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UN report validates allegations of Hamas sexual violence

RON KAMPEAS – JTA

A United Nations (UN) report validated Israeli reports of sexual violence committed by Hamas during its 7 October invasion of Israel and afterward, including instances of rape.

The 24-page report, based on a 17-day investigation spanning January and February, supports a claim that Israel and its supporters have stressed in the months since 7 October: that rape and sexual assault were part and parcel of the atrocities committed by Hamas.

But the report has also angered the Israeli government, which has accused the UN of seeking to bury it.

The report, compiled by a team led by Special Representative Pramila Patten, was written based on dozens of interviews, visits to the sites of 7 October massacres, and consultations with Israeli investigative and law-enforcement bodies. Although the team didn't speak to any survivors of sexual violence, it concluded in graphic terms that such violence

had occurred or, in the case of hostages, may be ongoing. The report said that there were reasonable or verified claims of rape or gang rape in at least three places.

"[T]here are reasonable grounds to believe that conflict-related sexual violence occurred during

the 7 October attacks in multiple locations across Gaza periphery," the report said. "Across the various locations of the 7 October attacks, the team found that several fully naked or partially naked bodies from the waist down were recovered – mostly women – with hands tied and shot multiple times, often in the head."

The report added that, in terms of the more than 250 hostages taken to Gaza, there's "clear and convincing information that some have been subjected to various forms of conflict-related sexual violence including rape and sexualised torture and sexualised cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment, and it also has reasonable grounds to believe that such violence may be ongoing".

Some pro-Palestinian activists have denied that widespread sexual violence occurred. A lengthy *New York Times* report detailing allegations of sexual violence on 7 October has also come under scrutiny.

Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz reacted to the report's publication with outrage, writing on X that he had recalled Israeli UN Ambassador Gilad Erdan for consultation, and accusing UN officials of an attempt to silence it.

Katz took aim at UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, writing, "Although he has the authority to do so, the UN Secretary-General hasn't convened the security

council to declare Hamas a terrorist group and place sanctions on its supporters."

A UN spokesman denied that Guterres sought to obscure the report. "In no way, shape, or form did the secretary-general do anything to keep the report quiet,"

Stephane Dujarric was quoted as saying by Reuters.

And shortly after the report was published, Lior Haiat, Israel's foreign ministry spokesman, had a more positive reaction, welcoming "the definitive recognition that Hamas committed sexual crimes by an official UN representative".

But Haiat rejected claims of Israeli sexual violence toward Palestinians during the war, and made the same demands of the security council as Katz did.

The report described the difficulties Patten's team faced during its inquiry, including the mutilation of some corpses and the difficulties of forensic teams in gathering evidence in the aftermath. She also described distrust among victims toward international bodies including the UN. Patten wrote that the team learned of a "small number of survivors" who are "still experiencing an overwhelming level of trauma".

Hadassah, the women's Zionist movement, said the report fell short in at least one respect: in Patten's recommendation that UN bodies with a history of acting adversarially toward Israel further investigate the charges.



Special session held at the United Nations on sexual violence committed by Hamas
Photo: Jackie Haidenberg

Fortune and faith



Rabbi Levi Silman
rabbinical co-ordinator for Kosher SA

In this week's Torah portion, we learn about the construction of the Tabernacle in the desert.

The Torah commands us to make a dwelling place for Hashem here on earth. We're cautioned, however, to take a break when it comes to Shabbos. As important as it is to build the Temple, it doesn't override the sanctity of the holy Shabbos. "Six days work shall be done; and the seventh day shall be holy, a day of complete rest for the L-rd." (*Exodus 35:2*).

The Chassidic masters point out something interesting here. The Torah doesn't say, "You shall work" (*taaseh*), but rather, "Work shall be done" (*teyaseh*) in the passive.

What's the meaning of this? They answer that we need to work for a living. As Deuteronomy (15:18) clearly states, "And Hashem will bless you in all that you do." Meaning that we're commanded to work and not just rest on our laurels. However, at the same time, we need to realise that ultimately, all blessings come from above. We can sweat and toil to plough and sow the fields, but it's Hashem that causes it to rain and without it, hard work is in vain. The Cape Town drought a few short years ago was a stark reminder of this.

So, our work is a vessel to receive blessings from above. A vessel is essential to hold the blessings, but it's the blessings that fill the cup.

The Talmud (Taanis 2a) relates to us. Rabbi

Yochanan said, "Three keys the Holy One blessed be He has retained in His own hands and not entrusted to the hand of any messenger, namely, the key of rain, the key of childbirth, and the key of the revival of the dead."

This teaching specifically relates to what we all hope and pray for – sustenance, nachas, and life. We wake up early, hit the ground running, and pound the pavement as we strive to give our best for our families. We invest our greatest energy in being

able to achieve these good fortunes. But as we all know, no power on earth can guarantee any of them. That's why we partner with Hashem.

Work and faith need to go hand in hand. A story is told of a student that came to his Rebbe and asked for a blessing to have a child. The Rebbe gave the man a blessing. Some time later, the student came back and asked why the blessing had yet to be fulfilled? The Rebbe asked, "Did you buy a stroller?"

Torah Thought

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Mishkan means "dwelling", and refers to the portable complex in which G-d chose to dwell. It was the precursor to the Holy Temple. Tabernacle, from Latin *tabernaculum* ("tent"), Hebrew name, *Ohel Mo'ed*, "Tent of Meeting", where G-d would meet Moses. The Torah refers to it as Mikdash, Holy [place].

‘Calmness saved me’ says 80-year-old hijack victim

NICOLA MILTZ

A Johannesburg great-grandmother experienced a terrifying ordeal last week, when she was hijacked at gunpoint and taken on a joyride by two men who threatened to shoot her if she didn’t do what they said.

Sonia Margolias, 80, known for her feisty demeanour, was hijacked outside her daughter’s house in the Glenhazel area around lunchtime on Wednesday, 28 February.



Prince Tolo, Sonia Margolias, and Bongani Rakhivhani

Her unwavering calmness was the key to her survival, she said this week.

After securing herself in her Honda and starting the engine, two armed men appeared “out of nowhere” and demanded that she open the door, threatening to shoot her.

“I never screamed or hooted. I didn’t want my daughter and the kids to come running outside for fear of what would happen to them,” Margolias recounted.

The assailants pulled her out the driver’s seat, threw her onto the floor of the back seat, and covered her head with her thin, black nylon jacket, warning her not to look up.

Disoriented and unable to determine their direction, Margolias was driven

around while the hijackers demanded her valuables, bank cards, and PIN numbers. In spite of the danger, she remained calm and prayed for her safety for the sake of her family, said the grandmother of nine and great-grandmother of six.

“I did everything they asked me to do so as not to aggravate them,” she said, recalling the endless drive. She was able to sift through the cards in her wallet while lying down, giving the driver one of her bank cards.

In a moment of quick thinking, she managed to slip her identity card and other important cards under the car’s backseat carpet while the one attacker kept her face down with his shoe on her head.

Eventually, the car came to a standstill in a cemetery in Marlboro.

The attackers yanked her out the car and threw her onto the ground, threatening her not to look up. They stole her jewellery, including a sentimental necklace from her late husband, and left her abandoned among the tombstones, with no phone and no money. Alone and disoriented, Margolias

screamed for help, but found no-one around. She eventually spotted a fence and was noticed by a passer-by who kindly assisted her in getting help.

“He took me to a nearby building with a security guard, who gave me a chair to sit on and some water,” said Margolias, who proceeded to use his phone to call her daughter.

Upon receiving a call from her mom on an unfamiliar number, her daughter, Laureen Shalpid, realised immediately that something was wrong.

“She said she had been hijacked. When she said she didn’t know where she was, I realised that she had been kidnapped,” said Shalpid.

Fast acting, she pressed her panic

button which alerted CAP (Community Active Protection) to the emergency, which immediately sprang into action.

“There were so many good people around – the man who found her and took care of her; the security guard who sent their location coordinates to my daughter; the police who arrived to take her to Sandringham Police Station; and CAP, who kept the family calm on the phone throughout,” said Shalpid this week.

“When I finally saw my mom at the police station, it was the best moment,” she said.

Not long after that, CAP located the vehicle.

Reflecting on the ordeal, Margolias emphasised the importance of staying calm and focused. “Even though it’s traumatic, you have to stay calm, cool, and collected, however hard it is, and do what they say. I stayed focused, and in the end, I was the winner. By being in control, it calmed them down. It was difficult, but I think that’s what saved me,” she said, expressing gratitude for her safe return and the support of the community.

“The whole time, what was going through my mind was, ‘Please G-d, let me be safe for my family,’” she said. Filled with joy at her mom’s safe return, Shalpid took to Facebook to express her gratitude to CAP and all those involved in rescuing her mom giving them a “huge shout out”.

“I need to share an incident that was negative and could have gone completely down

a horrendous slippery slope, but instead there was a positive outcome,” she said.

“CAP responded within minutes, and had vehicles at my house in no time. Staff were calm on the other end of the phone while I was in a panic.

“They kept us informed and calm all the way. They knew what they were doing. In fact, the guys that found the car came past to check that my mom was OK,” she said. “There are so many heroes in this story, but the real hero is my mom. She’s brave, and kept her wits about her. She’s level headed and calm.”

Dean Immermann, the chief security officer at CAP, said, “Our teams are trained to handle complicated scenarios such as this, and I believe this was demonstrated on the day”.

“We’re grateful that the victim was helped by a Good Samaritan and released back to her family without injury. Our dedicated teams are working tirelessly to bring those responsible to book, and hope to report on this in the coming weeks.”

Immermann emphasised two key basic protocols to people in public spaces: first, practice defensive behaviour. Always be aware, alert, and conscious of what’s happening around you, especially when using public spaces. Second, report all suspicious activity, as the number of incidents prevented by merely reporting suspicious activity is tried and tested.

South Africans support prosecuting Hamas for war crimes

>>Continued from page 1

Ninety percent of respondents believed that all rape victims should be supported, regardless of race, culture, religion or gender, Richardson says, and 73% believe that rape is never justifiable.

Farber-Cohen, the former spokesperson for the provincial executive committee of the ANC Women’s League (ANCWL), says, “My main reason for leaving the ANC was because it didn’t recognise Jewish lives and Israeli lives as lives worthy of protection. Just like it couldn’t sufficiently condemn Hamas for the atrocities committed on 7 October, and claimed that Israelis bought the atrocities on themselves, so, too, has it remained starkly silent on the rapes and mutilations which Israeli women suffered at the hands of Hamas.

“Once again, its double standards about women, gender-based violence, and human rights has been made horrifyingly clear. Further, through the findings of the survey, it’s clear how out of touch the ANC is with the public opinion of its South African citizens. One of the reasons for originally getting involved in the ANCWL was because standing up for women is close to my heart as a Jewish feminist. So, putting my energy into speaking up for Israeli women who were the victims of brutal sexual violence was an obligation which I had to fulfil.”

A media statement with the findings of the WACSA survey was scheduled to be released to

media in South Africa and internationally on 7 March 2024, the day before International Women’s Day. The details of the survey and its finding will be made available through www.womensactioncampaignsa.org.

“We hope to attract media attention to spread the findings as far as possible,” says Farber-Cohen. “Anyone can support the work of the organisation by sharing all forms of our media. This can be done through word of mouth, by sending content to friends, family, acquaintances, and colleagues, and through social media.

“Unfortunately, many of these women were murdered, and will never have the opportunity to say what happened to them,” she says. “Therefore, it’s our responsibility as the Jewish community to make sure their voices are heard, believed, and stood up for; that their stories aren’t forgotten, and the violence [they experienced] isn’t silenced.”

“WACSA calls on political parties, our government, civil society, women’s-rights organisations, and activists to condemn rape and sexual violence publicly wherever they occur,” says Goldman. “We call on the South African government to apply maximum pressure through international courts, the United Nations, and its close ties to Hamas, to ensure accountability and justice for victims and survivors, and the release of all hostages. The majority of South Africans would support this.”

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Help is ‘just a call away’

NICOLA MILTZ

Recent suicides and attempted suicides in the community have prompted action across the spectrum to promote mental health and offer assistance to those in despair.

“Please reach out” is the message from experts. “There’s 24-hour help. You’re not alone,” said Saul Tomson, the chief executive officer of the Chevrah Kadisha.

The situation is concerning, insiders say, prompting urgent attention by stakeholders in the mental-health arena as well as communal leaders and rabbonim.



“We need to tackle the real issues, and it’s not the African National Congress, the International Court of Justice, ELAL, crime, or anything else, it’s our community that’s at breaking point, some people are at their wits end,” said Rabbi Levi Avtzon of the Linksfield Senderwood Hebrew Congregation.

Suicide is a serious global public-health problem, Avtzon said, but in this community, it seems to have been an issue for years. “People spend countless conversations around the Shabbos table talking about crime, but we’ve never had a mature conversation about suicide.”

The SA Jewish Report is aware of the numbers, but one of the dilemmas of dealing with suicide and suicidal tendencies is something called the “Werther effect”, a phenomenon in which cases of suicide increase after media reports about them. This makes it tough to raise awareness of such a devastating growing public health problem and prevent it from spreading.

Tomson said the Chev’s social services team was “very aware” of the stress, anxiety, and pressure the community is experiencing.

“Some of it is the result of the truly terrible and traumatic events in Israel, which is taking its toll, and much is the result of local financial, political, and emotional distress,” he said. “In our world of constant connectivity, it’s paradoxical that a growing number of people are feeling alone and isolated. They see no way out, and fail to realise that help is just a conversation away.

“Having someone who hears you, sees you, and responds to you in a helpful way, can be the ‘difference that makes a difference,’” he said.

Johannesburg mother Alison Wise, 55, reached the end of her tether several years ago after a gambling addiction left her penniless and in debt. Desperate and ashamed, she attempted suicide which left her on life support and thereafter unable to walk for several years. “The Chevrah Kadisha brought me back to life,” she told

the SA Jewish Report this week.

The welfare organisation paid for her months-long rehabilitation, and provided her with accommodation and work literally to get her back on her feet.

“I’m proof that it’s possible to pick yourself up even when all the odds are against you,” Wise says. “It’s never as bad as you think. Reach out. There’s help 24/7. Don’t do it. Your family will suffer. I broke my daughter’s heart, and it takes years to repair the relationship.”

Bullied and ostracised from a young age for being different, Brad Seef, 26 – not his real name – attempted suicide several times as a “desperate cry for help”.

“I bottled all my feelings, which led to depression and violent outbursts. I made the wrong choices, which led me down the wrong path. Eventually it all became too much.” He began seeing a social worker at the Chev, which helped turn his life around. “All you need is one or two people to talk to, to help offload this heavy burden. I realised I didn’t have to suffer in silence or alone. There were good people willing to listen to me and guide me, I just had to take a leap of faith.”

The Chev is also working to educate community members, medical and psycho-social professionals, rabbinical leaders, and healthcare workers on how to support sufferers of anxiety and depression.

While the Chev is at the coalface, rabbis shoulder the pain.

“The anxiety levels that this community live under are unsustainable,” said Avtzon, who has been at the forefront of this discussion.

“We live at a crazy level of panic, unlike anywhere else in the world. South Africans live in heaven but think they’re in hell, which is causing a tremendous amount of despair,” he said.

People are already on the edge, and perhaps some of our communal anxiety is pushing them over the edge. Life is tough and chaotic everywhere, but over here, we’ve created such a high bar of what a good life is, and many people can’t match up.”

“Rabbonim are personally affected by losses of this nature, needing to support in the early stages, during the mourning period, and well beyond,” said Rabbi Yossi Chaikin, the chairperson of the South African Rabbinical Association (SARA), this week.

SARA has arranged a briefing for rabbis with Rabbi Herschel Shachter, world-renowned posek (religious law authority) and rosh yeshiva at RIETS, Yeshiva University in New York, on the religious approach to the subject. Rabbis have also consulted with social workers to gain a better understanding.

Sheri Hanson, a social worker at Hatzolah, said, “January and February are always difficult months, where people may feel they are faced with yet another year of the same overwhelming struggles.”

“Although mental health is gaining

more airtime, it remains shrouded in stigma. We need to emphasise help-seeking as a strength, make people aware of the resources that are available, and encourage a general ethos of kindness. We need to make more of an effort to connect to people, and help them feel that they aren’t alone. It’s important for people to know that there are many avenues of assistance in our community,” she said.

End the silence – speak up for our sisters

OPINION

ROLENE MARKS



March is Women’s History Month, dedicated to raising issues facing women today. It’s a month that includes International Women’s Day on 8 March, when issues like suffrage, gender parity, equity, and gender-based violence are highlighted and addressed.

Some will scoff – after all, do women need a whole month to highlight issues?

In the wake of the atrocities of 7 October, we’re learning daily about the magnitude and level of depravity of the sexual violence committed on that day, a crime against humanity against Israeli women and girls. We also know from testimony from hostages that have been released that some of the male

hostages have also been violated. Last week, the Association of Israeli Rape Crisis Centers (ACCRI) released its report presented to the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women). The report, replete with the relevant appendices that reference testimonies and images, is beyond what the soul can bear.

This week, the United Nations special envoy on sexual violence, Pramila Patten’s, team released its report following an investigation in Israel where it viewed more than 50 hours of footage and combed through more than 5 000 photographs. It’s devastating. These reports prove beyond any doubt that Israeli women and girls suffered the most horrific rapes, cruel and humiliating sexual torture, murder, and at least two accounts of necrophilia.

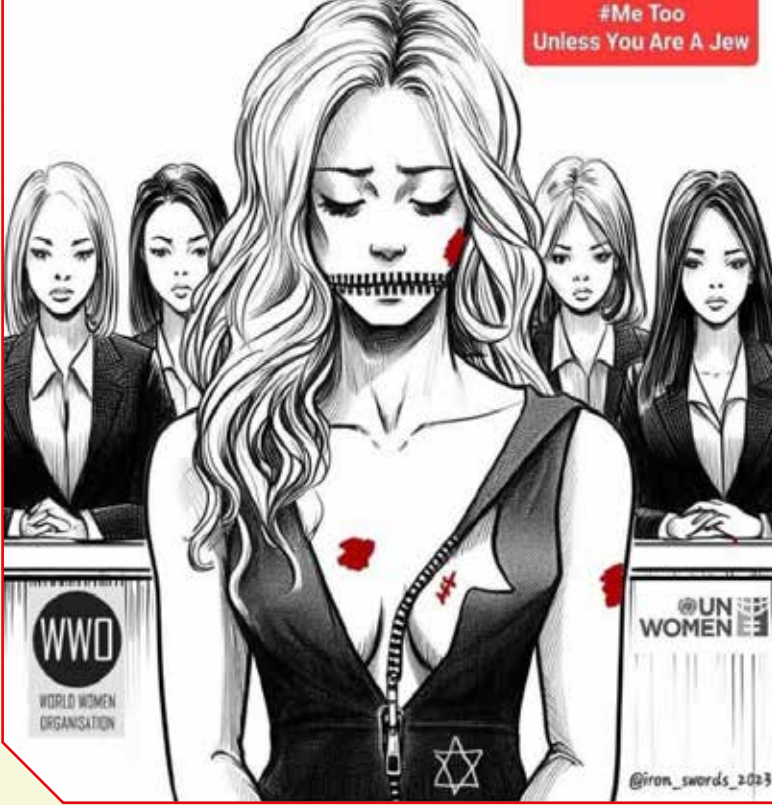
On 7 October, the world looked on in horror as Hamas broadcast with glee as the body of Shany Louk, legs broken and clothes ripped, was kicked and spat on as she was paraded through the streets of Gaza like a trophy. We all saw Naama Levy, still captive in Gaza, dragged by her hair, bleeding in the crotch, and shoved in a waiting van. Every feminist, women’s organisation, celebrity activist, and human being with a conscience should have immediately raised the alarm. Instead, Israeli women were met with a wall of silence and even denial or demands for “context”. There’s that word again – context. Let me be very clear, rape isn’t resistance, and there’s never an appropriate “context” for rape.

The silence hasn’t been limited to those

mentioned above. Sadly, there are many among our communities who are loathe to speak of the crimes of sexual violence.

I know that for many, it’s hard to digest or internalise how Israeli women and girls have and continue to be violated, but we

Photo: @iron_swords_2023



have a duty to speak for them. At a time when so many deny these events or pass them off as “resistance”, we have a moral imperative to speak for our sisters and daughters who have no voice. We’re their voice. Imagine it was your daughter, sister, wife or mother. Wouldn’t you want justice?

The depravity of the sexual assaults is difficult and painful to digest, but we’re the generation that must bear witness. We’re recording history, we’re seeking justice, and it’s important to speak about it. Silence sends a message to future rape victims that their suffering is in vain. Silence legitimises sexual violence as a weapon of war. Silence fails the victims and the justice that they deserve.

Friday is International Women’s Day, and many organisations and leaders will highlight issues facing women today. We need to remind the world of what happened and continues to happen to our women and girls. In his press conference earlier this week, Rear Admiral Daniel Hagari, the spokesperson for the Israel Defense Forces, raised the alarm about our 19 girls who are hostages, saying that they are in real danger. We now have irrefutable proof of crimes against humanity, of sexual violence, on 7 October. Speak up, because if we aren’t for ourselves, who will be for us?

It’s not enough to just #BelieveIsraeliWomen, we need to speak up for them as well.

• Rolene Marks is on the World WIZO executive committee, and holds the portfolio of head of public diplomacy.

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SA's ICJ case against Israel continues to backfire

STEVEN GRUZO

In the United States Congress this week, a resolution was introduced condemning the case of genocide against Israel brought by South Africa at the International Court of Justice (ICJ). Meanwhile, Hamas and the South African government were quick to accuse Israel of “targeted killings” of Palestinians when 112 Palestinians were reportedly killed by live Israeli fire in a frenzied scramble for aid supplies in Gaza on 29 February. Israel refuted this claim. Analyst Terence Corrigan said, “The South African government’s case was in the first instance about coming to the aid of an ally – Palestine, or whichever faction is in charge of it – against an enemy, which is how it defines Israel. Whatever merits its case may have had on the grounds of human rights or international law, its intention was to land a political blow to Israel, which would have been to tie its hands and prevent it from military operations. Failing to get the ceasefire was a major failure. It hasn’t been able to get a ruling that could be parsed into an argument that Israeli military action is effectively illegal. So it hasn’t gained the decisive strategic victory it sought.” Referring to the deaths and injuries on 29 February, South Africa’s department of international relations and cooperation (Dirco) said in a media statement on 1 March, “This latest atrocity is another breach of international law and in breach of the binding provisional orders of the ICJ. Legal remedies are one route



The United States Congress has attempted to pass bills condemning South Africa’s genocide case against Israel

to end institutionalised impunity that Israel has enjoyed for decades. Legal remedies aren’t sufficient though, and the international community must now consider other measures to end the unlawful actions of the Israeli government. A first step is an unconditional call for a ceasefire by the United Nations Security Council.” In December 2023, the South African government hauled Israel before the ICJ on charges of genocide against the Palestinians – especially in Gaza – following the terrorist attack on Israel on 7 October. Outraged, Israel called South Africa’s charges “baseless”, and claimed that South Africa was “functioning as the legal arm” of Hamas. Uncharacteristically though, Israel chose to defend itself before the ICJ. The ICJ didn’t grant South Africa’s request for a ceasefire in Gaza. It also didn’t rule on the substantive issue of whether Israel was indeed committing

genocide in Gaza. That process will play out over the next year. The ICJ ordered Israel to report within 30 days on various measures it was taking to prevent a genocide in Gaza. Israel has complied by submitting a report, but it hasn’t been made public. It’s expected that South Africa’s response to this report will be placed in the public domain as another occasion to damn and demonise Israel. In the interim, on 12 February, with Israel purportedly preparing to launch increased operations in the southern Gazan city of Rafah – to which hundreds of thousands of Palestinians have fled from the north – South Africa again approached the ICJ urgently to institute a ceasefire. It said the attack on Rafah would breach the Genocide Convention and the court’s January ruling. The court rejected this appeal on 15 February, saying that existing measures were adequate.

Said advocate Mark Oppenheimer, “The case brought by South Africa on 29 December last year primarily aimed to achieve a one-sided ceasefire that would require Israel to stop its military engagement in Gaza. Every single judge refused to grant that relief in the ICJ case. However, the South African government proceeded to tell everybody that it had, in fact, received a ceasefire. It then put this notion to the test by bringing a further application to the ICJ in which it asked the courts to intervene to prevent Israel from engaging in a military raid in Rafah. The ICJ refused to grant the relief sought by South Africa. This shows that the South African case was a failure, and that the ICJ in fact recognises Israel’s right to engage in a just war, that it has a right to defend itself, and the right to find its hostages and take them back into safety.” Israel’s government said the second South African submission was “evidence

of a renewed and cynical effort by South Africa to use provisional measures as a sword, rather than a shield, and to manipulate the court to protect South Africa’s long-time ally, Hamas, a genocidal terrorist organisation, from Israel’s inherent right and obligation to defend itself, in accordance with the law, from the terrorist assault it faces and to pursue the release of more than 130 hostages.” Also, last month, separate hearings were heard at the ICJ following a United Nations request for a non-binding advisory opinion on the legal consequences of Israel’s “occupation” of Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem. South Africa was, unsurprisingly, an enthusiastic participant. In another development, US Congressmen Ronny Jackson from Texas and David Kustoff from Tennessee introduced a resolution condemning the ICJ interim order, and South Africa for bringing the case in the first place. Jackson said, “If South Africa and the ICJ truly cared about Palestinians, they would demand that Hamas release every hostage.” He said South Africa had fallen prey to “terrorist propaganda” that played into the hands of Hamas and its sponsor, Iran. He said the United States must defend its “greatest ally in the Middle East, and call out the ICJ for falsely calling Israel genocidal”. This joins a string of recent congressional bills condemning South Africa which haven’t been passed. While the ground war rages on, so do the legal battles, with no end in sight.

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Enough is enough!

International Women’s Day on 8 March is a farce! How can we celebrate women while the world hasn’t acknowledged the violent sexual crimes perpetrated against Jewish women in Israel on 7 October? And there hasn’t been an international outcry to demand the release of the hostages, some of whom are believed to continue to be subjected to this horror.

How dare a world that purports to take women’s rights seriously ignore this heinous crime? How dare the United Nations (UN) celebrate this day as its own, while still not taking on the plight of the Jewish women who were systematically raped and mutilated by depraved Hamas terrorists.

Even now that a UN report by a team of experts under the guidance of Pramila Patten, the secretary-general’s special representative on sexual violence in conflict, came back with proof of this devastation, nothing has happened. In fact, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres appears to be doing absolutely nothing about the report. Word has it that he saw it and tried to keep it quiet for as long as possible, but I can’t prove that.

However, the Israeli Ambassador to the United Nations, Gilad Erdan, demanded in a letter to Guterres early this week that he convene an urgent security council meeting to ensure that Hamas is held accountable and declared a terrorist organisation by the UN.

So far, we’ve had no reaction ...

Nevertheless, on this International Women’s Day, the UN celebrates under the theme “Invest in women: Accelerate progress”. That’s all well and good, but empowering women starts with women having rights over their own bodies. And the first step is to believe women who have been raped.

Considering that one of this year’s slogans, “My body, my right” speaks to exactly that principle, I would imagine this would be top of the agenda. However, what has been the biggest travesty against women in many decades should lead to, first of all, believing them, and second, justice being done against the perpetrators.

But, at this stage, more than five months after 7 October, nothing even close to that has happened. Meanwhile, as the UN report clearly states, the hostages are most probably still being subjected to sexualised torture. What do we have to do to get people in power to do something? Or is it as simple as the fact that if you’re Jewish, it doesn’t count?

It’s a breath of fresh air to see that South African women of all ages and backgrounds came together under the banner of the Women’s Action Campaign South Africa to find out what our fellow citizens feel.

It was especially heart-warming to know that the majority of those surveyed – representative of the country – believe that our government should take this up internationally.

I know that it’s almost laughable to expect this government, which has sided with Hamas against Israel, even to consider doing so. It has made its feelings about what Hamas did on 7 October so clear by literally ignoring it for so long.

That is, until this week, when our dear minister of international affairs and cooperation, Dr Naledi Pandor, suggested, after all this time, that Hamas should be investigated for war crimes for its attack on Israel last October. Talk about paying lip service to something she clearly doesn’t believe! What took her five months?

Had she actually believed it, perhaps she would have ensured that this was taken to the International Court of Justice rather than the many charges her team lay at the feet of Israel. However, that, and her call at the same time for the release of Israeli hostages was so soft and insignificant, it wasn’t even heard by South Africans, let alone those in Hamas.

These words of hers, however, do signify some kind of backtracking, but I’m not quite sure why. Perhaps her stance has upset America, and she has been told off. I have no idea, but it clearly isn’t where her heart is.

The point is: as a woman first and foremost, I would imagine her responsibility lies with standing up for other women, and I believe she should have been shouting from the rooftops against the weaponisation of sexual violence. And knowing what happened to women at Hamas’s hands, she should have also done everything in her power to get the hostages released.

Had she done that, the war might well have been over a while back. But instead, she not only ignored the plight of Israelis, she demonised it, making Israel out to be a country that only wants to harm. Truth is, Israel wants its people back, and to ensure that Hamas can’t hurt Israelis again.

Had she demanded this in the first place when she made her phone call to Hamas the day after 7 October, perhaps many Gazan civilians would never have experienced what they have. The number of deaths wouldn’t be so high. She could have done something, but she didn’t.

UN Women could also have done something in the past five months, but they didn’t. Will they do anything now that they have a UN report proving what Jewish women said was true? We’ll see.

But South African Jewish women aren’t sitting back and waiting. We’re taking to the streets to protest these atrocities and our government’s continued deafening silence.

We’ll be raising our voices for those who are unable to do so. We’ll be raising our voices for the 19 women still being held in Gaza. We’ll be shouting out for those who were brutalised and killed on 7 October. Enough is enough!

Shabbat Shalom!
Peta Krost
Editor



From #MeToo to blanket denial

OPINION

WENDY HENDLER



On 7 October 2023, an apocalypse of sexual violence was unleashed by Hamas terrorists on Israeli citizens in the south of Israel. The immediate visceral response of the world was one of horror and repugnance.

Sadly, this was short lived as the narrative quickly turned in favour of Hamas in its “fight for freedom”. In a puff of smoke, the progress made by women’s organisations in fighting gender-based violence across the globe disappeared into thin air.

The #MeToo movement’s core message of “believe the victim” was silenced. However, this didn’t apply to all women, only to certain women. “#MeToounlessyouareaJew” became the lived reality for Jews everywhere.

When it comes to the Israeli victims of Hamas’s sexual atrocities, there’s default disbelief. In fact, the message conveyed was that without rape pictures or a viewing of dead bodies, one must believe there was no rape. Never in history has the burden of proof for rape been set so high. The denials border on the absurd.

As one would do in any criminal case, let’s look at the evidence. Hamas terrorists proudly and gleefully shared videos of the rapes and sexual assaults across all social media platforms on 7 October. They even went so far as to send videos to the family members of their victims. Pictures of women with bloodied crotches have become an iconic symbol of these sexual crimes.

The recent report by the Association of Rape Crisis Centers in Israel provides evidence of systematic and widespread sexual crimes. As quoted in the report, “several survivors of the massacre provided eyewitness testimony of gang rape, where women were abused and handled between multiple terrorists who beat, injured, and ultimately killed them”.

soon as possible. Once the forensic examinations had been completed, the bodies were returned to the families for burial.

The denial of these atrocities is evident in the macabre demands to view the bodies, which flies in the face of international protocols. Mutilated bodies are never released to the public to be viewed.

In fact, in South Africa, bodies generally are examined and buried on the same day or a day or two after they have been brought to the morgue. In the Hindu tradition, cremation is carried out on the same day, and in Islam, burial is usually within 24 hours of death.

This denialism is clearly seen in the assertion by Basem Naim, a Hamas official, that “using rape or assault as a weapon of war would go against founding Islamic principles. Any sexual relationship or activity is considered completely *haram* – forbidden by Islam”.

Here we see a complete unwillingness to contemplate the idea that Hamas could have perpetrated these heinous crimes. It becomes clear that this is a case of cognitive dissonance, which is the mental discomfort which results from holding two conflicting beliefs, values, or attitudes. Hence, accepting the reality of these acts by Hamas may cause an internal struggle for those who align themselves with its cause.

In addition, we live in a country where people identify with a victim mentality, where only those disadvantaged and historically oppressed can be seen as legitimate victims. Israeli citizens, be they men, women, or children, who don’t fit this description, can simply never be victims. This is competitive victimhood, and there’s no winning side.

As we know, no person’s suffering should be measured against any other person’s suffering. It can be extremely destructive and dehumanising to make comparisons.

Meanwhile in South Africa, Department of International Relations and Cooperation Minister Dr Naledi Pandor never ceases to surprise us with her theatrics – namely her recent about-turn, stating that Hamas should be tried for war crimes.

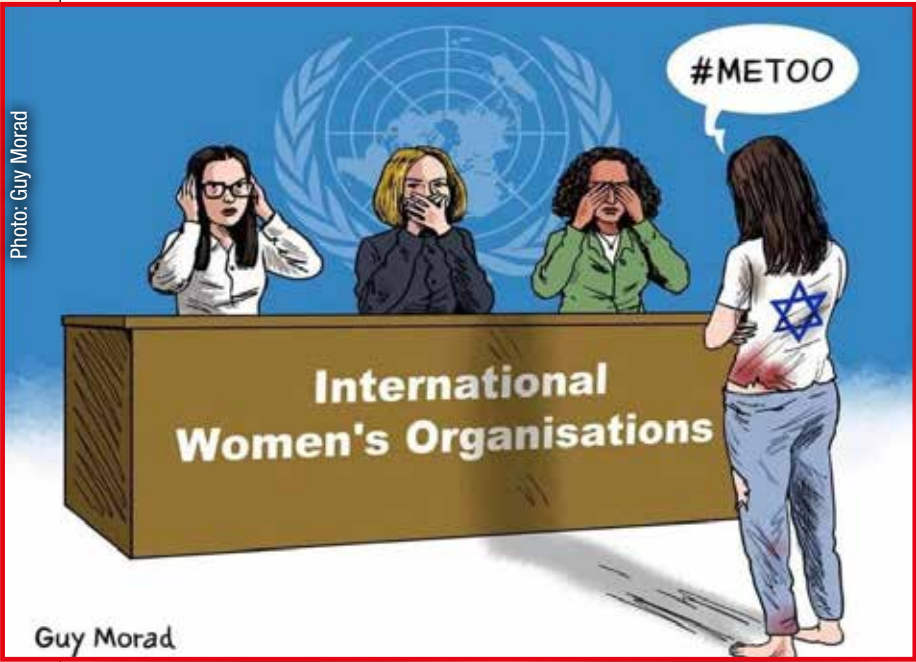
We ask which war crimes she’s referring to specifically? This past Monday, 4 March, a report was released by United Nations Special Representative Pramila Patten detailing the rapes, gang rapes, sexual assaults, and sexualised torture of Israeli citizens on 7 October, as well as the ongoing sexual crimes being committed against female and child hostages.

Do these systematic and premeditated acts fall under the banner of Pandor’s definition of war crimes, and will there be a blanket condemnation?

Furthermore, will our government push for the prosecution of these war criminals in the same way that it has determinedly pushed its case against Israel in the International Court of Justice?

It would be dangerous to hold our breath.

• Wendy Hendler is the co-founder and director of Koleinu SA, the helpline for victims of abuse in the South African Jewish community. The helpline number is 011 264 0341, operating on Sunday to Thursday, from 09:00 to 22:00, and after Shabbat until midnight.



Pandor’s box creaks open on SA’s Hamas ties

TALI FEINBERG

Several opposition parties have taken on South Africa's department of international relations and cooperation (Dirco) and its minister, Dr Naledi Pandor, probing its relationships with Hamas, Iran, Qatar, and Russia.

The questions dig into the costs of South Africa's case against Israel at the International Court of Justice (ICJ); the funding for the case; the role that South Africa could play in getting Hamas to release the hostages; and why South Africa has gone to the ICJ on Israel but not Russia.

While some questions were dodged or left unanswered, a question from the Democratic Alliance (DA) in the National Assembly on 28 February prompted Pandor to say, "The action of Hamas may very well constitute a war crime and should be investigated." She said the government stood by its call for a two-state solution, and said, "We should look at what steps we might take to support the call that all hostages held by Hamas must be freed." But when the DA asked in early March if the minister considered Hamas to be the legitimate government or a terrorist group, she responded that she didn't see Hamas as a terrorist organisation "in line with the United Nations".

Meanwhile, the DA is digging deeper into the past, questioning ties between South Africa, Hamas, Iran, Qatar, and Russia, and what they meant for the 7 October attack and afterwards. In early February, the DA asked whether President Cyril Ramaphosa or any member of cabinet had met with or had a telephone discussion with Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh or any other Hamas leader

between 2022 to the present day. It also asked for full details of the discussion, and any agreements reached.

The DA also asked if there was discussion of any strategy whereby South Africa could assist Hamas, Iran, or any other country in "waging a diplomatic and/or legal offensive against the state of Israel at any time in 2022, 2023, and 2024", and the relevant details.

The action of Hamas may very well constitute a war crime and should be investigated.

In response, Pandor denied contact with or the planning of a diplomatic or legal offensive between South Africa, Hamas, Iran, and Qatar, but confirmed that "Dirco issued a media statement on 17 October 2023 confirming that [Pandor] received a request to call Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh to discuss getting humanitarian aid to Palestine." Later, she said that there were "open lines of communication" with all Palestinian organisations including Fatah and Hamas.

The DA also probed a South African state visit to Qatar in November 2023. This was a large delegation of 10 people, and the minutes of the meetings there haven't been revealed. In response to the DA's questions, Pandor revealed the names of those in the delegation – including herself and the president – and the programme of events,

but insisted that "the meetings held in the state of Qatar were of a confidential nature and the minutes of the said meetings are classified".

Emma Powell, the DA shadow minister of international relations and cooperation, asked if any guests travelling aboard aircraft returning to South Africa from any state visit to Qatar in 2023 made any foreign currency declarations on their return from those meetings, and for details of sponsorships, donations, and financial transfers provided for any purposes to the president and his cabinet, or to government officials by any Qatari, Iranian, or Russian organ of state, organisation, or resident. She didn't receive a response.

She asked the minister to provide the "full costs of South Africa's litigation at the ICJ with a breakdown of costs per line item, funded by her department". She asked if the South African government had "received any financial, legal, or communications assistance from any other organisation or state in respect of South Africa's litigation at the ICJ in respect of the Israel/Gaza war".

On 28 February, Pandor responded, "I'm sure the honourable Powell wishes that her fantasy that some other government funded the legal case South Africa brought should be true. There's been no money from any sinister source provided for this case."

Finally, the DA asked, "In light of the department's decision to recall diplomats from Tel Aviv and close our foreign mission in Israel, what plans will be made to ensure South Africans from both Israel and Palestine are able to vote on election day from Israel?"

Pandor responded, "Our embassy in

Ramallah is pulling out all the stops to provide consular assistance to any South African that remains in the area of conflict, or indeed in Tel Aviv. We'll do all we can to ensure that South Africans are well-served." She asked that the DA ask Israel to "stop its onslaught" so that diplomatic missions could resume their work.

Meanwhile, Inkatha Freedom Party Member of Parliament (MP) Mkhuleko Hlengwa asked about the costs of South Africa's ICJ case, to which Pandor responded that "the costs aren't prohibitive" as officials were being paid from departmental budgets. "The other legal counsel has provided pro bono services," she said. She pledged to make public the travel and accommodation costs incurred, and said the government's legal staff would be paid by the justice or international relations departments where they were employed. "These are resources that are well-spent," she said.

When the African Christian Democratic Party's Steve Swart asked if Pandor could use South Africa's "close ties to Hamas and its Iranian backers" to try to reach a ceasefire which would include the release of the hostages, Pandor said she was "taken aback" that Swart believed South Africa had close ties to Hamas, and insisted it didn't. South Africa had "normal relations" with Iran, she said.

Questioned by Swart about why the government wasn't more vocal about Russia ignoring a genocide order of the ICJ, Pandor said the situations couldn't be compared.

Meanwhile, other parties used the opportunity of the National Assembly plenary on 28 February to push for further action against Israel. The Economic Freedom Fighters called Israel "racist and murderous",

and asked why the Israeli embassy in Pretoria hadn't been closed. "Cabinet is yet to deliberate and finalise this," said Pandor.

African National Congress MP Desmond Moela asked how South Africa intended to engage with other nations, "especially those expressing support for the government's action [at the ICJ] and to ensure that the decisions [of the ICJ] are respected".

Pandor responded that the government through her department was working to strengthen ties with other countries against Israel's "intended genocide". This included exploring joint legal action. "We attempt to persuade countries to the merit of South Africa's case," she said.

MP Brett Herron of the Good Party asked what steps South Africa would take if "Israel is found to be in contempt of the ICJ judgment". Pandor responded that South Africa would "continue to utilise options available to seek action".

Regarding why he asked such probing questions, Swart told the *SA Jewish Report*, "We all want peace and regret the loss of lives on both sides, but Pandor's assumption is that Israel is to blame. We say Hamas is to blame, and should release the hostages immediately.

"I also don't understand why she [Pandor] distinguishes between the Russia/Ukraine ICJ judgment and the SA/Israel ICJ judgment, as both concerned the Genocide Treaty. Indeed, the ICJ went further, and called for an immediate ceasefire by Russia, which was ignored, yet South Africa was silent. Double standards in my view."

The *SA Jewish Report* also reached out to Powell and Hlengwa, but they chose not to comment.

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A donor’s dilemma at UCT

OPINION

DAVID BENATAR

The University of Cape Town (UCT) senate will on Friday, 8 March, consider no fewer than three separate motions about the current war in Gaza. It will come as no surprise that these motions, proposed by members of the senate, all target Israel, with two of them calling for boycotts.

This isn’t the first time that anti-Israel motions have been brought to UCT’s senate. When it previously approved such a motion, UCT’s governing body, the council, referred the matter back to the senate for reconsideration, with the result that the decision was reversed.

In the interim, the council has itself taken a stand against Israel in the form of a vacuous statement about the war against Hamas. I’m not aware of any other country being the subject of such obsessive and compulsive attention by UCT. This is all in keeping with a global trend of many universities to become increasingly hostile to Israel and those Jews and others not willing to fall in line with condemnation of Israel.

Current and prospective donors might be wondering how to react to these developments. Voicing their concerns carries two related risks. First, it might be perceived, not without some justification, as interference in academic freedom. If donors make their donations contingent upon universities taking one course of action over another, there are reasonable questions to be asked about the influence of donors on the operations of a university.

Of course, boycotts themselves, when coercive, which some of the proposed UCT ones would be, are also threats to academic freedom. However, one then enters the messy terrain of justifying one violation of academic freedom by reference to another. Even if that’s sometimes justified, this complexity can be avoided.

The second risk is feeding the antisemitic beast. We all know that antisemitism is driven not by what Jews do, but rather by what antisemites think they do. However, Jewish donors should be especially concerned about their actions being used as fodder for those who peddle stereotypes about “Jewish control” via “Jewish money”.

If Jews had the influence that antisemites think they did, Israel wouldn’t be as marginalised and targeted as it is. Nor is there

evidence that Jewish donors act any differently from other donors who find their beneficiaries not acting as they – the donors – would like. Nevertheless, we cannot ignore the dangers of antisemitism, especially when there’s independent reason to avoid using influence.

None of this means that donors must blithely continue donating irrespective of what their beneficiaries do. However, there’s an alternative course of action, namely to remain quiet until the point that one feels that one can no longer support an institution,

and then to stop funding it. Withholding funding is then reactive to university decisions already taken, rather than seeking to influence institutional decisions yet to be taken. With this strategy, institutions are free to act as they see fit, and the donors are equally free to act as they see fit but without donors reasonably

being seen as influencing the institution.

Of course, a university might anticipate such donor action, and this might be thought to constitute undue influence, but there are a few reasons to discount this concern. Most importantly, institutional anticipation of donor withdrawal isn’t avoidable unless donors are required to contribute irrespective of whether they approve of the direction their beneficiary institution is taking. There can be no such requirement.

How bad an institution must become before a donor decides that he or she can no longer contribute in good conscience will vary from donor to donor. For some, UCT has long since passed that point. For others it might be imminent.

When donors do decide to withhold funds, they might seek alternative good causes. These could include Israeli universities themselves, or funding for South African students to study at them, especially as the quality of South African universities, just like the rand, continues to decline.

• David Benatar, Emeritus Professor of Philosophy, writes in his personal capacity.

Photo: Instagram

Pro-Palestinian supporters at the University of Cape Town



Surviving fire: tallis makes it to the bris

LEE TANKLE

It’s not unusual for a newborn to wear his dad’s tallis at his bris, but it is unique when it was one of the only things that survived a house fire in 1991.

Such was the situation for the editor of *The Pretoria Jewish Chronicle*, Diane Wolfson’s, grandson, Max, who had his bris on 3 March.

surviving siddurim was from my Batmitzvah, and one from my husband’s Barmitzvah. The outsides were blackened but the siddurim were fine.

Wolfson. “We had just bought an entire brand new dinner service for our wedding anniversary, which we hadn’t even paid for yet. And the whole thing was gone.

“As for the Rotary medal, the message was clear as anything. It said, ‘Your work isn’t finished. You’ve still got charity and outreach work to do.’ But there was a big hand from Hashem on everything. There were maybe five photographs that didn’t burn. They were burnt around the outside, but they were all taken at my son’s *pidyon haben*.

“I never used to sleep at night because we had a thatched roof home. I used to freak out every time we had a lightning storm. I was scared that the thatch would catch alight and we’d all burn inside. It was driving me crazy because I couldn’t sleep during a storm. And when our house burnt down, it was like a fresh start,” Wolfson said.

“To have my grandson wear this tallit speaks to us having a Jewish people – you know, *le dor vador* from one generation to the next. It means we’ll have future generations, and we must be proud and grateful to Hashem for watching over us.

“My son sings *le dor vador* in the shul choir, and people in the community love hearing it,” Wolfson said. “Now, Max wearing my Dov’s baby tallit is exactly that – *le dor vador*.”



Baby Max wearing Dov Wolfson’s tallit

“The tallit bag from my son Dov’s bris was burnt, but not the tallit inside. And there was nothing left in our bedroom, other than the pocket of my husband’s jacket. And inside the pocket was a yarmulke,” Wolfson says.

The only non-Jewish item not destroyed was Wolfson’s Paul Harris Award Medal for her work in Rotary International.

“There were a lot of messages there,” said

The tallis was spared when Wolfson’s house was gutted by a house fire in 1991. The only things that survived the fire were two siddurim, the mezuzah on the door, a baby tallit and yarmulke, five photographs, and Wolfson’s Paul Harris Award Medal (awarded by Rotary International).

“We woke up that morning to the house on fire, and everything was burnt,” recalled Wolfson. “The casing of the mezuzah on the doorpost at the front door had melted, but the mezuzah itself didn’t burn. One of the two

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GILLIAN KLAWSKY

"The tattoo allows me to express the inspiration I draw from the Jewish nation and how we deal with all the hate and relentless attacks," says Dena. "It shows that no matter what those that seek to destroy do, we'll always

For Terrin Livingstone, the meaning behind a tattoo adds to its appeal and impact. "Tattoos with a back-story or ones that holds meaning with good line work or



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Continued on page 14>>

**Lance Maron, Peter Berman, Naomi Benjamin, Yael Benjamin, Adam Davis,
and Jonathan Birin**

"It's a testament to the love of music, the fact that music speaks louder than a lot of the messages we get on social media and the news," she said.

Lefty’s passing leaves a vacuum on Long Avenue

SAUL KAMIONSKY

He was the friendly face that greeted you, and helped you park when you arrived to meet people for lunch on the kosher strip or to go shopping. He would ask about your family members and let you know who was already waiting for you at Frangelicas or KosherWorld, or one of the outlets on Long Avenue, Glenhazel, before looking after your car while you were gone.

Few knew much about this car guard other than that his name was Lefty, he was kind, smart, and friendly, and he made everyone feel at home. His full name was Lefty Tshoyi, and he hailed from the Eastern Cape.

His sudden absence has been felt around the community, and tributes are pouring in for him since he passed away after a short illness. Many say his passing leaves a deep void in the area.

Lefty was often found outside Fresh Fellas, and looked after cars parked across the whole street from KosherWorld right to the end at PostNet.

“He was really well-known and loved,” says Samantha Riesenber, who saw him by Fresh Fellas once a week. “Lefty seemed to know everyone who came to Fresh Fellas and their families. The shoppers also took an interest in him.”

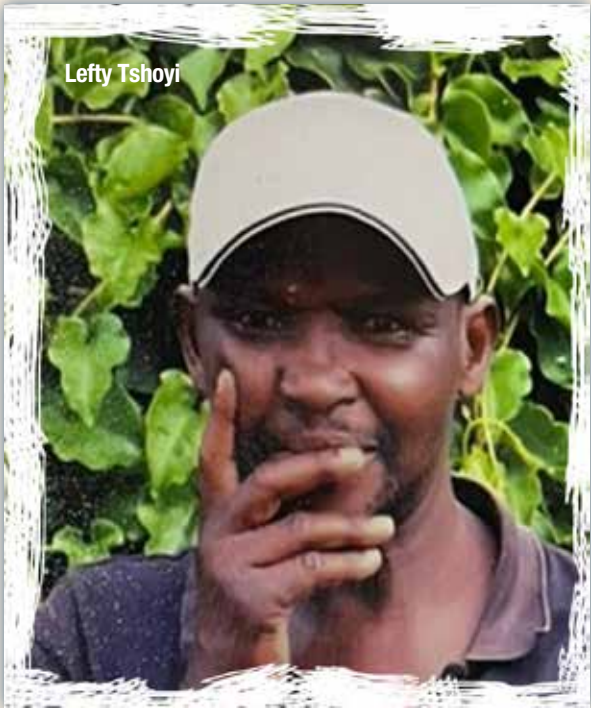
Bianca Rubenstein, who lives close to Fresh Fellas, says Lefty always went above and beyond. “He even took out my dustbins for me. Long Avenue chaos won’t be the same without our dear friend.”

Lefty had worked there for a long time, and lived in Alexandra, Johannesburg, says Riesenber, who helped him when he fell ill. “I took him to the doctor. One or two ladies in the community were always happy to contribute towards his doctor appointments and x-rays.

“He fell ill about a month ago,” she said. “Hatzolah came and took him to Edenvale Clinic. Then he got better and came back.” Lefty fell ill again about two weeks ago. “His neighbour phoned me to say that he was dizzy and confused. An ambulance took

him to Edenvale Hospital. He was moved to Tembisa Hospital, where he died.”

Riesenber says Lefty started as a car guard outside Fresh Fellas after coming to Johannesburg to earn a living and money for his family. “I know he went home every December to see his family. I know he has a mom and a sister. I used to go shopping for him in December, and buy him all the necessary groceries



he needed to take home.”

When Lefty wasn’t helping people with their parcels and with reversing out of their parking, he could be found sitting on a small chair under a tree on the pavement opposite Fresh Fellas. A lady who crocheted kippot sat next to him.

“We are going to put a plaque up on that tree,” Riesenber says. A new car guard has now replaced Lefty.

Says Cheryl Bondi, “Lefty came every year to help us to put up sukkah decorations. He would tell everyone which poster went where, and leave only when he was satisfied that it was perfect.”

Lefty made an impact on Debbie Gottlieb’s son. He chatted to her son when he walked home from school every day. “If my son went away, Lefty always asked me about him. He genuinely cared about everyone. My son was so upset to hear of his passing.”

Jodi Fisher describes Lefty as a *mensch*. “A couple of years ago, DL Link was collecting money outside KosherWorld. He went with his little bit of money, and made a contribution.”

Says Lindi Rudnicki, “He knew us all by name, and would even tell me when he had seen my daughter drive past during the day.”

“Lefty showed passion and dedication for his job and for those he knew. He was always grateful for what he received, no matter how big or small. A giant of a good man,” says Renee Tobiansky.

Says Robyn Kahlberg, “Lefty showed genuine interest in our families and children over all the years. He was always friendly and cheerful despite his circumstances and truly grateful for any help received. He will be so missed outside Fresh Fellas.”

“He wasn’t only a car guard,” says Isarae Seeff. “He became a somebody when he put his name on his shirt. Always smiling and grateful.”

Says Bondi, “Every time I saw him, he asked after my son, who is overseas. When my son was home, he would grab him to give him a warm welcome.”

Lefty knew about Bondi and Riesenber’s regular coffee meetings on a Thursday. He would come up to one of them driving in and say that the other one was already there.

Lefty also knew Riesenber’s sisters-in-law, Terri and Yael, the former describing him as a gentle and friendly man, the latter saying, “Even if you didn’t have change to give him, he still helped with a smile on his face and a wave goodbye.”

Says Denise Swartz, “He always greeted us with, ‘Hello ladies!’ and a smile. He knew our cars, and kept on the lookout for all of us.”

Rubenstein says Lefty knew and enjoyed chatting to all her children.

“A few of us ladies had put money together because he was looking to move into a better accommodation,” says Riesenber. Lefty and the ladies were going to split the costs 50-50, but his passing scuppered that plan. The money collected by the ladies will be given to the Tshoyi family to put towards Lefty’s funeral.

A written statement by Merissa Moritz on behalf of the community will be given to Lefty’s family at the funeral in the Eastern Cape. “Lefty became part of our community and our everyday,” it reads in part. “He was proud of his family, and always looked forward to coming home. Lefty was so proud of his work. He showed commitment, integrity, and loyalty. He will be sorely missed by us and forever be remembered for the gentleman that he was.”



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One-tyre wonders – unicyclists blaze a trail

SAUL KAMIONSKY

It's not every day you see a rabbi riding a unicycle, but those at Sandringham Gardens in Johannesburg will attest to the fact that Chevrah Kadisha Group Rabbi Jonathan Fox certainly isn't an everyday kind of rabbi.

In fact, he was the only competitor on a one-wheeled vehicle at the sweltering Boksburg Stadium in the Dis-Chem Ride for Sight 8km Fun Ride on 18 February.

"When I saw that there was an 8km charity fun ride, I immediately entered in the hope of finishing in one piece," Fox says. "I had never cycled more than 4km in one ride. I was elated to complete the distance, and hope to do longer distances in the future."

"When a friend of mine emigrated two years ago, he offered his unicycle to me and challenged me to learn to ride it," Fox says. "He's an avid cyclist, and bought a unicycle as a new challenge. For various reasons, he wasn't able to master it, so he paid it forward to a friend."

Fox's fellow South African unicyclist, Jude Kapeluschnik, who matriculated from Redhill School in Johannesburg last year, also discovered a passion for cycling on one wheel, and wants to notch up the Guinness World Record of being the first person to go around the world on a unicycle.

Ed Pratt, setting forth from England as a 19-year-old, previously accomplished this feat over three years, but the Guinness World Record is still up for grabs. "They say you're not allowed to take more than a two-week break, and he took a six-month break because the weather got really bad and the roads were too slippery," Kapeluschnik says.

Kapeluschnik hopes to circumnavigate the

globe at some point in the future. "It's not a short-term goal," he says. "I'm also going to start a unicycle foundation. Pratt did it for some organisation, and I decided that I was going to donate unicycles to rural areas for kids to use and potentially for people to use to commute. When I'm riding on the road, I often see these kids who live in poverty-stricken areas, and they always take a keen interest in my unicycle."

Kapeluschnik was inspired to take up unicycling after seeing a family friend of his riding a small unicycle. "When it was his Barmitzvah, we went to his house to do some photos, and he was showing us how he rode it, so the thought of unicycling had always been in my mind, and then for my birthday a few years ago, my parents decided to get me one."

He set about learning to ride it without getting advice from anybody or even watching YouTube tutorials. "Looking back, this was probably not the wisest decision," he admits.

He went to the park during the COVID-19 lockdown, and initially had no luck, but didn't give up. "For the first three hours, I made

absolutely no progress. I just kept on falling. After the three-hour mark, I did about an hour a day. I started unicycling for a few metres. That sparked the motivation to keep learning."

Similarly, Fox suffered many failed attempts and lots of falls in the early days of learning to ride a unicycle even though he had watched YouTube videos. He eventually got it right, and became hooked on riding longer distances.

Fox rides about 2km by himself in quiet parking lots almost daily. "It was particularly meaningful for me to take part in the Dis-Chem Ride for Sight cycling event, which raises money for Retina South Africa, a

nongovernmental organisation that focuses on age-related macular degeneration and other visual impairments," he says.

The encouragement and support he has received has been "overwhelming, as most people, even cyclists, have never seen a person cycling long-distance on a unicycle".

Fox wants to teach others how to ride a unicycle. He suggests that beginners hold onto a post or a wall, try a few pedals, and be prepared to fall. "It took me three months of daily practice and many falls to be able to mount the unicycle without assistance and be able to ride without falling. I practised in my garden so that I wouldn't hurt myself when I fell. The hardest part is getting going. Once you're riding, the balancing becomes easier."

Fox says unicycling is quite rare in South Africa, but you've still got more chance of spotting a unicyclist than a unicorn. A WhatsApp group, AmaOneTyre, has about 80

unicyclists from around the country.

Kapeluschnik is on two WhatsApp groups with a whole bunch of unicyclists. "I'm on the Cape Town group and the Johannesburg one, so I occasionally meet up with unicyclists, but I mostly ride by myself," he says.

THE ENCOURAGEMENT AND SUPPORT HAS BEEN "OVERWHELMING, AS MOST PEOPLE, EVEN CYCLISTS, HAVE NEVER SEEN A PERSON CYCLING LONG-DISTANCE ON A UNICYCLE".

He frequently uses unicycling to commute. "I rode it to school in Joburg once a week. It was about an hour's journey." He has three different unicycles. "Two of them are more for commuting, and the other one is a performance unicycle, which is seven feet tall. I've been practising with it because I got that one recently."

Unicycling is traditionally associated with the circus, parades, carnivals, and street festivals. Clowns can be seen juggling while riding unicycles. Even acrobatic performers ride them across a tightrope.

There are different types of unicycles such as touring/commuting unicycles; freestyle unicycles; muni (mountain) unicycles; and seatless unicycles. Although it can be difficult to ride the handle-less bike, you can get a mini handlebar at the front with a brake.

"Riding a unicycle is excellent exercise," Fox says. "It strengthens the core and the thighs and improves your sense of balance. Being able to master a new skill over the age of 50 has been very rewarding, and it's important for mental health to have goals."

Fox says South Africans can order a unicycle through SA Unicycling Mix's Donna Kisogloo, who gets them from overseas. "Otherwise, one can buy directly online from overseas."

Anyone interested in learning to unicycle can contact Rabbi Fox at rabbij@jhbchev.co.za for guidance.







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Ten-year-old angel raises funds for shelter

LEE TANKLE

When 10-year-old Liam Meyersfeld wanted to find a way to help his favourite animal shelter, nothing was going to get in his way. So he raised R14 000 for Fallen Angels Pet Rescue Farm in Melkbosstrand, an hour and a half from Cape Town.

"Liam's on the Autism spectrum, although he's very high functioning, but when he gets his mind set on something, very little can stop him," Liam's father, Dr Nick Meyersfeld, told the SA Jewish Report this week.

"I wanted to do a raffle for Fallen Angels through my school, but I couldn't because it already had an idea for a raffle this term. So I went to my mom, and she has an Instagram page called The Mom Club which has more than 40 000 followers. I thought, 'Why not do the raffle anyway on my own and with the help of my mom's page to raise money for the dog shelter.'"

Liam independently managed to get the raffle prizes sponsored by Camp Canoe in Franschoek, Truworths, and Exclusive Books. The prizes were an iPhone; a night stay for two at Camp Canoe in Boschendal; a R1 500 Truworths voucher; and a voucher for six people to go kayaking with Atlantic Outlook.

"I just called everybody I knew, and asked them to advertise. Every ticket cost only R10, and I sold 1 400 of them," said Liam.

"I advertised the raffle on my mom's Instagram page, and my dad, a doctor, advertised it at work,"



Liam said. "My brother advertised at his school, I advertised at my school, and my dad called everyone he knew."

"Liam contacted all of my and my wife's colleagues and friends, used social media, and stood for hours on end on the promenade selling tickets," Meyersfeld said.

"I love dogs, and I just want to help as many of them as I can. Fallen Angels is an amazing animal-rescue organisation. Not many people know about it, so I just really wanted to do something amazing for it," Liam said.

Fallen Angels' mission is to save and improve the living conditions of animals in their immediate surroundings while maintaining their rehabilitation. This may involve re-homing animals who are unwanted, unloved, or lost – mostly focusing on township animals, but not limited to them. The farm believes that the rehabilitation of animals ultimately involves children, which is therapy for children and animals.

Any animal that is forgotten, abandoned, abused, lost, lonely, emaciated, and neglected is considered to be a Fallen Angel, and therefore part of the focus area of the organisation.

Through animal therapy, the farm aims to assist in healing the broken souls of any animal it is financially able to assist.

"I can't wait to go to Fallen Angels to give them the money," Liam said.

He plans to do a raffle to raise money for Fallen Angels Pet Rescue Farm in the future, and hopes to adopt a dog from the shelter one day.

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When identity turns toxic, resort to being a Spaniel

“What are you?” was the first question she was asked. University had just started, and as a first-year student, my daughter was trying to figure out the lay of land. Another student, presumably in her class, had joined the group and kicked off the conversation. “What do you mean?” Confused, she sought clarification. “Like, what are you? Are you Greek? Or something?” Tempted to answer, “Part Spaniel with definite hints of Labrador,” she gave in to the process and said, “I’m Jewish.” “Thought so,” was the curt, self-satisfied reply.

And that was that. Only it wasn’t. Because the question itself betrays an obsessive need to place people in a context that defines them. And one that governs how much credibility we give to their views.

According to my colleagues on the morning show, I’m the most hated person on the internet. Not because I’m inherently detestable – although I might be – but because I’m a plus 50-year-old, straight, white, Jewish, Zionist male. I’m also “abled”, meaning I have no disability – aside from flat feet and low muscle tone – and I don’t qualify for any form of social grant.

I was also born in South Africa before 1994, which means that I must have benefited from apartheid and loved every moment of it. In terms of that narrative, as we speak, I’m most likely frolicking through the open fields of a farm. A farm that I have no doubt stolen from someone.

There’s little that could place me any lower on the social status register. The upshot of lowly status is that my view on anything will need to be filtered through these factors – male, Jewish, straight, Zionist, white, born in pre-democracy South Africa – to disqualify me along with my perspective. Years ago, when I wrote an article that suggested a possible solution to dealing with male dominance in the workplace, I was told by one publication that though my approach seemed to be a decent one, it wasn’t keen to have a male offer a

INNER VOICE
Howard Feldman



solution to a problem faced by women. And more recently, I had an interview with one of the local TV channels here in Africa, but it cancelled on short notice. The segment was meant to be about my recent trip to Israel following the 7 October invasion. Its concern was that I wouldn’t be an unbiased voice. Which is perfectly true. I wouldn’t be. And I would be upfront about that, as I’ve been in all other interviews. But the assumption was that others that they interviewed on the subject are unbiased, and that their voice has a higher trust level than mine does. The presumption is patently absurd, given that not only is the very notion of “non-bias” naïve, but more importantly, it reflects a deep prejudice – that because of my Jewish Zionist identity, there’s no way my opinion can be trusted. Whereas it’s not much of a challenge to be outraged when the offense has an impact on us, it’s equally important to hold ourselves to the same standard. It’s easy to point out, for example, that the department of international relations and cooperation (Dirco) minister has adopted the Muslim faith as though this explains her view, but to do so is to accept that our voices will also be filtered through ours. And whereas it’s much more difficult to counter her prejudice with fact and reasoning, it holds much greater value in the long run than if we attack her on her identity. I have no advice for my daughter. I want her to stand proud as a Jew. But I also don’t want her to live in a world that defines and locks her into a role that limits her. Where perhaps I could offer some wisdom is to suggest that perhaps part Spaniel with a hint of French Poodle would be much more accurate a description. But that’s just my white, straight, over-50-male who is also a Jewish Zionist view.

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Join protest against Hamas’s sexual violence



ABOVE BOARD
Karen Milner



It took nearly five months and continual pressure from women’s rights advocates, but the United Nations (UN) has finally acknowledged that both during and subsequent to the 7 October massacre, Hamas has perpetrated the most heinous acts of sexual violence against Israeli captives. On Monday, 4 March, the UN issued a report confirming that it found “clear and convincing” information that hostages held captive by Hamas in Gaza were sexually abused, and that there are “reasonable grounds” to believe that this sexual violence is continuing. Sadly, but hardly unpredictably, what’s also continuing is the deafening silence of our own government in the face of yet more revelations of Hamas’s depravities. Nineteen women are still being held hostage in Gaza, and testimony from freed hostages indicates that male hostages have also been sexually abused. This coming Friday, 8 March, is International Women’s Day, designated by the UN itself in 1975 to promote women’s rights across the world. Under the banner of #MeTooUnlessYou’reAJew, the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) will be marking this day by holding a protest march against the heinous weaponising of sexual violence by Hamas as well as the African National Congress government’s persistent refusal even to acknowledge, let alone condemn it. Jewish women from Johannesburg and further afield will march from the Constitutional Court to the Commission for Gender Equality. There, they will be

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

A column of WIZO South Africa

WIZO focuses on resilience, rebuilding for women

Shelley Trope-Friedman
President, WIZO South Africa



International Women’s Day, a global day celebrated annually on Friday, 8 March, focuses on issues such as gender equality, violence, and abuse against women. The theme this year, “Inspire Inclusion”, ensures that we appreciate and respect women and their beliefs. The tagline’s powerful slogan, “Invest in Women: Accelerate Progress”, promotes the belief of the Women’s International Zionist Organisation (WIZO) in collective action, investment in women, and engaging in meaningful conversations to create better solutions. These themes epitomise WIZO’s ethos. Being the largest Women’s International Zionist Organisation in the world, we work tirelessly to advance the rights and well-being of women. WIZO doesn’t just invest in women, we also focus on men, youth, and babies. The current war has brought WIZO to the forefront once again as we continue to be one of the largest role players in rehabilitating Israel. The situation has taken an unbearable toll physically and mentally on the people of Israel. This is especially apparent for women who deal with caring for children and their homes while their spouses are away at war. Emotional-resilience programmes have been installed across WIZO’s educational institutions as a coping mechanism during these agonising times. These programmes aim to strengthen personal resilience and help individuals acquire the psychological survival skills to create deep connections with others. The after effects of this could continue into the future if they aren’t dealt with. Trauma counselling is a large part of WIZO’s mantra to attempt to restore and repair the health of those who need it most.

This column is paid for by WIZO SA

Arming themselves – Jews mark 7 October with tattoos >>Continued from page 10

or making snide comments,” she says. “However, they have also made random people come up to me and show their support for Israel or pull out their hidden chai or Magen David because as Jews, we’re scared for our lives. I’ve been told to get out of stores if I support Israel, and I’ve walked out of stores because they are anti-Israel. I avoid areas that are pro-Hamas, as we don’t know what they are capable of doing.” Yet Livingstone refuses to be silenced. “I wear all my tattoos with love. I’m proud to be called Jewish and to have lived in Israel. My life has stood still since 7 October, and my tattoos are a reminder that we’ll survive this war.” Tattoo artist, Mandi Bradshaw, the founder of Jane Doe Ink, says that although getting a tattoo can be

painful, it can also be highly therapeutic. “Very often, physical pain can counteract emotional pain, creating a healing experience,” she says. This notion of tattoos as therapy has frequently been mentioned by those who say they have got commemorative tattoos in the wake of the massacre. “Since 7 October, we’ve had a lot more Jewish customers coming in to get tattooed with Hebrew script most commonly as well as with Magen Davids and Israeli flags,” says Bradshaw. “Whether the tattoo or message is directly related to that date or is just a Jewish-related tattoo is unclear. But we do talk about the meaning, and most of our clients say that they want to show their Judaism.”



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THEATRE ON THE SQUARE

Holocaust survivor caught in anti-Israel propaganda

LEE TANKLE

Don Krausz, a 93-year-old Holocaust survivor, and the chairperson of the Johannesburg chapter of the South African Holocaust Survivors Association, has been made a pawn of the social media war against Israel.

A quote of his was used on an Instagram page called @Israelscrimes, with which BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) South Africa and Africa4Palestine are associated.

The Israel haters quoted him as having said, “The Jew in South Africa sided with the Afrikaners, not so much out of sympathy, but out of fear against the blacks. I came to this country in 1946, and all you could hear from Jews was ‘the blacks this and the blacks that’. And I said to them, ‘You know, I’ve heard exactly the same from the Nazis about you.’”

Krausz, who was deported to concentration camps with his family when he was only 12, and who spent two and a half years in four concentration camps including Ravensbrück and Sachsenhausen, denies ever supporting apartheid.

“I have never said a word in favour of apartheid, and even if I had thought things in support of apartheid, remembering the two and a half years I spent in concentration camps would have changed my mind quickly,” Krausz told the *SA Jewish Report*.

The quote was used to show that South African Jews are racists, as it says that Jews are always talking about “the blacks”, and sided with the Afrikaner because Jews were scared of black people.

However, upon closer look at the

statement, Krausz makes a plea to end all discrimination, pointing out that the statements made are ones that the Nazis once made about Jews and that Jews shouldn’t think that way, otherwise we aren’t so different from those who have tried to destroy the Jewish people.

Krausz is irked that an Israeli-hating, antisemitic organisation is using him in its social media campaigns.

The Instagram post, titled “Israel’s relationship with apartheid South Africa”, was put up on 23 January, with Africa4Palestine and BDS SA tagged. The caption of the post reads, “Israel was founded in 1948. At the same time, the apartheid regime in South Africa started. Read about the symbiotic, tight, and sometimes hypocritical relationship between Israel and the apartheid government. It covers sentiments, propaganda, military, weapons, and nuclear-weapon development.”

The post implies that apartheid South Africa was spurred on by Israel, and claims that Israel implements similar apartheid policies to this day.

It includes statements that after Israel’s establishment, the Jews of South Africa became the largest per capita contributor to Israel, and shows that South Africa and Israel had a strong trade relationship in

the 1960s. However, it also states that many of Israel’s early leaders were opposed to the apartheid ideology and in fact, in October 1962 at the United Nations General Assembly, Israel voted in favour of the landmark Resolution 1761, which strongly condemned apartheid and called for voluntary sanctions against South Africa, a point which the author of the post chooses not to focus on.

Krausz spent more than four years in Israel, two and a half years of which were spent drilling for oil in areas near Kibbutz Be’eri, one of the main locations of the catastrophe on 7 October, when Israel was invaded by Hamas. “I was shocked [on hearing about the start of the war and the massacre on 7 October],” he said. “I’m familiar with the places devastated by the events of 7 October, and I have fond memories there. It’s absolutely devastating.”

Krausz, born to a Hungarian father and an English mother, was raised in a traditionally Jewish, Zionist household in Rotterdam, the Netherlands.

In September 1942, when Krausz was only 12, he was taken along with his family and many other Jews in his community to the death camps. He was deported to Westerbork concentration camp in the Dutch countryside. Krausz, his mother,

and sister were then transported to Ravensbrück, while his father would be killed in Buchenwald.

When he was 14, Krausz was separated from his mother and sister and moved to the men’s camp at Ravensbrück. Krausz was then transported to Sachsenhausen, where his job was to remove the corpses of people killed at the camp.

“In my two and a half years in the concentration camps, I saw people get shot and killed in front of me, and I saw people being tortured,” Krausz said, “at Sachsenhausen, I had to remove the corpses in the camp. These scenes are with me every night when I go to sleep.”

Krausz would complete a 14-day death march before being freed by the Russians in May 1945. He ultimately survived four camps, and lost 24 family members.

Krausz believes the South African government’s allegations at the International Court of Justice of Israel committing genocide against the Palestinian people is “nonsense”.

“[The rise of antisemitism in the wake of the war in Israel] is frightening. Considering what we know about the Holocaust, and knowing that there are people who are calling for another Holocaust, it shows that people haven’t learned anything,” he said.

“The SS [Schutzstaffel] in the camps saw it as a privilege to kill Jewish men, women, and children because they were told that the Jews were a pestilence. And yes, there are people today that still think that way. If the Holocaust didn’t make them change their minds, then nothing is going to change,” he said.



Don Krausz

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No parking until hostages return

Highly coveted parking spots just became that much harder to find in the Yeshiva College parking lot, as one of the bays has been marked “reserved” until the hostages captured by Hamas are returned. The sign and related floor markings indicate that the bay will be reserved until the hostages are returned, providing a constant reminder of their plight to those at school.



The Yeshiva College parking lot

Showing appreciation on ‘extra day’

King David Sandton students used 29 February, the “extra day” that comes around only every four years, to do good. In line with the school’s recently launched “It’s Cool To Be Kind” initiative, students made cards and wrote letters of thanks and appreciation to the school’s non-teaching staff. Front office staff, security guards, ground staff, and cleaners received cards and letters and felt a sense of belonging to the school community.



Skylla Woolf, Reneilwe Gift Makhubedu, and Edith Magonono

My Family Story project makes history real for students

King David Primary School Linksfield Grade 7 students recently participated in Israel’s international ANU Museum of the Jewish People’s “My Family Story” project. The children and their families embarked on a journey of discovery of their roots and presented their findings in a creative display of history and art. Children, parents, and grandparents gathered to celebrate the exceptional works of art which embody rich history, deep values, and messages of hope.



Zac Lurie’s My Family Story project

UJW donates Australian books to PE schools

The Union of Jewish Women’s (UJW) Port Elizabeth branch recently received 50 cartons of books from Australian Books for Children of Africa (ABCA) in Australia. The almost-new books, in superb condition, were given to the least resourced primary and high schools in Port Elizabeth (Gqeberha), as well as to various charities. UJW Port Elizabeth has been getting these books from ABCA for around the last decade.



Walmer Junior Primary School students with their new books

Letters

CELEBRATE FEMALE SOLDIERS AND BE THE VOICE OF CAPTIVES

As we approach International Women’s Day, it’s important for women to recognise and celebrate the invaluable contributions of women soldiers in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) who have dedicated themselves to defending their home while yearning for peace in the region.

The role of women soldiers in the IDF is significant also for representing the strides Israel has made towards gender equality in the armed forces. These brave women who serve on the front lines, fly fighter jets and rescue helicopters, demonstrate unwavering courage and commitment to safeguarding Israel’s security and protecting its citizens. Their dedication and sacrifice exemplify the strength and resilience of women in the face of terrible adversity.

However, amidst this celebration, it’s crucial to shed light on the harrowing reality faced by women hostages held in Gaza. These women endure unimaginable suffering, subjected to captivity, sexual abuse, and exploitation. Their basic human rights are being violated, and their voices silenced under the oppressive regime of Hamas. Our hostages aren’t part of history, they are our present, and they need our voice!

On this International Women’s Day, let us stand in solidarity with the courageous women soldiers of the IDF, and advocate for the release of all hostages, especially the 14 women and children held captive in Gaza. It’s incumbent upon the international community to condemn such violations of human and women’s rights, and work towards ensuring the safe return of these women to their families and loved ones.

As we celebrate the achievements and contributions of women worldwide, let us also remember those who continue to suffer in silence. Let us amplify their voices, and demand justice and freedom for all women regardless of their circumstances or background.

As a Jewish woman, I’ll be a voice for all our women that cannot use their voices right now. We cannot let their silent cries go unheard. Let us be their voice, not only today but every day.

– Dena Pantanowitz, Johannesburg

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