yet eaten well upon her return. As of Tuesday, 28 November, she hadn’t yet seen her siblings, but Friedland says she thinks “today’s the day” [28 November] that they will be reunited. She says that because the children were raised in such a communal environment, she thinks they will have the resilience to adapt to a community of love around them. And if one day their kibbutz is rebuilt, it’s likely they will return there.

But for now, everyone is taking it one step at a time. “It’s bittersweet because there’s such deep sorrow,” says Friedland. “But she’s healing. She will be warmly enveloped in the love of her

Freed SA hostages grapple with reality back home

>>Continued from page 1

Aviva wanted to do was hug her family and hold them close.

“That’s all she wants to do,” said Solomon.

“We’re so happy to have Aviva home. I can’t imagine what she and Keith went through wondering if their one son who lives on their kibbutz managed to escape or not. Fortunately, he did, and she was overwhelmed to see him. She’s doing well. This isn’t a quick fix. This is going to take a long time,” she said.

The Siegels have four adult children and five grandchildren. The family have taken turns at her bedside during her hospital stay.

Israeli social workers have asked members of the hostages’ families to not ask too many questions but rather allow the victims to talk in their own time.

Telfed Chief Executive Dorron Kline told the *SA Jewish Report* that from what he could tell, both Peri and Siegel were relieved.

“Telfed is elated with their return. We’re in touch with both families. Telfed provided assistance to the

two families during the terrible period of Hamas incarceration, and we’ll continue our close contact with the families now that Channah and Aviva have returned home. We still await Nadav and Keith. The saga isn’t yet over.”

So far, 81 hostages held in Gaza have been released. Sixty Israeli women and children were freed as part of the ceasefire agreement, while a Russian-Israeli man not included in the deal was also freed by Hamas. Nineteen Thai hostages and one Filipino were released as part of a separate deal between Hamas and the Egyptian government.

Prior to the deals struck with Hamas, a further four Israeli hostages were released and another was freed by Israeli forces.

On Tuesday, 28 November, 10 Israeli and two Thai hostages were freed by Hamas.

Under the exchange, 180 Palestinian prisoners have been released from Israeli jails plus hundreds of trucks of humanitarian aid, medical supplies, and fuel have been allowed into Gaza.

Ordinary citizens hardest hit by anti-Israel boycotts

>>Continued from page 2

Krawitz, spoke at a public rally pledging, in fact, Cape Town’s support for Israel and the aim was to raise money for the Israeli war fund. He’s clearly supporting the genocide taking place in Gaza.”

In his letter published by the *Cape Argus* on 24 November, Bloch wrote, “This is defamation against Mr Krawitz and yet another example of the BDS coalition’s antisemitic attack on Jewish businesses. On Sunday, 15 October, during the peace rally, Mr Krawitz said, ‘We will support the Victims of Terror Fund, and that is hugely important.’ We would like to know where Ms Dadoo received her information from, and would like to understand why she has tried to mislead the South African public.”

Speaking to the *SA Jewish Report* this week, Bloch said that groups spearheading such company boycotts need to understand who will ultimately be impacted by them. “The answer,” he said, “is the ordinary South

African citizen. The South African citizen who is going to work and earning their salary so that they can put food on the table, put clothes on their family’s backs, and send their children to school to give them an education and a brighter future.”

If a company loses revenue as a result of boycotts or is forced to shut down, it will be forced into retrenchments and jobs will be lost, Bloch said. “There are no winners in this situation, and there’s no benefit for the Palestinian people. Israel won’t suddenly stop doing what it’s doing because BDS is boycotting a company.”

“BDS and other pro-Palestinian organisations have again shown their true nature. They are anti-Israel, they are antisemitic, they are discriminatory, and they don’t care about South African people. It’s all about their own modus operandi. South Africans need to wake up and see these organisations for what they are, that they are not benefitting us as South Africans in any way.”

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ANC’s anti-Israel stance ‘a tactic to lure voters’

TALI FEINBERG

The African National Congress (ANC) is unlikely to form a coalition government with the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) after the 2024 national elections, but is likely to form a coalition with smaller parties including Al Jamah-ah and the National Freedom Party, both of which have made vehemently anti-Israel statements in the past.

Furthermore, the ANC may double down on its current anti-Israel stance ahead of the elections to pull Muslim voters away from the Democratic Alliance (DA).

These were some of the points made by local political analyst Wayne Sussman in his keynote address to the Cape South African Jewish Board of Deputies (Cape Board) annual conference, held as a webinar on 28 November. “The Israel-Hamas war could become a central issue of the ANC’s campaign” said Sussman.

“There are, of course, Muslim voters, like Jewish voters, who care deeply about the war between Israel and Hamas,” he told the *SA Jewish Report* after the event. “But like Jewish voters, Muslim voters care about a range of issues. They care about the economy, crime, job opportunities for their

kids, the cost of living, et cetera. So Muslim voters, like Jewish voters, will weigh this up with parties’ foreign policy positions when making choices about who to vote for. Having said that, the ANC will want to use its firm position on Israel and its solidarity with the Palestinians to its benefit in that regard.”

A new trend, he said, is for voters to back parties that represent their unique communities, rather than the bigger parties. “They want parties in power that unapologetically represent their interests.” This will lead to further fragmentation of the vote and even more coalition politics ahead. Parties like the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP); the Patriotic Alliance (PA); and the Freedom Front Plus will benefit from this.

What the ANC has on its side in voters’ eyes is that there’s no other party that the people trust more with the dispensing of social grants, Sussman said. There’s also a level of faith that the ANC will still resolve loadshedding, especially if the power crisis improves over the festive season. And finally, the ANC’s foreign policy may draw voters.

professional team,” said Sulcas.

Regarding legal action, the Board had various options available, she said. “Criminal charges can be laid where the antisemitism manifests in an assault or vandalism of property or where there’s an intentional and serious violation of a person’s dignity and privacy. In terms of civil redress, we can lay a complaint with the South African Human Rights Commission or institute action via the Equality Court.



Daniel Bloch

“We have been consulting locally and abroad as well as with key stakeholders in the Cape. We have sought the opinion of senior advocates and experts in criminal law to assist us on matters pertaining to online, physical, or verbal antisemitism and incitement. We have investigated protest action outside the [Cape Town Jewish community campus] Samson Centre, Parliament, Herzlia, Jewish businesses, and individuals who have been harassed.”

Two cases of vandalism at the Samson Centre have been opened; charges of assault have been laid regarding the pro-Israel protester attacked outside Parliament; Christian Friends of Israel has opened a few cases of assault following the Christian protest that was disrupted; and there have been five cases of assault in Johannesburg, of which two criminal charges have been laid.

“We have to assess each case within the framework of our Constitution and the legislation,” said Sulcas about legal action regarding hate speech. “While the Constitution

However, Sussman notes that the ANC is losing popularity in the most populous areas of Gauteng. “If the ANC cannot recover among black voters in Gauteng, it’s in big trouble,” he said. Similarly, the IFP is “eating the EFF for breakfast” in KwaZulu-Natal, and the EFF is experiencing growth only in smaller rural towns as opposed to bigger towns and metros.

“In 2021, there was a lot of fragmentation in our politics,” said Sussman. “It’s likely, with many new entrants into the 2024 elections, that that fragmentation will continue and bigger parties will continue to find it challenging.”

As for the DA, Sussman believes at this stage, it can maintain power in the Western Cape. “Its vulnerabilities are PA growth and its hold on Muslim voters who supported the DA in the past few elections.”

He said that if the EFF or the DA formed coalitions with the ANC, it would hurt all parties involved. “The Moonshot Pact may excite voters, but it won’t form our next government. It’s likely to be the ANC with smaller parties.”



Wayne Sussman

Meanwhile, the head of the Cape Board’s antisemitism and legal subcommittee, Simone Sulcas, said, “As expected, the current war in Gaza has manifested in a sharp rise in antisemitism in South Africa. We have recorded more antisemitic incidents in the past seven weeks than in the entire preceding year. In October and November, there were 110 incidents reported countrywide as opposed to 73 in total last year. The Western Cape accounts for 35 of those 110 incidents.”

However, she noted that “in spite of this sharp incline, our numbers are low when compared with Jewish communities abroad”.

“Antisemitism can be direct, for example the display of a Nazi symbol, or indirect, where criticism of Israel is used as a front to perpetuate antisemitic tropes against Jews and Jewish institutions,” Sulcas said. “We’re experiencing both at present. Our core mandate as the Cape Board is to combat antisemitism through a variety of methods.”

These include legal action, education, political lobbying, and media activism. “We fulfil this mandate via our antisemitism and legal subcommittee made up of our executive, a research journalist, six lawyers, and our

protects freedom of expression, this freedom doesn’t extend to hate speech. The leading ‘hate speech’ case on antisemitism is the Masuku case. This case sets up a clear parameter to the effect that ‘anti-Zionist’ rhetoric is not per se considered hate speech [in South Africa]. What’s needed is a case that successfully shows that in certain instances, anti-Zionism is in fact a front for antisemitism and is indeed hate speech.

“It’s through this lens that we have to assess whether legal action in the Equality Court will be successful,” said Sulcas. “Even in a case where there are good prospects of success, we always need to apply a holistic assessment.”

Regarding protests, “It’s important to appreciate that in terms of our Constitution, the right to protest peacefully is guaranteed under Section 17. An urgent interdict to curtail a protest can be sought only where the protest is unlawful, with the threat of violence or damage to property. The local authorities can also set conditions regarding the protest. In so far as the flying of flags at these protests, Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and Hezbollah are not seen as terrorist organisations in South Africa, hence the flags aren’t illegal. We are, however, investigating the flying of ISIS [Islamic State] flags.”

Regarding boycotts targeting Jewish-owned businesses or businesses selling Israeli products, the Cape Board and the national South African Jewish Board of Deputies work together is assisting boycotted business by issuing press statements, contacting stakeholders, and providing overall support.

Antisemitism often manifests in the form of graffiti. “We report this immediately to the City of Cape Town, which has been diligent in removing it,” Sulcas said.

“To conclude, our antisemitism and legal subcommittee is doing everything possible to ensure that it fulfils its mandate and combats antisemitism using every available resource.”

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Kasrils' 'mask slips' in speech glorifying Hamas atrocities

NICOLA MILTZ

Jewish-born Ronnie Kasrils, former South African minister of intelligence and longtime champion of the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) organisation has come under fire for celebrating Hamas' massacre of innocent civilians on 7 October.

“They swept on them, and they killed them, and damned good! I was so pleased,” he told “comrades” at a recent anti-Israel gathering in Braamfontein, Johannesburg, referring to the most heinous slaughtering of Jews since the Holocaust.

Kasrils, a long serving patron of BDS, which describes itself as a non-violent human rights organisation, called it a “brilliant, spectacular, guerrilla warfare attack, which will go down in the annals of guerrilla warfare and resistance”.

A short video clip of the lecture by Kasrils, the former chief of intelligence in the African National Congress's armed wing, uMkhonto weSizwe, was posted without comment on X by Na'eem Jeenah, the executive director of the Afro-Middle East Centre.

It appears to have since been deleted, but can still be viewed on the accounts of several BDS-supporting advocates who themselves seem to have balked at Kasrils' jubilant praise for the murdering of innocent civilians.

In it, Kasrils said, “They surprised the Israeli Gaza division, that has locked them in [sic], that controls the beleaguered Gaza, and has been responsible for killing, murdering, maiming Gaza people in five previous all-out wars [sic], where so many children and women died, and you know all about that. And people who support resistance applauded it, absolutely. If we had been able to spring a surprise on the Boers, and knock down 100 of them, the people would have been rejoicing to the rooftops. It’s the struggle, the armed struggle, and in international law, the occupied law, agreed, accepted international law, that they have the right to that kind of resistance.”

Attempts this week to get comment from members of BDS-SA and aligned sub-groups as to whether the organisation condoned and supported Kasrils' support of violence were unsuccessful.

During the lecture, which veers off course, Kasrils described Hamas, a designated terrorist organisation, as a liberation movement and said, “There’s no way the resistance killed 1 200 citizens that day.” Instead, he blamed the death, mayhem, and destruction on Israeli tanks when they “blindly opened fire, killing



Ronnie Kasrils

many people”.

“No-one was beheaded, no-one was raped, and only one baby died,” Kasrils said.

“Whatever you think of Hamas or Islamic jihad, they are very religious people. They wouldn’t touch a non-Muslim woman not even touch or shake hands. This is all the kind of exaggeration that Israelis are using, that the Zionists in this country are using, the *SA Jewish Report* that has just come out ... in spite of all these lies having been exposed.”

Joel Pollak, senior editor-at-large at *Breitbart News* and the author of *The Kasrils Affair: Jews and Minority Politics in Post-Apartheid South Africa*, said Kasrils, who draws on his Jewish heritage while expressing opposition to Israel, “is wrong on the facts and the law”.

“Israel no longer occupied Gaza after 2005, and didn’t ‘lock in’ the population; it allowed limited numbers of Gazans to work in Israel.

“There have not been five ‘all-out’ wars,” Pollak wrote. “Israel largely refrained from ground invasions in recent conflicts, all of which were started by Hamas and other terror organisations, which have launched rockets at Israel in an effort to kill Israeli civilians.”

“Kasrils is wrong about a so-called ‘right’ to resist occupation violently. In fact, the Hamas attack was a brazen violation of international law, and targeted civilians including children, women, and the elderly. Roughly 240 were taken hostage.”

The South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) lambasted Kasrils, who made no attempt to “conceal his glee over the massacre”.

“Not just Jewish people, but all people with a grain of humanity were appalled by

the atrocities perpetrated on that hideous day," the Board said.

“On 7 October 2023, the world was shown the face of true barbarity. Yet Ronnie Kasrils rejoices and delights in those monstrous crimes. BDS stalwart Na’eem Jeenah was sufficiently inspired by Kasrils’ celebration of the Hamas murder spree to share it without comment on his X account. Why, one can only wonder, would someone feted by the media as a Middle East expert so clearly endorse the celebration of genocide? BDS SA spokesperson Roshan Dadoo was present when Kasrils was speaking. What exactly was her reaction at the time?” the Board asked.

“All this goes to show, yet again, the falseness of the

claims of BDS and its ilk to be a ‘human rights’ movement. That mask has now unambiguously slipped to reveal for all to see the vile Jew hatred lurking behind the cause it supposedly espouses.”

SAJBD National Director Wendy Kahn said, “Mr Kasrils there’s a name for people like you who delight in the systematic murder of Jews. The word is antisemite, and throughout history, there have been many like you who have taken similar joy in murdering Jews.”

Benji Shulman, director of public policy at the South African Zionist Federation (SAZF), said the SAZF condemned the glorification of violence and the support for Hamas that is apparent in Kasrils' speech.

“It shows further that the BDS movement that Kasrils supports is in support of violence and isn’t the non-violent, democratic group it claims to be,” he said.

“In addition, Ronnie Kasrils is lying about South African history and the fact that South Africans targeted civilians, when in fact many precautions were taken to limit that, unlike Hamas and other Palestinian terrorist groups that have made the targeting of civilians part of their military doctrine.”

Hate speech expert, advocate Mark Oppenheimer said Kasrils clearly celebrated the death of innocent Jews and Israelis killed by Hamas.

Referring to a prior case involving trade union Solidarity and Black First Land First (BLF), it was held that when members of BLF celebrated the deaths of three white children who were killed in a tragic accident, the celebration amounted to hate speech on the grounds that it promoted hatred against a racial group and was harmful to that group because it undermined their dignity.

“It may well be that in order to stem the tide of rising antisemitism, it’s important that members of the Jewish community pick a case – and unfortunately there have been so many in the past few weeks – and make an example of these individuals spouting hate speech.

“Ronnie Kasrils in particular would strike me as a person worthy of making such an example of given his prominence and his ability to rely on the fact that he was born Jewish to attack other Jews and spout anti-Jewish hatred,” he said.

Ravaged kibbutz a jarring experience, says Musk

PHILISSA CRAMER – JTA

Elon Musk, the tech titan under fire for his role in amplifying antisemitism on his social media platform X, visited Israel on Monday, 27 November, and toured the devastation at Kfar Aza, a kibbutz ravaged by Hamas on 7 October.

Musk toured the kibbutz, where dozens of people were killed and an estimated 17 were kidnapped with Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Afterward, Musk and Netanyahu spoke live on X.

He said the experience was "jarring" and that he was struck by what appeared to be "joy" on the part of the terrorists in video footage.

"The rebuttal is often made that well, you know, Israel has killed civilians also in Gaza," he said. "But there's an important difference, which is that Israel is doing everything it can to avoid killing civilians. And, you know, there's not the sort of joy expressed."

Musk also said there was "no choice" but for Israel to destroy Hamas, but that Israel then needed to "help

those that remain", comparing a post-war scenario to the post-World War II occupation of Germany and Japan by the United States.

Musk's visit comes as he faces continued criticism over his engagement with antisemites on X and over the platform's role in fuelling misinformation about 7 October. Last week, multiple advertisers dropped the platform after Musk called an endorsement of the antisemitic "Great Replacement" theory the "actual truth". After speaking to Musk, the Anti-Defamation League's chief executive praised Musk, who later tweeted that he would be donating X's revenue associated with the war to hospitals in Israel and the Red Crescent in Gaza.

A video released by Netanyahu's office from Kfar Aza shows Musk, wearing a flak jacket, nodding somberly as he is shown a crib filled with spent bullets that has become a symbol of the kibbutz, walking through ruined homes, and viewing a video showing how Hamas terrorists breached the doors of families' safe rooms.

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Back off our rising star!

I'm incensed by the revolting abuse that the winner of our inaugural Absa Jewish Achiever Rising Star Award, David Teeger, has been subjected to in the past couple of weeks. Our haters are abusing him because he made it clear that he supports Israel and dedicated his award to the young soldiers fighting so we can hold our head up high in the diaspora.

And for this, our smart, open hearted, 18-year-old cricketer is being lambasted and stands to lose his captaincy of the Under-19 Proteas. Why? Because like all of us, he supports the survival of the Jewish state and wasn't afraid to say so. Nor should he be.

This teenager is an exceptional sportsman with the potential to become one of South Africa's greats. He's also destined to go so far in life because he has what it takes – that X-factor.

Consider that this young, observant Jewish teen became head boy of King Edward VII School, where there are very few Jewish kids, and earned the respect of his teachers and peers.

When his school cricket team were playing at home on Saturdays, they would walk all the way to his house – not close to the school – to walk with David to the grounds because they respect his religious choices and him. He's a young man with integrity, a moral backbone, commitment to what's important to him, and a true leader with a good head on his shoulders.

Because of this, I nominated him for the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards as a rising star. We had written about him enough to know the mettle he was made of.

Truth is, he had tough competition, and many of those competing against him were older and had achieved more in different areas. But the judges spent a great deal of time weighing up who most deserved this inaugural award.

Their decision was final. They believed that David was the clear rising star, and it was his time to shine.

When David got up to accept the award, he hadn't expected to win, and he hadn't prepared a speech. So, he spoke from the heart.

He was so gracious, thanking everyone involved in the awards, speaking about how it's far more important to be a good person, a good father, husband, brother, and son than it is to be famous. He spoke about how much he honoured the diversity in his school, and the love and brotherhood he found there. Is this the sentiment of someone who is likely to support genocide? Hardly!

He spoke about truly wanting to inspire other religious young sportsmen to follow their dreams as he was doing – and in a way that didn't get in the way of his faith. Clearly, David is a role model, someone many young people can look up to and learn from.

When David dedicated his award to the young soldiers, he inspired the entire audience at the awards ceremony. Not surprising because we were – and still are – reeling from the brutality of the massacre of 1 200 Israelis, and the maiming, burning, raping, and injuring of about 5 000 others and kidnapping of 240 mostly women and children.

We were all still in shock as the horrific facts of what happened on 7 October filtered through to us. Most of us in this community have family living in Israel, and we have a close connection with the Jewish state. What's more, the people were attacked for no other reason other than the fact that they were Jews. For this reason, the Israeli army called up thousands to help destroy the terrorist organisation that did this to them. So, David's sentiments are our own. The fact that young men have no choice but to go and fight for the survival of the country isn't something anyone wants. They have no choice. So, we – Jews all over the world – support them. Not just David.

Can I say it seems absurd that Cricket South Africa and the Gauteng Lions Union are even considering suspending David for making what our haters termed a “provocative and inflammatory political statement” at the awards ceremony?

In the pages of this newspaper, I can show you provocative and inflammatory political statements from many of our haters, in which they call for Israel to be destroyed and the killing of people like us. That's inflammatory and provocative, but saying that you support Israeli soldiers isn't. It's fair comment, and his opinion, based on who he is and who we are. Simple! He's certainly not inciting violence or making comments that can be construed as hate speech. It's his opinion, and one shared by our community, with the exception of a disparate few.

He's 100% correct that those young soldiers taking their lives into their hands are going to make the difference between the survival of Israel or not. As a Jew, this is intrinsically important to us. Every time I or any of us see another alert about more soldiers – more often than not under the age of 23 – being killed in Gaza, it makes us sick to our stomachs.

However, our haters took what he said at a private event, and have gone out to destroy this incredible young man's sporting career. Why, you may ask? Simple, they are using him to make an example of their power in the sporting arena. Much like how they bullied the Rugby Union into disallowing a South African-strong team from Israel coming to play here. Much like they did to a former Miss South Africa, who went to Israel to represent this country.

Only in this case, these cowards are attacking a boy who is writing matric. All he wants to do is what's right, write matric, play cricket, and get on with living his best life. He means nobody any harm. He's not a fighter. He's a young man who is proud of his heritage, both South African and Jewish. His pride in his country of birth is so huge, he dreams of representing it in cricket against the world. And clearly, he would be a shining light in this arena.

That is, unless our haters are able to bully Cricket South Africa and Gauteng Lions Union into dropping David from his captaincy or the team. Only cowards harm or bully 18-year-olds who mean nobody any harm. But then, with all the misinformation around us, they could win.

Hopefully Advocate Wim Trengove SC, who has been called on to adjudicate an independent enquiry, will make mincemeat of this nonsense. If left to the hype and hysteria, the haters could win because it seems that around the world right now, we keep being told Jewish lives don't matter.

As we move into the 16 Days of Activism for No Violence against Women and Children, we're still waiting for women's rights organisations and groups opposed to the abuse of women and gender-based violence to acknowledge what happened in Israel on 7 October. But the biggest, supposedly most important, of such organisations refuse to do so. Why? Because the lives of Palestinian people are important but in their eyes, ours aren't.

Women are women, and we matter, whether we're Muslim, African, Scandinavian, or Jewish. If you're going to fight against the abuse of women, it cannot be biased in favour of only certain women.

And in the same way, if you're not going to allow a young sports person the right to express an innocent and harmless opinion, you're taking away his legitimate right according to the Constitution of this country. And that would be detrimental to upholding the values and morals we fought so long to entrench in South Africa.

Shabbat Shalom and Am Yisrael Chai!

Peta Krost
Editor



SA women need to speak up

OPINION

ROZANNE SACK



As an anti-abuse organisation supporting victims of all forms of abuse, Koleinu SA is outraged by the deafening silence of gender equality women's organisations in response to the mass rapes of women and girls by Hamas on 7 October. Its goal was to instil terror in women, children, and other unarmed civilians. The head of the Israeli nongovernmental commission investigating crimes perpetrated against women and children on 7 October, Dr Cochav Elkayam-Levy, states, “The torture of women was weaponised to destroy communities, to destroy a people, to destroy a nation.”

According to experts, the calculated, planned, and systematic rape on 7 October has never been a practice previously used in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. These crimes cannot be denied as Hamas terrorists left behind documents detailing how they planned to rape as many females as possible – babies, children, pregnant women, elderly women, and adolescents – to “dirty and contaminate them” as described by one of the captured terrorists.

As part of their psychological warfare, they videoed their despicable acts for all the world to see, as well as posting them on the victims' Facebook pages as a final means of degradation. Israel's first lady, Michal Herzog, stated, “Our forensic scientists have found bodies of women and girls raped with such violence that their pelvic bones were broken. These acts were used as a form of torture before executing them.”

Rape and sexual assault as a terror tactic in conflict is a recognised war crime. The Geneva Convention states that “women shall be especially protected against any attack on their honour, in particular against rape or any form of indecent assault”. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court states that “rape, sexual slavery, forced pregnancy, or any other form of sexual violence” is a crime against humanity. Many other international conventions demand that the global community must always safeguard women and girls, including and especially during armed conflict.

Yet in the aftermath of Hamas's pure savagery, there has been complete and utter silence from all South African women's organisations and

reiterate that the rape wasn't their fault no matter what the circumstances; and reassure them and ascertain what their needs are going forward. Clearly when it comes to the systemic rape of Jewish women, these principles fall away. Unfortunately the #MeTooUnlessYou'reAJew says it all.

While grave concern for the displacement of women and children in Gaza has been prevalent in all the South African media, there has been nothing but glaring silence about the displaced women from Be'eri, Nir Oz, Kfar Aza, Ashkelon, and Sderot who were attacked by Hamas just for being Jewish. Not a word about the Israeli mothers burying their mutilated daughters, sons, and husbands and about the Israeli women raped and left to be spat on while their naked bodies were paraded and celebrated throughout the streets of Gaza.

“

There hasn't been one word of condemnation from organisations which claim to represent the rights of women, regardless of race, colour, or creed.

Adding insult to injury, some have even gone so far as to question the veracity of the accusations even though Hamas publicly posted and lauded its brutality on social media. After the wars in the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, and Ukraine, crimes against women were central to the international criminal indictments and prosecutions of men responsible for orchestrating and perpetrating the campaigns of rape. In light of the current blinding hypocrisy and unbridled antisemitism, it's highly unlikely that a special prosecutor will be called to provide the same legal protection to Israeli women and children.

As we head into the 16 Days of Activism for No Violence against Women and Children, which started on 25 November, and as a proudly Jewish anti-abuse organisation supporting victims of

abuse in the rape capital of the world, we now turn the spotlight onto these so-called women's rights organisations to emerge from their self-induced blindness and discrimination, and loudly condemn for all of South Africa and the rest of the world to hear the barbaric, sadistic, and wholesale rape of Jewish women and children by Hamas terrorists.

We call on the ANC Women's League, People opposing Women Abuse, and Sonke Gender Justice, among others, to take the lead in expressing their purported support for all victims of sexual assault. This is Koleinu SA's challenge to you.

In the words of Nitsana Darshan-Leitner, the president of Shurat HaDin, a legal organisation fighting terror, “Those who spent their lives fighting for women and children but held their tongue when the victims were Jewish will have to answer for their hypocritical and tell-tale prejudicial silence.”

• *Rozanne Sack is a co-founder of Koleinu SA, a helpline and advocacy organisation for victims of gender-based violence and child abuse in the Jewish and wider community.*

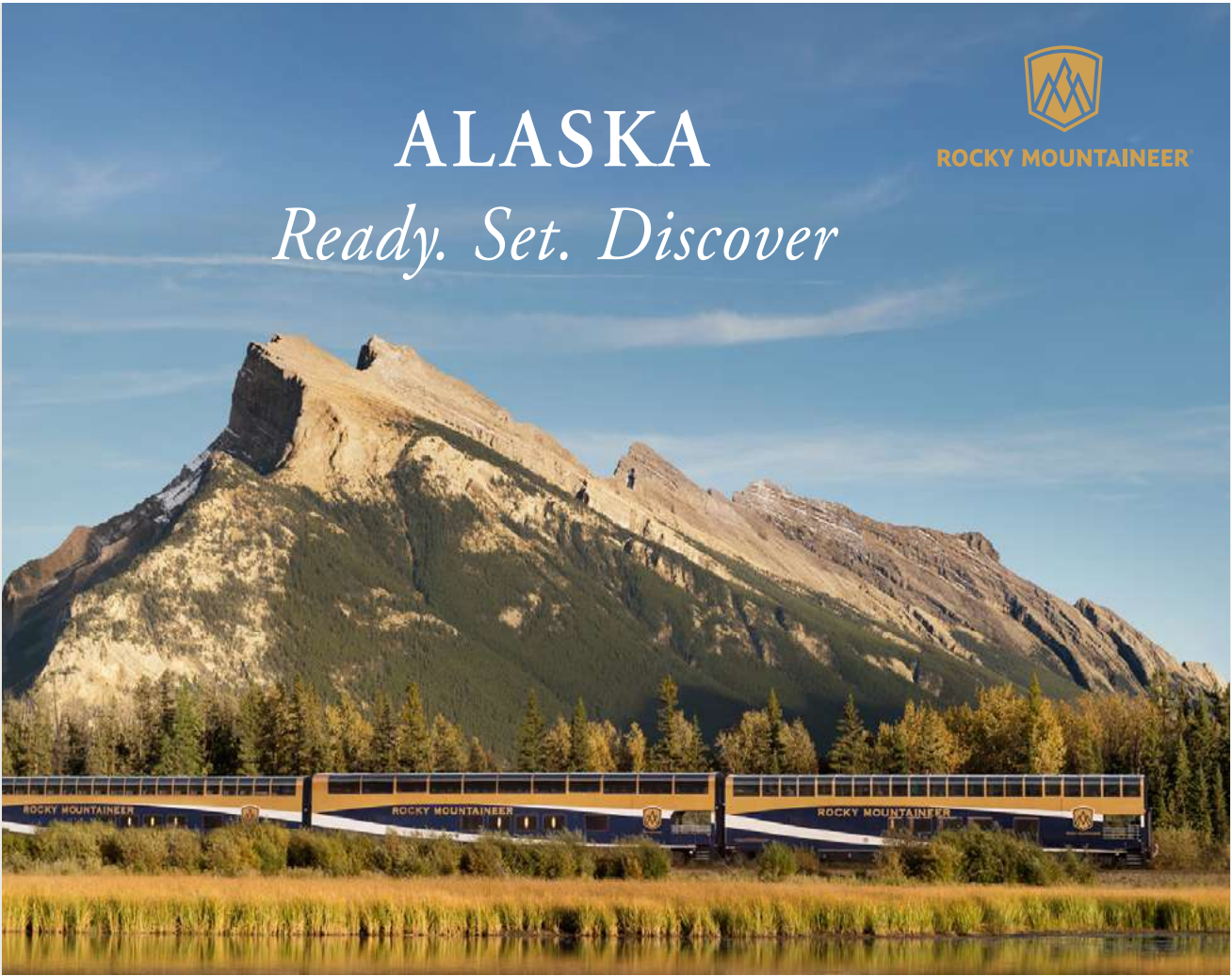


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Outcry over UN silence on Hamas’ rape and torture

DARRYL EGNAL

The depraved rape, barbaric acts of torture, and gender-based violence in Israel perpetrated by Hamas terrorists on 7 October was so shocking, it has left the nation wounded and broken. However, as the country reels from the impact, the world stays silent about it.

After more than 50 days, women's rights organisations around the world have said nothing about it, “failing even to recognise the heinous crimes many of the women faced on black Saturday”, according to Dr Cochav Elkayam-Levy, the founder of the Civil Commission on 7 October Crimes by Hamas against Women and Children.

Elkayam-Levy is an expert in international law, human rights, feminist theory, and the role of the United Nations’ (UN) human rights system, especially in relation to women's rights during conflicts.

She points out that on the eve of the global 16 Days of Activism for No Violence against Women and Children, that United Nations Women and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly, didn’t reveal what happened to Israeli women. In fact, over seven weeks, the Israeli civil commission received support from 160 international law and human rights experts, but there wasn’t one word from UN Women, CEDAW, or the #MeToo movement.

Chances seem slim that this will change considering their stance of indifference and, in many cases, denial, over the past seven weeks.

“The failure to condemn these shocking acts undermines the legitimacy of global institutions and allows for further violations, not just in Israel, but globally. It has left thousands of survivors behind,” said Elkayam-Levy in a recent international webinar addressing “The Unspeakable Terror: Gender-Based Violence on October 7”.

“Hamas might now be denying these war crimes, but during the attack and immediately afterwards, Hamas and its terrorists released horrific visuals of its brutal crimes. The evidence is undeniable. Yet, we find ourselves fighting a dual battle: one against these atrocities and another against global silence. As Israeli women, we feel we’re all the subject of a collective international denial,” Elkayam-Levy said.

The UN's silence is clearly in opposition to the UN Security Council's adoption on 31 October 2000 of resolution 1325 and the six subsequent resolutions on women, peace, and security, which made clear that women's human rights and gender equality are central to the maintenance of international peace and security.

In these, UN agencies publicly condemn the crimes, expressing solidarity with the victims and the affected country.

As for taking concrete action, which includes supporting survivors and reiterating international standards and best practices, “this is where specific mechanisms relevant to women’s rights, such as UN Women and CEDAW are meant to play a significant role”, Elkayam-Levy said.

Elkayam-Levy and her colleagues established the commission on the eighth day of the war as more and more evidence of gruesome crimes against women and children emerged.

“Footage and videos broadcast on social media by Hamas in real time during 7 October, showed clear violations of international law and brutal crimes committed against women and children,” she said.

“To our deep surprise, in spite of what we already knew, no international recognition or condemnation specific to the crimes committed against women and children were published. Therefore, we took it upon ourselves to call for recognition and action. We also realised that these crimes must be documented and brought to the attention of the international community,” said Elkayam-Levy.

The commission is in the process of creating a credible database that will translate into several reports to ensure that the 7 October victims of sexual and other violence against women are never forgotten and that their stories are adequately told.

“Another important aspect of our work is to provide guidance to the Israeli authorities regarding the gender-based violence aspects of the investigation, including trauma-informed investigation, response to survivors, and gathering testimony on war crimes against women.”

The evidence of the magnitude of the brutality emerged as early as the morning of Saturday, 7 October, as Hamas proudly posted live images and videos of the attack on social media. Some were sent to the families of the victims using the victims’ own phones.

There’s a wide variety of sources of evidence of sexual violence and horrific gender-based crimes: videos from survivors; eyewitnesses; first responders; news reports; testimony from investigations of captured terrorists; forensic evidence from hospitals; morgues; and crime scenes.

“Sadly, we understand that the vast majority of victims of rape and other sexual assaults on 7 October, including genital mutilation, were murdered and will never be able to testify to what has been done to them,” said Elkayam-Levy.

The Israel Police has announced that the events of 7 October have resulted in the largest criminal investigation of gender-based crimes in the country's history. The details of the police investigation have mostly not yet been released to the public.

“We predict that it will take many more months and maybe years until all relevant information is collected. We also must be mindful of the fact that due to the nature of gender-based crimes, some witnesses or survivors may find the courage to tell their stories only years later.

“Never in my life could I imagine that I would be standing in front of my academic peers to talk about gender-based war crimes and crimes against humanity committed against Israeli women and girls on such a large scale – and we expect much more to come up in the future,” Elkayam-Levy said.

“What we’ve seen in Israel were rape and gender-based crimes under clear orders and under full control. It was rape unto death, rape as massacre, rape and crimes made to kill and torture women, using them and their bodies as an instrument to force exile of those communities in Israel. It was rape to be seen and heard by others – women's and girls' bodies used as spectacles of victory, trophies of war. As feminist legal historian Catharine Mackinnon clearly articulated, this is rape as genocide,” she said.

“The weak, if any, response by the international

community provides fertile ground for the continuing weaponisation of women's and girls' bodies in warfare, as we have witnessed in an unimaginable scale on



7 October. International standards and norms are rendered meaningless if they don't apply to all victims and are enforced upon all perpetrators.

“As I said before, members of the CEDAW committee: ‘It raises the haunting question: Are Israeli women and girls protected under international law? Is there international law for them?’”

The lack of condemnation of Hamas from groups like UN Women and CEDAW and especially the #MeToo movement has resulted in a new hashtag – #MeToo_Unless_Or_A_Jew or #metoounlessurajew.

It's a global campaign founded by Danielle Ofek, the chief executive of P51, a social-impact venture that advocates for equal opportunities for women in the workplace, and Nataly Livski, senior marketing and business development marketer at Deloitte.

“When it comes to being a global champion for gender equality and raising awareness of human rights violations against women, it's clear that for UN Women, and the UN as a whole, Jews simply don't count,” the campaigners say.

The campaign's petition aims to reach one million people.

Silence of the sisters

OPINION

WARNING GRAPHIC CONTENT

The date 25 November is International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, and ushers in the 16 Days of Activism for No Violence against Women and Children. This is a critical campaign that highlights the horrific gender-based violence that affects women and young girls around the world.

Around the world – except for Israeli victims. Since the atrocities of 7 October, in which Israeli women and girls of all ages were humiliated, brutally tortured, raped, murdered, and taken hostage by Hamas terrorists, there has been a deafening silence from women's organisations, nongovernmental organisations, activists, and celebrities.

The sisters have gone silent.

When the horrific images of Shany Louk were circulated, clothes ripped, legs broken, lying on the back of a truck, and paraded through the streets of Gaza while she was spat on and kicked by Palestinian men crowing over the war trophy they had, we should have heard outraged and angry condemnation.

When we saw footage of Naama Levi, now held hostage in Gaza, pulled by her hair, arms bound, and bleeding from her crotch into a Jeep by an armed terrorist, which confirmed our worst fears, immediate condemnation should have resulted.

As the weeks following the attacks of 7 October unfold, we have heard the accounts of the barbarism and depravity inflicted on Israelis on 7 October, and they are worse than our most frightening nightmares. We’ve heard

consistently from first responders, soldiers, eyewitnesses, forensic pathologists, and Chevrah Kadisha volunteers preparing bodies for burial how rape was used as a weapon of war. The accounts are excruciating of how women, children, and the elderly weren’t only raped, they had limbs or body parts cut off. Hamas terrorists have admitted to it in interrogation interviews for the world to see, without a single expression of remorse. In fact, they enjoyed it.

One terrorist was asked during his interrogation, “And why take the kids and babies?” He replied, “To rape them.” They admitted to receiving orders to “dirty the women and children”.

The sisters remained silent.

Women’s organisations in Israel, including the Women’s International Zionist Organisation (WIZO), the foreign affairs ministry, activists, and many more have and continue to write letters, OpEds, address forums and media, pressure the United Nations (UN) and its agencies like UN Women, and have launched campaigns like “#MeTooUnlessYou’reAJew”



and “Believe Israeli” women. When the #MeToo movement took off around the world, women felt that finally we were being heard and gender-based violence and rape was on the agenda.

Our First Lady, Michal Herzog, penned an OpEd for *Newsweek* magazine.

Until the atrocities of 7 October. Women are heard, unless they are Israeli women. Jewish women.

It took a campaign of tremendous pressure for UN Women, 50 days after the attacks, to tweet that it remained “alarmed by gender-based violence reports on 7 October and call for rigorous investigation, prioritising the rights, needs, and safety of those affected”. It wasn’t disgusted, appalled, or outraged, but simply

ROLENE MARKS



alarmed. It has since gone silent. What a failure of its mandate!

The Israel Police’s Lahav 433 National Crime Unit collected the testimony of a young woman who survived the massacre at the Supernova music festival in Reim: “As I am hiding, I see in the corner of my eyes that [a terrorist] is raping her,” she said of another victim while demonstrating the terrorist’s violent grasp with her hands. “She was alive beforehand; she stood on her feet, bleeding from her back. But then the situation was that he was pulling her hair. She had long, brown hair,” she was quoted as saying.

The witness saw the woman bleeding from the back, she said, first bent over, then pulled back up by combatants. One man pulled the woman’s long hair and raped her, the witness said, then passed her onto another man, who also raped her before shooting her in the head.

“He didn’t pick up his pants,” the witness said. “He shot her while inside her.”

As a Jewish woman, an Israeli, I can say that the message we have received loud and clear from our so-called feminist sisters is that our lives and experience doesn’t count. Women’s organisations, activists, and feminists haven’t only failed their Jewish sisters, but future victims as well as they have now established a precedent based on identity politics and prejudice.

Israeli women are raising our voices, and we won’t stop. We’ll continue to be the voices of our women and children. Most of them have been murdered or taken hostage.

The sisters remain silent.
• Rolene Marks is the head of public diplomacy and hasbarah for World WIZO.

Restoring SA-Israel ties requires tough action

OPINION

BENJI SHULMAN



Since the 7 October massacre, the South African government’s rhetoric on Israel has been increasingly hostile. The African National Congress (ANC) essentially blamed Israel for the massacre, hasn’t expressed concern for the hostages, called Hamas to express solidarity, and Parliament has taken a resolution on the closure of the Israeli embassy in South Africa. The latter would have disastrous effects not just on Jewish South Africans, but on all those who want to interact with Israel for religious, commercial, or cultural reasons.

However a window of opportunity is opening in which there’s hope for ties between South Africa and Israel to be restored. In order to understand where such a window might come from, we need to understand the key driver behind this rhetoric. In spite of all the events surrounding the war between Israel and Hamas and the complexities of the conflict for the ANC and its alliance, this is a lot more simple and basically has to do more with ideology than humanity. They tend to view the issue more like a problem out of the Cold War in which Israel represents as white, colonial, Western and capitalist versus the brown, oppressed, third-world Palestinians.



South African President Cyril Ramaphosa and United States President Joe Biden

Photo: Wikimedia Commons

Within such a framework, anything that the Palestinians do to harm Israel including violence against civilians is considered acceptable, and anything that Israel does to defend itself isn’t considered legitimate. An example of this approach is Ronnie Kasrils who was recently called out on X, formerly Twitter, for lying about the history of the ANC to justify the murder of Israeli civilians. As an extension of this framework, anything the ANC does to support the Palestinians is considered appropriate as a basic question of ideology.

Whatever society might think of the ANC as corrupt or incompetent, the ANC considers itself a revolutionary movement, and believes it should lead society to conform to its ideological strictures including on the issue of Israel. It’s important to note this ideological approach operates regardless of who the president or other office bearers of the organisation are. One can see this in action on issues such as land reform, black economic empowerment, or the National Health Insurance.

This doesn’t mean that the ANC always gets its way. Because it has to operate in a liberal, democratic, free market system,

sometimes public push-back against its policies means that it has to retreat. A good example of this is the e-toll saga, in which through a combination of protests, public pressure, non-compliance, bad media, legal challenges, and potential damage at the polls, the ANC eventually scrapped what would otherwise have been an important change to how road infrastructure was financed.

For many years, similar approaches have been used by a variety of groups supportive of Israel to help manage the ANC and the government’s approach to the Middle East. However, the severity of the war has given the ANC more room than normal to pursue its ideological preferences in the Middle East, which means that tougher tools need to be brought to bear to deter the ANC from following through with its current trajectory.

This brings us to the window that’s opening up in four distinct areas. The first is the national elections, in which the ANC is crashing in the polls and may lose not just key provinces but also its national majority. The second is the national economy and upcoming budget. The country is running at a large deficit, and cannot afford to have any more shocks to investor confidence. Thirdly, there’s an American election coming in 2024, in which foreign policy is starting to become a major topic of discussion, especially around questions of what countries are aligned with American interests. Lastly, in 2025, the African Growth and Opportunities Act (AGOA), a preferential trade deal of which South Africa is a beneficiary, is set to be ratified for another term. There’s tension between the White House, which wants to

continue the policy, and the Senate, which feels like certain countries including South Africa are no longer deserving of its benefits. South Africa could be on the chopping block, which would exacerbate its already fragile economic standing.

All this means that for the next 12 months, government, and by extension the ANC, is vulnerable to the argument that it has franchised out its foreign policy to extremist foreign actors, and that this is making sustainable investment impossible. If enough business people backed by civil society were to get together to say this and publicly support political entities that promise to restore the status quo, it would send a signal that it’s no longer business as usual when it comes to a relationship between Israel and South Africa. In addition, sending high-level public delegations to Western capitals complaining about the government’s conduct and suggesting that AGOA be conditioned on more favourable relations with Israel would make sure that an important trade deal that helps South Africans will result in some real accountability from the South African government.

While such an approach would probably not be popular among the government or even the news media, if the pro-Israel forces in the country hold firm, there’s a good opportunity to bring government to the negotiating table to find a mature way to manage relations with Israel going forward.

• Benji Shulman is the director of public policy for the South African Zionist Federation.

Hot but not bothered: pro-Israel demo stops traffic

PERSONAL STORY

LEE TANKLE



Amid 16:00 traffic and loadshedding leaving traffic lights not operational, we stood on the corner of Atholl Oaklands and Corlett Drive in Johannesburg, calling on passersby to condemn Hamas and help release Israeli hostages held in Gaza.

It was a heatwave, but we, the members of the Johannesburg Jewish community, stood peacefully brandishing our Israeli flags and placards on all four corners of the intersection. Our placards spoke for themselves: “Free Gaza from Hamas”, “Israel wants peace, Hamas wants war”, “Stop supporting Hamas terror”, and “Hamas = Al Qaeda = Hezbollah”.

No matter how hot and bothered, the group, led by the South African Zionist Federation and South African Friends of Israel, was steadfast in its reason for being there and showing pride. There wasn’t a

moment’s silence for the entire hour that we were there as we sang songs of hope and shouted “Am Yisrael Chai!” and “Bring Them Home!” The small group started as strangers, but at the end of the hour, there was a sense of unity. People were chatting as if they had known each other for years and had not just met that afternoon.

The reaction from the public was positive. We had been warned before heading to the intersection that some people wouldn’t react positively and that we should try our best not to engage with the negativity. But, while standing there in the thick of afternoon traffic, we were met with people hooting en masse in support of Israel.

Instead of the usual end-of-day traffic frustration, there seemed to be an excitement at seeing us standing up for what we believe.

There were a few negative reactions, with one or two people yelling from their cars, “Free Palestine!” and showing us the middle finger or pulling out the occasional Palestinian flag, but these were far outweighed by the positive ones.

Drivers were keen to show their support of Israel, and took flags and waved them from their cars.

I was immensely proud to stand up for something I believe in with a community that I’m proud to be a part of.

• Lee Tankle is an intern at the SA Jewish Report.



Photo: Brett Wiskin



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Staff not businesses pay price of boycotts

OPINION MICHAEL BAGRAIM



The boycott of any business is hardly ever sustainable and invariably makes a big noise that doesn’t really affect the bottom line. During apartheid, numerous businesses were boycotted by the majority of the population of South Africa. They hardly felt the boycotts, and invariably after a few months, they were abandoned.



As a labour lawyer, I look at the effect on staff and on the long-term sustainability of the business. Today, the business environment is far more complex. Cross shareholding and differing interests have made businesses not as uniform as they used to be. Larger businesses which incur the wrath of small interest groups are able to sustain boycotts, but it’s the workers who face the immediacy of the short sustained downturn. I’ve been involved in numerous retrenchment programmes over the past 40 years in which the first people to be hurt were the staff. When turnover is affected, a truism in any business is that management seeks to cut down on its overheads. Invariably, the biggest overhead is salaries. Clearly, during a boycott, either sales or production are affected on a short-term basis, and management seeks to retrench. More often than not, this retrenchment programme overacts, and more staff than needed are subject to retrenchment.

I’ve also found that when businesses feel the need to shrink their staff because of other factors such as computerisation, outsourcing, and mechanisation, they have held over with the retrenchment so as not to affect staff. Especially in South Africa, where jobs are hard to come by and we have almost 50% unemployment, many businesses have just carried on with the same staff numbers. When an external factor such as a boycott rears its ugly head, management then reacts by retrenching not only those that need to go but others because of the other factors mentioned above. In essence, the people who suffer the most – and sometime the sole sufferers – are the staff. This suffering is immense specifically because the chances of finding an alternative position in South Africa is minimal. Those boycotting businesses need to understand that the first victim of a boycott is a staff member. Those organising boycotts should analyse who works at the coalface, and who’ll be suffering the most.

Obviously, boycotting Jewish businesses has attracted a lot of media coverage online and in print. Those boycotting the businesses and planning the boycotts don’t seem to have thought the issue through at all. I don’t intend to touch on the reasons for the boycott and/or the philosophy behind the call.

Being a labour lawyer, I’m aware that a boycott could unhinge the delicate balance between productivity and profitability. I don’t hold a brief for the national business Cape Union Mart. I am, however,

aware that this business is proudly South African and one of the few large clothing businesses left in South Africa which makes its own range in South Africa. The businesses appear to be staffed by South Africans of all types, and I’m aware that the majority of the manufacturing and retail staff are from the previously disadvantaged community.

I do need to disclose that I’m a regular customer, and find its apparel just perfect for my lifestyle. I have had occasion to visit its factories, and I’ve frequented literally dozens of its outlets across South Africa. I’m acutely aware that the staff are overwhelmingly courteous, happy, and well trained. As a labour lawyer, I engage regularly

with staff members, who appear to come more than 90% from black, coloured, and Indian groupings.

I’m also aware that I’ve never seen or heard about a previous retrenchment at this business, even during the COVID-19 pandemic. Unlike other manufacturing and retail businesses, it appears that Cape Union Mart rewarded its staff by taking no retrenchment action at all. However, a boycott could push that over the edge. Who will suffer? Obviously, the biggest expense of a business of this nature is salaries. If the boycott is even mildly successful, the only people who will suffer are those that get retrenched.

Those boycotting businesses need to understand that the first victim of a boycott is a staff member.

Those that do get retrenched won’t just have the difficulty of finding another job but will invariably not receive a salary similar to that being paid to them at the moment. I’ve taken the time and trouble to speak to many of its staff members, and asked them to share information about their salary and benefits. To a person, they’ve all said that they won’t give me the exact details, but they’re earning far in excess of their counterparts in other businesses of a similar nature. All these staff, no matter their religion, colour, race, or creed have shown enormous loyalty to the business. It’s a crying shame that it’s those people who will suffer from the boycott. If this is the reason for the boycott, then I must applaud those boycotting the business as they will effectively ensure that many luckless South Africans will lose their jobs.

It’s important for me to point out that I don’t know whether the boycott is even making a dent in the turnover, and I don’t know whether management has ever considered the possibility of a retrenchment. What I do know is that businesses in a similar predicament in the past have followed the route of mass retrenchment. This needs to be avoided in South Africa, especially in the unemployment crisis we’re facing.

• Michael Bagrim is a labour lawyer.

Horror and hope for Holocaust survivors

OPINION MARY KLUK



Last Thursday, 23 November, was a day that will remain with me forever, an extraordinary day that vacillated between hope and despair, a day that in spite of the heartache, left me feeling hopeful and inspired.

As a member of the Leadership Council of the Claims Conference (Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany), we met in Jerusalem as a gesture of solidarity with the Claims Conference’s 100 staff members in Israel and the many partner organisations on the ground who are at the coalface of supporting our beloved Holocaust survivors in dealing with what has happened since 7 October.

At the start of the meeting, Tziona Koenig-Yair, the associate executive vice-president of the Claims Conference in Israel, read a piece written by Holocaust survivor, Yosef Viner, in Ashkelon:

“My name is Yosef Viner, and I am 97 years old. I survived the Nazi animal fire in the concentration camps; my entire family perished in the terrible Holocaust. I detached myself from my deep roots, and erected a monument in their memory made of basalt stones.

From the depths of despair, with determination and resilience, I clung to the earth and planted seeds in Zion.

I married Aviva, and together, we raised two children, Ofer and Nurit. Ofer and Michal blessed us with four grandchildren in Kfar Aza. Nurit and Miki brought six grandchildren into our lives in Kfar Aza. I arrived at my well-planted family tree in the homeland, yielding fruit.

But suddenly, on 7 October 2023, from between the evil barbed wires, emerged the horrifying scenes of fire, dust, murder, and the terrible massacre of innocent lives, reaching me once again.

My dearest grandson, Yahav, may his memory be blessed, was murdered while protecting his wife, Shaylee, and their one-month-old daughter, Shaya. And my dearest granddaughter, Hadar, may her memory be blessed, and her husband, Itay, may his memory be blessed, were slaughtered while defending their 10-month-old twins, Roe and Guy.

Once again, I find myself exhausted, in despair, sinking. And I have no more land to hold onto.”

There are 145 000 Holocaust survivors living in Israel, 80% of whom receive some level of care and support from the Claims Conference. On 7 October, their world was once again shattered

Thousands have been displaced from their homes and are now living temporarily in hotels, far away from all that is familiar, and in spite of the hotel comforts, when asked, one survivor said she “longs for her kitchen table with tea and crackers”. One of the challenging discussions at our meeting was how long before they might be able to return to tea

at their kitchen table, to the familiarity and sanctity of their homes. Two years was the time frame bandied about, and the focus now needs to include how to support and care for this community during that time.

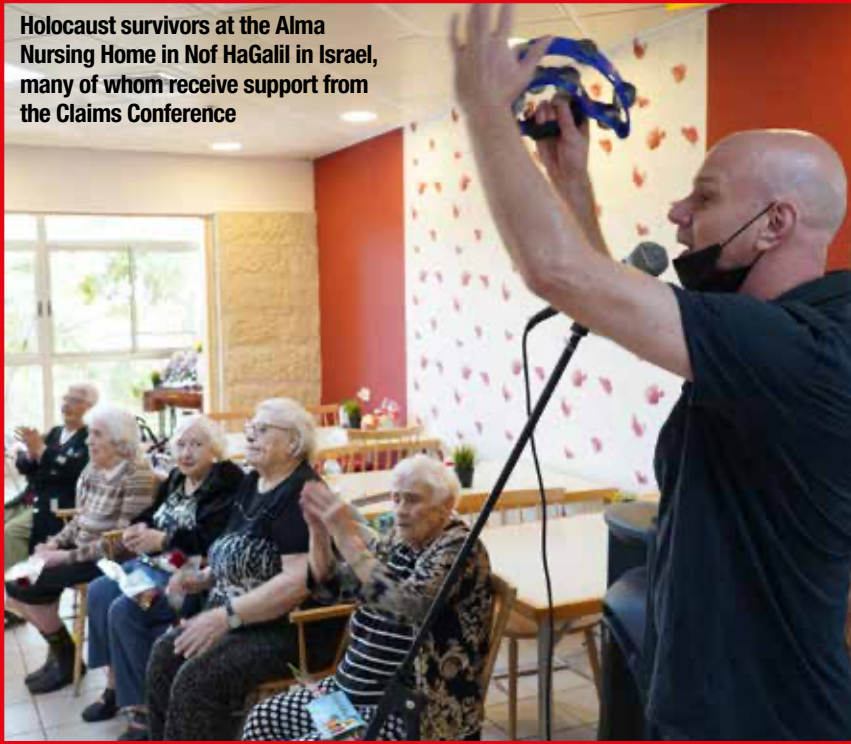
Throughout my life, I’ve been in awe of the strength and resilience of the many Holocaust survivors I have had the privilege to meet and get to know, and those who joined our group last week were no exception, remarkable people offering inspiration and courage in these times of such trauma.

We heard how civil society across Israel has galvanised into action in a way that’s simply extraordinary and will surely be a future global case study of civil society at its best. But in the meantime, the work is urgent and ongoing, and every citizen is engaged in a myriad of activities to prop up and support a country in trauma.

What makes this mobilisation of civil society even more remarkable is that each one of the people from the leadership of the organisations we heard from to their huge base of volunteers is deeply affected themselves and living with trauma and heartache, yet they not only show up, but they execute this holy work with love and care.

Throughout the day, in addition to the details of the staggering round-the-clock support these unsung heroes are providing,

Holocaust survivors at the Alma Nursing Home in Nof HaGalil in Israel, many of whom receive support from the Claims Conference



we heard stories of loss and pain that are almost impossible to process. Every one of those I spoke to had sons, daughters, and their spouses in the army, many in Gaza, whom they aren’t able to hear from yet their commitment to the welfare of the Holocaust survivors they take care of is unwavering.

We heard wretched stories of missing family and friends as well as first-hand accounts of 7 October that left us bereft. But at the same time inspired. Inspired in a way that’s difficult to describe. Perhaps it was the Holocaust survivors in the room who provided the sense of resilience and passion for a way forward that was so comforting for me, although no-one is quite sure what that future will look like yet.

My short visit filled me with the belief that all of us, Israel and the entire Jewish people, will return to a future filled with hope and aspiration and will resume dreaming rather than enduring nightmares.

• Mary Kluk is the national vice-president of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, and the director of the Durban Holocaust & Genocide Centre.

Shofar summons UK masses against antisemitism

CLAUDIA GROSS

About 100 000 people came together in the heart of London on Sunday, 26 November, in a March Against Antisemitism. Not even the cold and rain could keep them away. The crowd, consisting of Jews and gentiles, met outside the Royal Courts of Justice in the heart of the city to raise their voices against growing antisemitism, not just in Britain, but globally since the 7 October attack. Stephen Silverman, who helped to organise the march, emphasised that tolerance, inclusion, and kindness were the core tenets of the event. The event realised these intentions, from the placards by many non-Jewish groups showing support for Jews to the peaceful nature of the march itself.



Liane, a 38-year-old South African living in London, said that she had been apprehensive about attending the march due to the growing number of antisemitic incidents in the city, including the tearing down of hostage posters and violent episodes at recent protests. Still, she was glad that she decided to go. “As we got into the city and I saw the crowds, I felt quite emotional, as I had never been part of something like this before, and to see so many Jewish people was quite amazing. The vibe in the crowd was palatable, and everyone was calm but also full of energy as they chanted, ‘Bring Them Home!’ You could feel how everyone knew how important this march was.” The march was opened by a blast from the shofar, and the crowd, led by Chief Rabbi Sir Ephraim Mirvis, marched along the Embankment and Whitehall to Parliament Square. It concluded with a rally in which the chief rabbi addressed the crowd in the shadow of Westminster Abbey and the Houses of Parliament. In his speech, he recalled the Battle of Cable Street in 1936, in which police and antifascists clashed with Oswald Mosley’s British Union of Fascists at its fourth-anniversary demonstration. This incident occurred in the East End, an area with a then-substantial Jewish population. Sunday’s march has been called the biggest march against antisemitism in London since Cable Street 87 years ago, Mirvis said. He went on to speak about the upcoming *parsha*, which focuses on Esau’s plot to murder his twin brother, Jacob. Like Jacob, Jewish people just want to live in peace with others in spite of what they have experienced, he said. He concluded his speech with the lyrics of Israeli composer Nurit Hirsh’s

song, *Oseh Shalom*. Ira Kapp, a South African Jew who has been living on London for more than four decades, said it was the historical aspect that stuck out for him. “We showed the world, we showed England how dynamic a people we can be. All demographics came together with no misbehaviour, being sure to thank the Metropolitan Police, and yearning for peace. I was incredibly proud to arrive at the tube station and wait for three trains to pass before there was space to get on because of the sheer volume of people travelling to the March Against Antisemitism. There was an amazing feeling of togetherness. Since 7 October, the United Kingdom Jewish community has been crying out to stand together, shoulder to shoulder, against antisemitism. Attending the march means that I’m part of history



for Israel, and expressed the hope that Hamas would be defeated in the ongoing conflict as this would benefit the world, not just Israel. Among the famous figures who attended the march were former Prime Minister Boris Johnson and his family; television presenter Rachel Riley; comedian and author David Baddiel; and actor Eddie Marsan. Shadow science and technology minister Peter Kyle apologised on behalf of the Labour Party for its antisemitic attitudes in the past, and championed change in the party under the leadership of Sir Keir Starmer. One notorious figure who tried to attend the march was the far-right anti-Islam activist and English Defence League (EDL) founder Tommy Robinson, whose real name is Stephen Christopher Yaxley-Lennon. He had been informed he wouldn’t be welcome to attend as police and organisers didn’t want a far-right presence at the event. The police blocked him when he tried to join the march, and he insisted that he was a journalist who needed to attend for work. Robinson continued to protest against the police, which caused them to pepper spray and arrest him. The EDL leader was charged with a criminal offence, and released on bail under the condition that he wouldn’t enter London or participate in any protests. Robinson is scheduled to appear in

court on 22 January 2024 in connection with this charge. Besides this and another arrest, the March Against Antisemitism occurred without incident. It was a peaceful demonstration by people of all ages, races, backgrounds, and religions in a common cause against antisemitism and in the hope of Hamas releasing all its hostages.

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Giving hostages a seat at the table

TALI FEINBERG

At the height of a couple's joy under the chuppah, the groom smashes the glass to remember the destruction of the Temple and that there's pain, loss, and injustice in the world.

Now, amidst unimaginable antisemitism and the abduction of innocents, one South African couple took this notion one step further by laying places for two hostages kidnapped by Hamas at the main table at their wedding.

"What's going on in Israel has deeply affected all of us, the entire Jewish nation. We're all heartbroken for what our innocent people, our future, our brethren, are unjustifiably going through," says Marnie Gordon, who married her husband, Stan, on 19 November. "While watching CNN, we happened to hear the parents of these two particular hostages speak about them – their free spirits and easy-going ways, their love for life and music, and something resonated, as well as a tremendous sadness for all the hostages and their families."

They therefore included places for Omer Shem Tov and Mia Schem, both 21, and both still held captive by Hamas for 50 days and counting. The photos were impossible to miss, placed at a central point as guests entered the hall, and many tears were shed. Though some hostages have since been released, these two young people remain kidnapped.

"Feeling guilty for having such a happy celebration while our people are locked up in some dark tunnel, somewhere, possibly hungry, uncomfortable, horrific, cold, who knows what the conditions are, we felt we needed to feel close to them, to remember them, as the Jewish spirit will prevail," says Gordon.

"Right through our wedding, although it was the most joyous occasion, we couldn't help but worry about our soldiers. We're praying for their safety and for Israel's victory. I felt proud to be Jewish, singing *Hatikvah*, and following all our magnificent traditions, listening to Rabbi David Masinter from River Club Chabad, who inspires goodness and kindness, as well as the beautiful voice of chazzan Ezra Sher from Pine Street Shul echo through the gorgeous garden.

"It was a simply spiritual experience, and I think everyone felt it. We needed some light in the darkness," she says. "Being Jewish is a privilege, and it breaks every Jewish heart to feel the antisemitism that has arisen in this time. I can't understand why the world chooses evil and turns a blind eye to the truth.

"A friend who attended the wedding conveyed our thoughts to the parents of the hostages, who were apparently very grateful," says Gordon. "Please bring them back safely now."

Hostages are also being given "a seat at the table" through an initiative started by The Village Shul in London called #YouBeTheirLight. All one needs to do is light two candles and take a card that has the name, photo, and age of one hostage, along with tehillim 121 – the prayer for captives. Bernice Berson in Johannesburg was so touched by the initiative, that she organised with others to get the hostage cards printed, and created a pack with candles to the women in the Johannesburg Jewish community.

Tanya Midzuk received one of these cards. "This little card came with two candles just before Shabbos from Linksfeld Shul,"

she says. The card had the name and photograph of hostage Eitan Levy, who is a 53-year-old Israeli. "We've brought him into our home," she says. "This is a man, he's 53, he's not likely to be among the first 50 hostages to come out, and he's going to be gone for a while. We therefore looked up his

for. I intend to find out more about him. "His story is that he was a taxi driver, and he got a request on the morning of 7 October to do a 06:00 lift to Kibbutz Be'eri, and as his son says, he's a good man and couldn't say no.

after a while it went dead and they assumed that he had been kidnapped." Another woman, speaking anonymously, told Berson she was "absolutely humbled

phone and looked on the news, I saw [that she had been released]. Got the absolute shivers and just began to sob! Baruch Hashem! May Hashem bring back all the hostages."

Another woman lit candles for South African-born Channah Peri, who was then released.

Instagram influencer @ChayaofLondon (Chaya Raichik) said she partnered with The Village Shul in Hampstead to bring #YouBeTheirLight to fruition. "I come to you with a unique opportunity to stand together in solidarity as we hope and pray for the safe return of our hostages," she said. "As you may have seen, in the past couple of weeks, I've been lighting two blue candles. But these aren't just any candles. They are a symbol of hope, a silent prayer, and a beacon for the safe return of our friends who cannot light candles wherever they are held."

Speaking almost prophetically before a hostage deal came into being, she said, "With these candles we aren't just pushing away the darkness, but igniting the divine spark that is within them and all of us. I would love nothing more than for you to take part in this with me. Just imagine the power of synchronising our hearts and prayers across the world at the same time, every Friday. Light your candles, make a blessing using the card provided, and take a moment to think about your hostage. Say their name out loud, close your eyes, and let your prayers shine through."



story, talked about him over Shabbat, pray for him, and we've almost adopted him as 'our person' that we're davening and praying

He got up at 06:00, and by 07:00, he was in trouble. He phoned his family and the family heard Arabic in the background and

that I got this woman to daven for while lighting candles! As soon as I opened my

Pandor's approach to Israel increasingly muddled

TALI FEINBERG

Minister of International Relations and Cooperation Dr Naledi Pandor has delivered an array of promises on Israel and Gaza, many of them in contradiction with each other, indicating her confused foreign policy towards the Middle East.

She promised to approach the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to have Israel declared an apartheid state and said that "South Africa cannot have normal relations with Israel as long as the latter is unwilling sincerely to negotiate a peace plan without preconditions with Palestine."

At the same time, she said, "South Africa will need to take a well-considered approach to closing the Israeli embassy in Pretoria. Our government will need to factor in whether such an action may impact negatively on South Africa's ability to maintain a diplomatic presence in Palestine." She followed this up with "the demands for the closure of the Israeli Embassy in Pretoria have merit".

After South Africa's continuous condemnation of Israel and closure of its embassy there, she believes South Africa still has a role to play in mediating the conflict, saying, "South Africa has called on the international community to seek a solution that facilitates equality and security for all people who have the right to live in the territories of Palestine and Israel before more innocent lives are lost. To this end, South Africa is considering the appointment of a special envoy to engage all role players within the region and beyond, to share our lived experience in negotiation, mediation, and conflict resolution, as well as post-conflict reconstruction and development."

Though she managed to condemn Hamas, she had to condemn Israel in the same sentence, saying, "South Africa condemned the attacks on civilians by Hamas and further stated that these actions should be investigated for war crimes," adding that the response by Israel was unlawful. "Similarly, in its attacks on and kidnapping of innocent civilians, Hamas leadership should also be investigated for breaching international law."

Pandor was speaking in response to parliamentary questions from Free State Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) Member of Parliament (MP) Moletsane Simon Moletsane and Gauteng EFF MP Kenny Motsamai. Moletsane asked Pandor, "What support has been provided to the people of Palestine and their campaign that seeks to take back their land from illegal occupation by Israel, which bombed Al Ahli Hospital in Gaza?"

Instead of explaining to Moletsane that Israel has a right

to exist and that it didn't bomb the Al Ahli Hospital, Pandor responded, "South Africa and Palestine are currently working on formulating practical strategies towards taking up the Palestinian cause to the ICC [International Criminal Court] and ICJ to declare Israel an apartheid state.

"South Africa intends to petition the ICJ directly to give advisory opinion on the legal consequences arising from the ongoing violation by Israel of the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, from its prolonged occupation, settlement, and annexation of the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967," she said.

These comments, published on 26 November, came after a majority of South African legislators voted on 21 November in favour of a motion calling for the closure of the Israeli embassy in South Africa and the cutting of diplomatic ties until Israel agreed to a ceasefire in Gaza. The vote came a day after Israel's foreign ministry recalled its ambassador to South Africa, Eli Belotsercovsky, back to Jerusalem "for consultation" following the "latest statements from South Africa".

Pandor said South Africa's decision to recall its diplomats from Israel was "rightful" and "is influenced by the need to assess its relationship with the country amid the rising civilian casualties from attacks by Israel on Gaza".

Regarding the closure of the Israeli embassy in South Africa, she said, "South Africa will initiate steps to engage all relevant stakeholders to assess the approach to our diplomatic relations with Israel given the current dire situation in the region. We will await, too, the outcome of a parliamentary debate and possible vote on the matter, bearing in mind that we can act only when instructed by Cabinet as foreign affairs is the domain of the executive."

"South Africa's policy towards Israel has hitherto been consistent, with a clear pro-Palestinian line. It now appears muddled," says local political analyst Steven Gruz. "On the one hand, it wants to take Israel to the ICJ and the ICC for war crimes, and Parliament has voted to close the Israeli embassy in South Africa. On the other, the minister has acknowledged that severing diplomatic ties would restrict South African access to the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah, which would not be in its interest.

"We have seen this split between African National Congress

MPs and the department of international relations and cooperation [Dirco] before – on the decision to downgrade the South African embassy in Tel Aviv," says Gruz. "The party pushed Dirco over several years for this decision to take effect. The government and party are sending mixed signals here.

"South Africa now has zero trust from Israel as a mediator. It's an irrelevant irritant," he says. "Its one-sidedness has scuppered any real meditation role. So if it happens [a special envoy to the Middle East], I don't expect much to change. Perhaps South Africa can use its friendship with Hamas positively, but I'm highly sceptical. Israel won't allow South Africa to have it both ways. Its hostility to Israel has all but disqualified it from a constructive role."

South African Jewish Board of Deputies National Director Wendy Kahn says, "Those in charge of South Africa's international relations policy are simply making it up as they go along. They want to eat their cake, and have it too. While Minister Naledi Pandor and the Dirco she presides over have spent the past eight weeks bashing Israel in the most vitriolic terms, describing it with such words as 'genocide', 'concentration camps', 'ethnic cleansing', and 'Holocaust', they are still under the apprehension that they can be an honest peace broker in the region.

"The South African government frequently seeks to position itself as the mediator and peace broker of the world," says Kahn. "However, its unbridled antipathy towards the Jewish state, exacerbated during this war, when it couldn't even bring itself to offer Israel condolence on its murdered civilians, has precluded it from playing any meaningful role in future peace efforts. It has been thoroughly discredited by its obvious bias and one-sided understanding of the conflict.

"Today, on the contrary, it's being seen as a proxy for Hamas and Iran, to both of which it reached out in the early days of the conflict while at the same time ceaselessly excoriating Israel. Its feeble attempts to call for a two-state solution are negated by its failure to acknowledge the fundamental premises upon which it is built, namely that there has to be a mutual commitment to peaceful co-existence, and that each state requires secure borders."



Extreme unity could give us frostbite

A few weeks before my wife was due to climb a mountain, she was advised by her doctor not to do so. It had something to do with her being likely to lose a reasonable number of fingers and/or toes because of the extreme weather they were likely to encounter. According to the specialist, medically, her body was better suited to Mauritius than it was to the peaks of Africa. Which is why, reluctantly, she cancelled the expedition which could have resulted in her either never wearing her engagement ring again, or open-toe shoes, or even both.

She was meant to summit with a cohort of women doing it for a cause. The nature of which, for the life of me, I can't remember.

As a gesture to the group, she offered to host an evening for the climbers. Although I wasn't particularly involved, I happened to have been walking past on the way to the kitchen in search of a snack when I heard one of the speakers poetically mention something about "15 women with one heart that beat in unison".

Lots of bodies. One goal. One heartbeat. Physiologically impossible and poetically dramatic as it might have been, I also found it plain old irritating. Which is why, as I continued my quest for something delicious, I tried to identify why it was that I was triggered by the harmless and sweet words of someone who was simply looking to inspire the would-be climbers.

Many years later, I might have stumbled on the answer. Over the past few years, there has been a terrible amount of disunity in the Jewish world. Intolerance exists on all sides of the political and religious divide in Israel, and had been increasingly steadily to the point that disdain for alternate views had become the norm. Scenes of discord played out throughout Israel and the diaspora, with Tel Aviv, in many ways, becoming the "Ground Zero" of this phenomenon.

The pinnacle for me was the pulling down of the *mechitza*, the separation between men and women, at a Yom Kippur service.

October 7 changed everything. It reminded us of what's important, what's a priority, and left no doubt that

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



though we acted out being outraged with each other, there were real people who meant us real harm. And who would give their lives to make sure that it wasn't Tel Aviv, let alone a *mechitza*, over which we had to argue.

A "positive" result of the 7 October terror attack was a sense of harmony among Jews, not only in Israel but worldwide. Noisy but insignificant anti Zionists aside, Jews have experienced a sense of unity not seen for decades. To some extent, since that day, like our mountaineers, the Jewish heart has beaten as one.

Which is awesome. But potentially irritating, and unquestionably not sustainable. Fifty-four days since the terror attacks, and I have been to more unity events than is good for me. I have said more *tehillim* than King David himself would have thought healthy, and I have shed more tears than I would have imagined possible had I been asked on 6 October.

I'm in no way diminishing how important this is, but I know my tolerance for unity has reached its maximum. We move further from the terrible events of the day as a changed people. As awful as the events have been, it's important to hold on to some of the results. And although we'll never sustain the current level of unity, there are some aspects worth protecting. We need to be united in our intentions, but not in our thoughts. We need to continue to value our love for each other, but be comfortable with taking different paths on the journey. We need to argue like siblings, and resolve like adults. And recognise that we are different bodies with different hearts that beat to our own rhythm. We need to have our own and unique relationship with G-d. And we need to give others the space to have theirs. And we need to be united in these values.

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Worldwide spike in antisemitism

With Israel's war against Hamas and other Iranian-backed proxies poised to enter its ninth week, reports continue to stream in on the massive antisemitic backlash being experienced by Jewish communities throughout the diaspora. The situation formed the core part of the agenda at the recent World Jewish Congress National Community Directors Forum in Rome. South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) National Director Wendy Kahn, together with her counterparts from 48 global Jewish communities, attended the meeting and presented on the situation in South Africa. The stridently pro-Hamas stance taken by the South African government since the conflict began is well-known in international circles, and many of those she engaged with took the opportunity to express their solidarity with our community. That being said, Wendy was struck in turn by the sheer scale and virulence of the antisemitic attacks that our diaspora counterparts, especially in countries whose governments are supportive of Israel, are experiencing.

South Africa has certainly experienced a huge spike in attacks against our community, several involving violence and including boycott campaigns against Jewish owned or run businesses. However, as in previous years, in terms of bare numbers as well as the relative gravity of the incidents recorded, antisemitism levels in the country continue to be markedly lower than those being experienced by other major diaspora communities. The SAJBD, in close co-operation with the Community Security Organisation, continues to engage with community members reporting antisemitism that they have experienced or otherwise become aware of, advising, investigating, documenting, and following up as required. In some instances, we have assisted with the laying of criminal charges. Antisemitism levels continue to be high, but from what we have seen over the past several weeks, appear to be slowly dropping off, and with the holiday season now almost upon us, this

ABOVE BOARD

Karen Milner



will hopefully continue. As always, we're there for our community at all times, and ask everyone to continue to keep us informed about what's happening on the ground by writing to sajbd@sajbd.org.

The SAJBD and the media war

Such are the times we are living in, every second or third day seems to bring up an issue we need to respond to. As a result, we continue to be exceptionally busy in the media sphere, responding to requests for interviews or comment from local and increasingly international media organisations. Issues we have commented on over the past week include Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) organisation-driven attacks on South Africa Under-19 cricket captain David Teeger for remarks made at a recent Jewish communal event; the release of hostages including two South Africans; the rise of antisemitism on the local front; and most recently the shocking remarks made at a BDS event over the weekend by former cabinet minister Ronnie Kasrils in which he expressed his delight and admiration for the 7 October atrocities. Kasrils has long been held up as an example of a "good Jew" by those with antisemitic intent. The a priori assumption is that all anti-Zionist rhetoric, even when it's clearly antisemitic, can be excused, because a prominent anti-Zionist, Kasrils, is Jewish. Kasrils' glee at the murder of Jews, captured on video and publicised by fellow anti-Zionist hardliner Na'eem Jeenah, gives the lie to that excuse. The mask slipped, and we saw the depth of the violent antisemitism behind the facade.

• Listen to Charisse Zeifert on Jewish Board Talk, 101.9 ChaiFM, every Friday from 12:00 to 13:00.

This column is paid for by the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

WIZO garden day highlights emergency work in Israel

More than 200 garden enthusiasts turned out to see a privately-owned, iconic Johannesburg garden at the annual WIZO (Women's International Zionist Organisation) Garden Day on Sunday, 22 October, WIZO's largest fundraiser for the year.

This was the 19th WIZO Garden Day convened by Helen Maisels Trisk, the vice-president of WIZO SA, together with the committee of WIZO Johannesburg.

The garden is owned by the third generation of one of South Africa's leading families known for its philanthropy and commitment to the country across the racial divide. Guests wandered around the multi-level garden, with spectacular views across Johannesburg to the Magaliesberg. The garden is all the



Helen Maisels Trisk

more spectacular for its location and exceptional planting on a landscape that was once no more than an indigenous koppie.

Maisels Trisk spoke about the devastating events in Israel that left children without parents, wives without husbands, and brothers and sisters without siblings.

WIZO's day care centres, schools,

foster care homes, and shelters for abused women in Israel are always in demand, but they have never been more important than now, she said. WIZO continues to operate 11 emergency day care centres in leading Israeli hospitals, ensuring that medical personnel can do their life saving work. Hundreds of evacuated families have found refuge in its youth villages and parents home. Care packages have bent sent to thousands of soldiers and displaced families.

WIZO has launched an emergency appeal to provide support for all its beneficiaries. Donations can be made to: WIZO Johannesburg; Nedbank Code 150115; Account 1511028858; Reference Your name and E Funds. Email: wizojohannesburg011@gmail.com

Letters

CALL FOR ISRAEL TO CEASE GAZA OPERATIONS TREACHEROUS AND ABHORRENT

This past week, a letter was widely circulated within the Jewish community titled "Concerned SA Jews call for Israel to cease operations in Gaza". This letter contained a long list of about 700 names which included close members of my family, including my sister, nieces, and nephew.

I wish to advise that the views expressed in this letter aren't shared by me and my immediate family. Furthermore, we have officially distanced ourselves from these relatives in all aspects. We no longer have any contact with them, and all ties have been immediately severed.

I would like to point out that both my grandmothers were Zionists to their core, and were active fundraisers for Israel. My maternal grandmother has a plaque with her name on it at the Ochberg Memorial in Israel. She was orphaned at the age of eight with her two younger siblings due to the Russian pogroms, and they were all

rescued by eminent Capetonian Isaac Ochberg. Isaac Ochberg made the single largest private financial contribution to the state of Israel when he purchased land on which the kibbutzim Dalia and Gal Ed were built. These kibbutzim were intended for the Ochberg survivors and their families. Both my grandmothers expressed the desire that their grandchildren would one day live in Israel. I shudder to think what our grandmothers would feel seeing their descendant's signatures on the referred-to letter.

We're shocked at the stance taken by many of the people on this list – some who are no longer alive and others who are known to us and the Pretoria Jewish community. As Jews, we find their misguided beliefs to be abhorrent and treacherous. Hitler wouldn't have cared about their views, and would have considered them Jews to be sent to the gas chambers.

- Gary Nowosenetz, Pretoria

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