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Volume 27 - Number 15 ■ 16 May 2024 ■ 8 Iyar 5784

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Hamas and allies intensify hate at Sandton conference

NICOLA MILTZ

An international who's who of anti-Israel activists, including Hamas leaders, gathered in Sandton at the weekend calling for the complete isolation, dismantling, and eradication of the Jewish state.

The conference, which had the endorsement of the South African government, took place while Jews worldwide commemorated Israel's fallen soldiers and victims of terror and celebrated Israel's independence.

The Global Anti-Apartheid Conference on Palestine at the Sandton Convention Centre took place from Friday to Sunday last week (10 to 12 May). Its aim was to work "towards a global movement to dismantle Israel's settler colonialism and apartheid". It also aimed to "set the basis for the mobilisation of a global anti-apartheid movement to hold Israel accountable for its crimes against the Palestinian people and to work to dismantle" the state.

It brought together recognised activists from several countries to strategise about the destruction of Israel, and was intentionally reminiscent of the antisemitic and deeply hurtful United Nations World Conference Against Racism in Durban in 2001.

Rowan Polovin, the national chairperson of the South African Zionist Federation said, "This was on a new level, where activists elevated the blood libel from apartheid to genocide. It was a glorification of Hamas and its unspeakable atrocities. There has been a concerted strategy to normalise and legitimise Hamas on the international stage."

Wendy Kahn, the national director of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, said "every rogue participant" was present.

"It was an orchestrated campaign of hate to conspire on how to decimate the Jewish state," she said. "What's so bitterly disgraceful is the centrality of our own government in this display."

Delegates to the conference came from countries that included Brazil, Canada, Germany, India, Sri Lanka, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

South Africa, which unlike many other countries, hasn't designated Hamas a terrorist organisation, provided the ideal stage for attacks on the legitimacy of the state of Israel.

that Palestine is having our South African anti-apartheid moment."

Pandor told delegates on 10 May, "As oppressed South Africans, we experienced first-hand the effects of racial inequality and discrimination, and we identify fully with the struggle for freedom and self-determination in Palestine."

She said the meeting was "rightly hosted in South Africa as a launch pad to consolidate international efforts to bring down apartheid Israel. On a governmental and political level, we would suggest that the conference, as a matter of priority, consider a role for frontline states, just as the liberation movements in South Africa did in our struggle for freedom and democracy."

Struggle veterans and supporters of the BDS movement, Frank Chikane and South Africa's former Intelligence Minister Ronnie Kasrils, also addressed delegates.

Kasrils told attendees, "There's no need to pussyfoot about the rights of the Palestinians to resist with arms."

He also said, "When we talk about 'the river to the sea', we've got to break Zionist Israel," and that the Jewish state had nuclear bombs, that "these madmen will let loose nuclear bombs".

He also added that, "It's been proved, what they were claiming about beheaded babies and the mass rape of women is absolute hasbara and lies."

Hamas members Emad Saber and Basem Naim also attended the conference.

Said Naim, "In spite of this image of Israel as this superpower of the region and with the support of all superpowers, it wasn't able, after seven months, to defeat this resistance in spite of its limited resources and space of movement."

"Therefore we believe we're on the right way, and 7 October will be a turning point in the history of this struggle for the Palestinians and maybe a turning point in the history of humankind."

The delegates adopted the "Johannesburg Declaration

Continued on page 3>>

From pain to hope



Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

Emmet and Caleb Danilewitz walk through the hostage display at Yom Ha'atzmaut in Johannesburg this week
See more on pages 5, 7, 8, 9, and 10.

International Relations Minister Dr Naledi Pandor opened the conference (See story on page 3).

"Pandor's continued support for Hamas through her unceasing attempts to attach the term "genocide" to Israel, is indicative that she's not serving the interests of the South African population but has become an active agent in the war of terror against Israel and the Jewish people," said Kahn.

Speakers included some of the most recognised anti-Israel antagonists, including Mustafa Barghouti, the general secretary of the Palestinian National Initiative party and a leader of the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) coalition; Zaher Birawi, a senior Hamas official living in the United Kingdom; and Ali Abunimah, the founder of the anti-Israel Electronic Intifada website.

Controversial Palestinian-American political activist Linda Sarsour told media at the conference, "I do feel



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Global vote brings Israel to Eurovision final

In spite of steep backlash including protests from other competitors, Israel's Eden Golan placed fifth in the Eurovision Song Contest on Saturday, 11 May, after delivering a rousing final performance of her song Hurricane.

The competition's winner is determined by a complex system in which juries for each participating country allocate half of all votes, while the public contributes the other half. Golan's success, which exceeded expectations set in betting markets before the competition, was fuelled by the popular vote, which Israel won in 14 countries plus a new category for voters not located in any of the participating countries. Israel didn't win any country's jury vote.

Golan's strength in the popular vote was in contrast to the intense protests against her and Israel's participation in the song contest amid the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza. Tens of thousands of people protested in the streets of Malmö, Sweden, during the competition held there, and Golan was reportedly advised to remain in her hotel room under the protection of security.

The tensions crept into the competition as well. During a rehearsal, a Finnish representative seemingly refused to say that her country had awarded points to Israel, while Ireland's Bambie Thug, another contestant, said she had "cried" after Golan made the final, and would have boycotted had she herself not been performing. A journalist asked Golan at a press conference whether she felt that "by being here you bring risk and danger for other participants" and she drew cheers after responding that the contest was "safe for everyone".

Iolande, representing Portugal, wore fingernails decorated with patterns suggesting Palestinian solidarity in the final in spite of rules set by the European Broadcasting Union prohibiting political speech during Eurovision. Earlier, a contestant drew a reprimand for wearing a keffiyeh.

Golan returned to Israel last Sunday, ahead of its memorial day. "I felt the love from the people, and you cannot understand how much it helped me," she told a press conference. "I represented the country and was our voice for everyone who needs to be brought home now."



Seinfeld keeps sense of humour at Duke

As the president of Duke University in the United States (US) introduced the commencement speaker, two cries rang out: first, loud boos, and then, a joyous chant of "Jerry! Jerry!"

Dozens of graduates, some carrying Palestinian flags, walked out of the ceremony to protest Jerry Seinfeld, who has been outspoken in his support for Israel since 7 October, the beginning of the war that has ignited anti-Israel protests on college campuses across the US. With Seinfeld at his side, Duke President Vincent Price paused his introduction for nearly a minute for the commotion to settle down.

It was an example of the type of disruption that has punctuated graduation ceremonies in the US this spring amid the protest movement, which has caused some schools to cancel or revamp their commencements. Seinfeld delivered his address as planned, to raucous applause. Still, the protest was detectable, and made more pointed because the students appeared to be protesting Seinfeld himself, not, as at other schools, their university.

"No room for celebration when your school brings a Zionist, pro-genocide commencement speaker," one wrote on social media, according to a post shared widely and disparagingly by a pro-Israel user.

Seinfeld, who has never made politics a centrepiece of his celebrity, has emerged as an unexpected pro-Israel advocate in the wake of 7 October. Seinfeld visited Israel in December, including visits to families of hostages held in Gaza. The visit elicited a sharp backlash, including heckling by pro-Palestinian protesters when he attended a speech in New York City by Bari Weiss, the editor of The Free Press and a long-time crusader against antisemitism and anti-Zionism, in February.

When *GQ* magazine asked him last month why he chose to make the trip to Israel, Seinfeld answered, "Well, I'm Jewish." He also acknowledged the backlash, saying, "Every Jewish person I know was surprised by how hostile the reaction was."

But Seinfeld told *GQ* he didn't view himself as a crusader when it came to Israel, as some celebrities have become over the last seven months. "I don't preach about it," he said.

Seinfeld didn't mention Israel during his speech, and he mentioned his Jewish identity only when exhorting graduates not to be ashamed of the advantages they possess, including a Duke degree.

"Privilege is a word that has taken quite a beating. I would like to take a moment to defend it," he said. "I say, use your privilege. I grew up a Jewish boy from New York. That's a privilege, if you want to be a comedian."



Photo: Jessica Gow - TT & TT News Agency - AFP via Getty Images

Israeli singer Eden Golan at Eurovision 2024

Rabbi Akiva's happy legacy

Torah Thought



**Rabbi Hillel Bernstein
Milnerton Hebrew
Congregation**

Rabbi Akiva is the hero of the Omer, read at this time of year between Pesach and Shavuot. After suffering hardships

and setbacks, he kept on pushing to achieve success.

Rabbi Akiva, who began studying Hebrew at the "young" age of 40, lived in 70CE, at the time of the destruction of the second temple. At that time, an enormous number of Jews were massacred, sold as slaves, and sent into exile by the Roman legions.

Rabbi Akiva studied with dedication for 24 years, and produced a mighty Torah educational system with 24 000 students! However in the short span of time between Pesach and Shavuot, his 24 000 students died from a plague.

How could he continue after such a massive blow?

He didn't despair, and began a new yeshiva with five students. The Torah traditions that we have today are the teachings of those five students.

How did he do it? Where did he find the strength and motivation to persevere after such devastation?

I heard from my rosh yeshiva, Rabbi Azriel Chayim Goldfein, of blessed memory, that the secret to Rabbi Akiva's positivity lay in his own teachings found in Pirkei Avot, the Ethics of our Fathers.

In chapter three, *mishna* 18, Rabbi Akiva tells us why we should always be happy, saying we should focus on three principles:

First, all of mankind is beloved by Hashem. All of mankind has been given a *tzelem elokim* (likeness to Hashem). All humans have a soul which is a part of Hashem, and have been endowed with supernatural creative abilities. We must use our spiritual gifts and

respect all humans.

Second, Hashem chose to express in the Torah that the Jewish people are His children. This great expression of love for us teaches us that we have a unique relationship with G-d Almighty. No matter how low we've sunk or how challenging life is, we should know that we have a loving father in heaven who is always available for us to turn to.

Third, the Torah we've been blessed with is the tool that Hashem used to design the world. This is powerful. It means that if we use that "tool" correctly, we have the ability to redesign ourselves

and the world around us in a good and positive way.

Being aware of these three great gifts that every Jewish person possesses gives tremendous motivation and strength to move forward, even when things are challenging. This is a secret to Rabbi Akiva's constantly positive attitude.

As we continue to pray for Hashem to bless the Jewish people with kindness and compassion, let's take strength and inspiration from the life of one of our greatest leaders, Rabbi Akiva, to uplift and guide us in navigating through the challenging times we're experiencing.

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The period of the counting of the Omer is considered to be a time of potential for inner growth. It's for a person to work on their good characteristics (*middot*) through reflection and development of one aspect each day for the 49 days of the counting.

*Israel is one hour ahead of South Africa

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Design and layout Bryan Maron/Design Bandits – bryan@designbandits.co.za • Distribution Sandy Furman • Subscriptions Avusa Publishing (Pty) Ltd
Tel: 0860 525 200 • Advertisements and editorial copy do not necessarily reflect the views of the editor, staff and board of directors. Tel: 011 430 1980.



Jewish protesters harassed at anti-Israel conference

TALI FEINBERG

Peaceful Jewish protesters were harassed and forcibly removed from outside the Sandton Convention Centre on 10 May, as they criticised Minister of International Relations and Cooperation Dr Naledi Pandor for endorsing encampments at universities in the United States (US) and South Africa.

Pandor was the keynote speaker at the "Global Anti-Apartheid Conference on Israel" at the convention centre, and the protesters, from the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) and South African Union of Jewish Students (SAUJS), chose to emphasise that there was "no place for Jew hate" as she gave her address.

Speaking at the Shireen Abu Akleh Memorial Lecture at the University of Johannesburg (UJ) on 8 May, Pandor said, "The student encampment at Columbia University has inspired students worldwide. We hope that this unprecedented activism by students in the US will spur greater activism among student movements here in South Africa, and spur more vocal support from our university administrators, some of whom have remained silent."

On 10 May, Pandor visited the University of Cape Town, where she expressed a similar sentiment, saying, "There's no struggle in the world which is won by observation. You support a struggle by being active. You don't have to be in the trenches, but you must do something. That's what I hope the students of South Africa will show the world - that we too can do something." While she spoke, students hoisted a sign with pictures of terrorist leaders, saying, "South Africa stands with the resistance. From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free."

"It's beyond belief that a government minister would encourage the kind of anarchistic displays that are being seen on American campuses, and that she would wilfully put students at risk by trying to import the hate and aggression that are plaguing universities in the US," says SAJBD National Director Wendy Kahn.

"We know in South Africa that our campuses are tinderboxes," she says. "Pandor put diplomats at risk when she recently called for protests outside embassies in South Africa, and now she's endangering students. It's highly irresponsible, especially in the weeks preceding university exams."

SAUJS National Chairperson Shmuel Krengel says, "SAUJS is appalled by the blatant antisemitism of Pandor's actions. Once again, she's proven that there's no mask, and she's shown her full colours in the sense that her sole objective is to make campus unwelcome to Jewish students."

"But more than that, it's so incredibly harmful to the students who are trying their best to get a university education and to lift their families and communities out of poverty, and who have real problems of their own. There hasn't been water and electricity at Wits [University of the Witwatersrand] residences for the past week and a half, students have been struggling to feed themselves, and we just donated 7 000 meals. Pandor is using students as a tool for her personal vendetta, and shutting down the opportunity for 40 000 students to get an education."

South African Zionist Federation National Chairperson



Protesting outside the anti-Israel conference in Sandton

Photo: Neil McCartney

Rowan Polovin says, "Pandor's inflammatory, antisemitic, and factually inaccurate speech at UJ was a reckless endorsement of anti-Israel protests on South African university campuses. History has shown that these protests invariably devolve into antisemitic hate-fests, violating the dignity and constitutional rights of Jewish students and academics. By encouraging such aggression, Pandor, a sitting South African minister, is effectively sanctioning antisemitism and undermining the autonomy of universities."

"Pandor's criticism of university administrators who oppose these dangerous protests is a further indication of her disregard for the safety and well-being of Jewish students and academics," says Polovin. "Her actions are a blatant abuse of power and a betrayal of her responsibility to promote peace and equality for all South Africans. Had the ANC [African National Congress] government the moral fortitude to do so, it would criticise Pandor's statements and reaffirm its commitment to protecting the rights of all its citizens, including the Jewish community."

Dr Glen Segell, visiting professor and research fellow at the University of the Free State and a research fellow at the Ezri Center for Iran & Gulf States Research at the University of Haifa, notes the irony that "Pandor, when minister of education in 2008, urged students 'to take their studies seriously and focus on them and nothing else'. She didn't deviate from this for more than a decade, adamant in 2019 that 'we don't allow any person [student] to hijack legitimate protest for political mischief'."

"This caustic mix of politics and education by ANC elites isn't a result of the Gaza War or the forthcoming South African elections," says Segell. "It's indicative of South Africa as a country, with serious problems of racism and violence, which is the reason, in 2015, that Blade Nzimande, the current minister of higher education, science, and innovation, was denied a visa to Israel, having at the time incited the South African police to attack migrants from neighbouring African countries."

At the "Global Anti-Apartheid Conference on Israel", Pandor made radical statements about Israel, calling to "end the apartheid system, which is worse than what

we experienced in our country", and supporting armed struggle, saying the Palestinians should resist through "mass mobilisation; armed operations; underground organisation [and] international solidarity work".

"The Nakba involved a combination of mass murder and the forced displacement of hundreds of thousands of native Palestinians by Zionist militias to replace them with Jewish immigrants and create what's known today as the state of Israel," she said. "Now, we're witnessing 'Nakba Two' in Gaza." She expressed similar sentiments in her address at UJ.

"Pandor's comments are objectionable, devious, and disingenuous," says analyst Adam Charnas. "On

multiple occasions, the minister has indicated that Israel is undertaking a 'genocide', knowingly misrepresenting the findings of the International Court of Justice. The minister and the entire ANC government have no interest in the realities of the situation, but merely seek to besmirch the Israeli people with the genocide smear."

Kahn says that during the SAJBD and SAUJS protest, "It was clear that the delegates attending the conference objected to the presence of Jews on the streets of Joburg, and did what they could to intimidate them. Not content with hurling abuse, showing zap signs, they came into our space, and physically pulled posters out of one of our protester's hands, spat in her face, and told her to 'f**k off'. The police were compliant with the aggressors, and physically relocated the protesters."

The peaceful demonstration was limited to 15 people, thus was in the legal parameters for a public gathering. "Our Constitution states that South Africa belongs to all who live in it," says Kahn. "The removal of peaceful Jewish protesters to ensure that anti-Israel conference attendees aren't offended is a perversion of justice, and leads to further questions as to whether our government is doing the bidding of belligerent foreign powers, and whether South African Jews are unwelcome. This was a tangible example of exactly that. We once again call on our government to stop allowing hatred against Jews in this country."

"We insisted on our right to continue the protest, in spite of the police physically moving us," Kahn says. "I want to express how proud I was of the SAJBD and SAUJS protesters, who stood up to the aggression of those provocateurs, refusing to cower to their violent intimidation."

Hamas and allies intensify hate at Sandton Conference

>>Continued from page 1

on Israel's Settler-Colonialism, Apartheid and Genocide: Towards a Global Anti-Apartheid Movement for Palestine."

It accuses Israel of an ongoing campaign of genocide, using sexual violence and starvation as weapons of war, of deliberately murdering children, causing a reproductive genocide, and accuses Western allies of enabling the continuation of the ongoing *nakba* (catastrophe).

Susan Heller Pinto, the vice-president of international policy at the Anti-Defamation League, the world's leading organisation on antisemitism, said the declaration's call to action, which fundamentally is about the eradication of the Jewish state and doubles down on calls for boycott, divestment, and sanctions "should be called out".

While the language and rhetoric of the declaration was "shocking", it wasn't new and was being seen "more and more". However, any fair-minded person who read this Johannesburg declaration would see immediately that there were numerous "outrageous things that should jump out".

"[The massacre of] 7 October is never mentioned. Hamas atrocities are never mentioned. The entire focus of the document is the delegitimisation of Israel and Zionism from Israel's very creation. The coded

conspiracy theories and allegations against Israel from deliberate acts of sexual violence to starvation to mass graves to reproductive genocide, the coded language about Israel's powerful militarised Western allies is unfortunately language we've seen before, but it's no less shocking and doesn't make it any less outrageous to see it in the context of 7 October and the Israel/Hamas war," Heller Pinto said.

Polovin said the conference was a continuation of the "vile antisemitic hatred" on display at the United Nations' notorious 2001 World Conference Against Racism in Durban, which launched the global antisemitic BDS movement."

Dr Dan Diker, the president of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs and former secretary of the World Jewish Congress, said the conference was a "national disgrace". "Nelson Mandela would be turning in his grave at what has become of his beloved country, as South Africa and the government supports Hamas's monstrous acts in the name of racial justice and Palestinian rights. Has South Africa lost its soul? Israel is the true rainbow nation."

On Friday, South Africa filed another emergency request at the International Court of Justice calling for additional provisional measures against Israel over its military campaign in Rafah.

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Bid to ban Israel from Olympics litters highways

STEVEN GRUZD

Johannesburg drivers have been confronted by multiple billboards calling for Israel to be banned from the Paris Olympic Games, which begins on 26 July this year. The anonymous boards have appeared in at least three places on the M1 and N3 highways, and possibly other locations. At least one has already been taken down.

The boards form part of a global campaign to kick Israel out of international sport, attempting to mimic the successful sporting bans on apartheid South Africa that started in the 1960s.

The SA Jewish Report spoke to an outdoor advertising expert, who asked not to be named for his own safety. He confirmed that the billboard sites belong to a Rosebank-based company called Black Media Outdoor. Established in 2014, it owns 63 outdoor sites. Its founder and chief executive is Yaeesh Sidat. The expert said Black Media Outdoor wasn't obligated to reveal client details, and alleged that the company may have run these adverts for free. He also said some of its outdoor sites could potentially be illegal unless they received approval from the City of Johannesburg's development planning department. The city has announced a crackdown on non-registered sites, but wasn't able to confirm whether these particular boards were legal or not.

The expert also said complaints against "controversial opinion" falls out of the advertising regulator's jurisdiction, and should be directed at the South African Human Rights Commission.

This isn't the first time that outdoor media have been used to push the anti-Israel cause around Johannesburg. For years, billboards have been erected to castigate or demonise Israel, often to be countered by pro-Israel boards in the same vicinity.

Black Media Outdoor proudly displays a billboard on its website linking Nelson Mandela to Iran for Al Quds Day, and includes the logo of the virulently anti-Israel Africa4Palestine group, among others. It ran on the R21 highway near Olifantsfontein, and on the R21 in Jet Park. The company's website lists the R21 highway at Emperor's Palace having a monthly rate of R65 000, with R9 720 for printing and R5 670 for "flighting". So three sites would have been worth a minimum of R240 000 per month.

And in February 2024, the SA Jewish Report ran a story about a billboard in Mayfair with the slogan "Israeled (verb) – taking something that isn't yours, and then shamelessly pretending it belongs to you while playing the victim."

The Olympic-ban boards feature a red triangle, which has become a symbol of Palestinian resistance to Israel. The design also has the five interlocking ring Olympic logo, with the red circle enclosing an Israeli flag with a red diagonal stripe over it. When contacted about whether this was copyright infringement and defacing the Olympic logo, the South African Sports Confederation and Olympic Committee's Jessica Choga said, "Unfortunately, it's not within our place to comment on this matter as it falls under the jurisdiction of the International Olympic Committee (IOC)."

South African Zionist Federation Chairperson Rowan Polovin said, "We find this message misguided, offensive, and contrary to the principles of international

sport and the Olympic spirit. Israel is a democratic nation with the inherent right to participate in global events like any other country in the community of nations. The Olympics were founded on the ideals of unity, friendship, and peaceful competition among nations. Singling out and excluding Israel undermines these very principles, and serves only to further divide rather than foster understanding. We also believe that this anti-Israel sentiment isn't representative of the views held by the majority of South Africans."

On 20 February 2024, an article appeared on the international BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions coalition) website, titled "No Olympics as usual. Join the campaign to #BanIsrael". It claimed that "more than 300 Palestinian sports teams are calling to ban Israel from the Olympics over its genocide against Palestinians in Gaza". It's a call to action for people around the world to put pressure on the IOC and its local sports bodies "to peacefully disrupt the road to Paris 2024".

Among the actions recommended by BDS are: protests at Olympic offices and national and international sports federations; disruptions and awareness-raising at Olympic qualifiers and events; and holding accountable governments that have signed the International Convention against Apartheid in Sports to get Israel expelled from sporting bodies and events. It also has a petition to ban Israel from international sport linked to social media campaigns.

Also in February 2024, 26 left-wing French parliamentarians called for Israeli athletes to be treated like those from Belarus and Russia, who must compete without their flag, anthem, and national colours, due to the war on Ukraine.

The campaign appears to have had little traction so far. In March 2024, IOC President Thomas Bach made it clear that there was no issue with Israel's participating at the 2024 Summer Olympics, and cautioned athletes against boycotts and discrimination.

Pierre-Olivier Beckers-Vieujant, the head of the IOC's Paris 2024 Coordination Committee told AFP, "The reasons that led the IOC to sanction first Russia and then the Russian Olympic Committee (ROC) are very specific. Russia and more recently the ROC have

undermined essential parts of the Olympic Charter. That's not the case with the Palestinian Olympic Committee or the Israeli Olympic Committee."

Israel plans to send 60 athletes to Paris in 11 sporting disciplines. Yael Arad, the president of the Olympic Committee of Israel, has stated that Israeli athletes would "100%" be present, with requisite safety measures in place.

Sport is seen as an easy target for Israel haters. This campaign follows an Israeli rugby team having its invitation to play in a South African competition rescinded; and Jewish teenager David Teeger being stripped of the captaincy of the U19 cricket team for publicly supporting the Israel Defense Forces. How all of this helps the Palestinians is unclear.

The SA Jewish Report put 10 questions to Sidat, but received no reply by the time of going to press.



A billboard on the M1 highway in Johannesburg

Photo: Ian Ossendryver

Daniel Perez's heroism immortalised in song gone viral



SAUL KAMIONSKY

As we commemorated Yom Hazikaron this week, a song in honour of a 22-year-old Johannesburg-born soldier murdered by Hamas touched hearts across the globe.

The memory of Captain Daniel Perez, an Israel Defense Forces (IDF) soldier who was tragically abducted and killed by Hamas on 7 October while defending his country, continues to live on through the song, *A Hero*. The roots of the song, created by his cousin, Elchanan Perez, and musician Elad Engler go back to 7 October.

Daniel, the son of South African-born Rabbi Doron Perez, the head of World Mizrahi, attended Yeshiva College in Johannesburg before making aliya from South Africa 10 years ago.

Elchanan, whose side of the family originates in Morocco, recalled the turmoil after 7 October. "We didn't know what was going on with Daniel. Was he missing, kidnapped, hurt? It was a lot for his family, for me, for my family. All my family worried about Daniel and his fate for the next 163 days, and were fighting for his safe return."

He created an Instagram account titled, "Good deeds for Daniel's safe return", through which people around the world sent wishes for Daniel's safe return.

"I also told my friends about Daniel, how I was coping, and how the family was coping when they asked," said Elchanan, whose own brother has been on duty as a soldier in Gaza for about 160 days. "I have a good friend, a musician, and one day, I suggested, 'Why don't we sit down and write a song in the hope of Daniel's return? When he comes back home, he'll hear the song.'"

Unfortunately, before they could start writing it, they received the tragic news that Daniel was killed on 7 October. They put the song aside "because it was a tough time", Elchanan says. "I wasn't thinking about the song."

"A week or two ago, we sat down, and wrote an amazing song with great words. The support that Daniel's family got from friends, strangers, and family was amazing. The song tells Daniel's story, of his bravery, and the courage he had on that day. To all who knew Daniel, it's a great, emotional song. People have heard the song around the world because of the Instagram account."

Elchanan says the song is special because of "how it explains the story of a hero, and it's close to Daniel's story. What's unique is it's for Daniel, for his memory. It does tell the story of others, but the song is for Daniel."

The lyrics convey a deep sense of longing, loss, and love for someone who has passed away, possibly in a war or conflict setting.

Although the song uses the words "I" and "you", it doesn't represent how Elchanan talked to Daniel. "We had a very different way of speaking to each other," he says.

The song begins with a soldier's promise to stay alive in the battlefield. It describes the scene of the battlefield and the reactions and words of the soldier. It speaks of his mom waiting and crying, him being missed and being remembered as a hero. It marvels at Daniel's desire to guard his country and leave behind everything important to him. The song ends with Elchanan assuring Daniel not to worry. He'll take care of himself and his mom.

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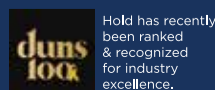
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Continued on page 15>>

Popplewell's family hopeful as death unconfirmed

NICOLA MILTZ

South African born grandmother and former Hamas hostage Channah Peri clings to hope that her son, Nadav Popplewell, is still alive, in spite of Hamas declaring him dead last weekend.

Popplewell, 51, a British-Israeli citizen was abducted with Peri, 79, at Kibbutz Nirim in southern Israel on 7 October when Hamas terrorists crossed the border fence and launched murderous attacks.

Peri who was born Denise Adele Levy in Johannesburg, but grew up in parts of the Cape, was released last November during a temporary ceasefire agreed between Hamas and Israel, leaving her son behind. She was unaware that her other son, Roi, 54, who lived nearby, had been murdered by Hamas near their home during the attack. Roi was buried while Peri was in captivity.



Screenshot from a video of Nadav Popplewell released by Hamas

In it, Popplewell can be seen with a heavily bruised right eye, saying his name under duress.

The footage is superimposed with text in Arabic and Hebrew that reads, "Time is running out. Your government is lying."

The Israeli military didn't comment on the latest video or Hamas's statement, and hasn't published or confirmed information about whether Popplewell is alive or dead.

Popplewell's sister, Ayelet Svatitzky, told the *SA Jewish Report*, "The video doesn't change our mission. We'll keep fighting for my brother's release."

She and her mother have been on an emotional roller-coaster this week as Israel commemorated Yom Hashoah (Holocaust Memorial Day) followed by Yom Hazikaron, the memorial day for fallen soldiers and victims of terror.

Popplewell was born in the town of Wakefield in Yorkshire, but lived in Israel for at least two decades.

Adam Rose and Adam Wagner, part of the legal team acting pro bono for British-linked families of hostages since 7 October both issued statements on Sunday, 12 May.

"It was announced yesterday that one of our clients had died," Rose said. "When I say that he died, what I mean is that after being taken as a hostage from his home in Israel on 7 October 2023, yesterday, Hamas announced Nadav Popplewell's death. We – Adam Wagner, Katy Colton, and I – have been working for him and

his family since October.

"We got to know him, and his brother, Roi, who was murdered by Hamas on 7 October, and his mother, Channah, who was released in exchange for prisoners in November, in ways and in circumstances we have never wanted to get to know a client.

"Nadav Popplewell is, or was, one of two British citizens

held hostage by Hamas. If the report is true – and at this time it remains unconfirmed by the United Kingdom Foreign Office and the Israeli authorities – he's the 16th British citizen murdered by Hamas since 7 October.

"His death would represent a total failure of leadership around the world to secure his release – of his own government, of those states intervening to try to get the hostages released, and of the terrorists of Hamas, who will be defeated."

Svatitzky told the newspaper last year how gunmen had attacked the kibbutz in southern Israel where they lived, killing her older brother.

On the day of the attack, Svatitzky said she received two pictures, sent by the attackers from her mother's phone, showing the pair sitting in her mother's living room, with the word "Hamas" written in English.

Hours later, a third picture was posted on her mother's Facebook account, showing them with an armed Hamas gunman in the corner.

Svatitzky said her mother was physically very weak upon her release, and continues to guard her privacy.

Wagner, a barrister, also issued a statement on Sunday, saying, "We've been acting for British-linked families of hostages since October. Some have been released, two have now died. We've become close to their families as they have experienced the extreme trauma of the uncertainty around the hostage situation, and the cruelty of Hamas – for example, in this case, as with Yossi Sharabi before, they revealed Nadav's death through a series of 'tease' videos like a reality TV series. One thing people don't necessarily realise is that many of the hostage families have also had family members murdered. They are experiencing double or triple traumas.

"After seven months, though I've never met Nadav, or Oded, or Eli, or Emily, I feel like I know them to an extent. I spoke about Oded to my synagogue just yesterday as it was his 84th birthday. And now we've lost another."



United Kingdom Foreign Secretary David Cameron told the BBC's *Sunday with Laura Kuenssberg* programme, "I can't give you any new updates this morning. Like everyone else, I watched the video on X last night, put out by Hamas, of Nadav answering a question as to who he was. You just think, what callous people they are to do that, to play with the family's emotions in that way!"

"I met Nadav's family, his sister, and I know the heartbreak they've been going through for more than 200 days, and when you see what Hamas is prepared to do, you realise the terrible, dreadful, inhuman people, frankly, that we're dealing with."

The video of Popplewell was the third such video Hamas has aired in recent weeks, following clips of other hostages like Hersh Goldberg-Polin, Keith Siegel, and Omri Miran that were released in late April.

In urging the Israeli government to act urgently to secure their release, the Hostages and Missing Families Forum stated that any sign of life from the captives was a distressing plea for action.

About 132 Israelis remain captive, having been held by Hamas for more than seven months.

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Unity Community Responsibility

Facts are harsh, but stick with them

Driving home on Monday, 13 May, after being at the Israeli embassy to commemorate the most distressing and heartbreaking Yom Hazikaron in my history, I heard a news bulletin on the radio that made me mad.

It was President Cyril – whom I now call “Brutus” because of his betrayal – Ramaphosa, going on about how angry he was about Israel still fighting and destroying Rafah in Gaza. The newsreader spoke about him being accompanied by Sinn Féin (Irish Republican Party) guests, and some other Israel-hating foreigners.

It was Yom Hazikaron, and they were oblivious to the fact that around the world, Jews were mourning the soldiers who died in defence of Israel and civilians killed in terrorist attacks. I guess, much like they have forgotten or chosen to ignore the massacre on 7 October 2023 in Israel.

How easy it must be to obliterate in their minds the devastation wrought in a country in which 1 200 people were brutally murdered, children burnt alive, women raped so violently their hips broke, and so it goes on. But to our government, or our president and his Iranian and Hamas cronies, this was irrelevant, and it left them cold.

However, the pain of hearing him go on about this after being at a commemoration of those who were killed was bad. I wanted to shout, but nobody was listening. I wanted to swear, but there would be no impact because those who can change things choose not to hear me.

This has been a tough week for us, the Jewish community here and around the world, but also one of intensified bonding with Israel and the Jewish world.

There’s deep irony in the fact that as the government was involved in an anti-Israel antisemitic hate fest at the Sandton Convention Centre, we were commemorating the fallen soldiers and those killed in terror attacks. As they build their hatred towards us and plan our downfall, we remember the pain of what that hatred has done to us.

But instead of cowering and hiding our lights under a bushel, we’re saying, “You’re wrong! We have every right to hold our heads up high as Jews and as those who support the only Jewish state in the world. We won’t cower. We’ll stand proud!”

While Ramaphosa and his henchmen continue their revolting rhetoric about Israel, they ignore the correction that the former president of the International Court of Justice (ICJ), Judge Joan Donoghue, has pointed out in the findings of the ICJ. They refuse to recognise the truth that the court didn’t say that genocide was plausible in Gaza, and so they go on as if it was.

They also ignore the fact that the United Nations (UN) has corrected the numbers of women and children who were killed in Gaza since 7 October to almost half of the number bandied about.

Now we – those of us who stick with the facts – are aware of how expert Hamas is at psychological torture and spreading fake information so that the world somehow believes it. Remember when it blamed Israel for bombing the Al-Ahli Arab Hospital, killing about 500 people in Gaza? Later, it was uncovered that it was a failed rocket launch from within Gaza by Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and it hit the hospital’s car park not the hospital. Our government ignored the truth, not to mention the number of deaths that didn’t happen. It still claims Israel is responsible.

This week, the UN quietly took the number of women and children claimed to have been killed by Israel and corrected it, effectively bringing back to life 11 000 people. The UN admits it over-estimated the number it received and accepted from Hamas. The recorded number bandied around of women killed by Israel was 9 500 and the real number given now was 4 959. As for Gazan children, the number thrown about in the world media was 14 500, but the UN’s new number is 7 797 children.

Now, I believe that any death is too many, and even the corrected numbers are huge and devastating. I also believe civilians should be protected from death in war, wherever possible. I do also believe that the Israel Defense Forces is doing everything in its power not to harm civilians. Hamas doesn’t make this easy, though, using women and children as human shields.

However, the vast difference in UN numbers is astonishing and proof positive of the lies being fed to the world by Hamas. Unfortunately, our government, like much of the world is picking up on what this terrorist organisation is saying, and passing it on as the truth.

Surely, just this information should be enough for intelligent people to do a double take, and question whether they are being lied to and used in this war of words. Somehow, this isn’t happening. Unfortunately, it boils down to how people feel about Jews and the Jewish state, not necessarily facts and who is or isn’t believable.

It’s astonishing that Hamas leaders are hanging around in Sandton as dignitaries. However, despite this, I still find it disconcerting that Israelis are afraid to come here, believing it is hugely dangerous being in South Africa (See page 13).

When I first heard this, I thought it was a joke, because we have a great life here in South Africa. Yes, we know the present government has made its feelings clear, but we still live in a democracy. Nobody is being lynched in the streets, Israeli or otherwise, no matter what International Relations Minister Dr Naledi Pandor, says. Having her spew vitriol is horrible, but it is what it is. For the most part, we live a wonderful life here among people who are good, and happy to live side by side with us.

We were free to celebrate Yom Ha’atzmaut and celebrate we certainly did. We celebrated the fact that we could hold our heads up high as Jews because we’re a part of a bigger world view.

Yes, we would like the war to be over, and in fact, if Moshiach came, it would be wonderful, but we carry on living a good life in this country no matter what the government feels towards us.

Shabbat Shalom!

Peta Krost
Editor



South Africans slam inability to vote in Israel

TALI FEINBERG

South Africans in Israel aren’t able to vote in the South African national election, with less than two weeks to go until 29 May.

“There are justifiable assumptions being made that the African National Congress (ANC) government is aware that dual national Israeli/South Africans would probably vote against the ANC,” said a knowledgeable source who spoke to the *SA Jewish Report* on condition of anonymity because of security risks.

The South African embassy in Ramat Gan, which would have been the obvious place to vote, has been closed since November 2023, when its staff were recalled, and the last South African ambassador to Israel was called home in 2018.

South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) Chairperson Rowan Polovin described the situation as “unconstitutional disenfranchisement of South African citizens in Israel who wish to vote in the upcoming elections.

“The ongoing closure of the South African embassy in Tel Aviv, which prevents these individuals from exercising their democratic rights, is a grave injustice that undermines the very principle of democracy,” Polovin said. “As we celebrate 30 years of democracy in South Africa, it’s disturbing to witness the government’s failure to ensure that all its citizens, regardless of their location, have the opportunity to participate in this landmark election.”



Voting in Israel during the 2019 South African general elections

Said Polovin, “Tel Aviv isn’t in a war situation, unlike Ukraine, where the ongoing conflict has understandably made it difficult to conduct voting procedures. There’s no valid reason for the South African government to deny its citizens in Israel the right to vote, and it appears that South Africa is deliberately discriminating against them. The SAZF has repeatedly reached out to the department of international relations and cooperation [Dirco], expressing our deep concern and dismay over this matter. We urge the government to take immediate action to rectify this unacceptable situation.”

South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) National Director Wendy Kahn said, “It’s regrettable that Dirco hasn’t provided a solution to assist South Africans in Israel to vote, as is their constitutional right. Since Dirco has found creative solutions to other issues that have arisen due to the temporary closure of the South African embassy, it’s puzzling why it’s unable to find one for the elections. Its ill-conceived suggestion that Jewish South Africans vote in Ramallah or Amman points to its disregard for the situation in the region.”

Travel expert Kim Kur notes that few South Africans in Israel registered to vote in the upcoming election, but even those few have a democratic right to vote, and every vote counts. “It was a predictable outcome that Dirco wouldn’t facilitate voting in Israel, even though it could easily have done so, utilising staff from Ramallah or the embassy that is still based in Israel,” she said. She has also been urging Dirco to ensure

that South Africans in Israel could vote.

“The South African government’s decision to shut the South African embassy in Ramat Gan deprives South Africans in Israel of their democratic right to vote in the upcoming South African election,” said Telfed Chairperson Maish Isaacson. “The South African embassy in Ramallah allows South African Palestinians to vote in the May elections, but not Israelis.”

Kenneth Moeng Mokgathe, a South African political writer and researcher based at Ben Gurion University, wrote from Israel on 1 May that, “For the first time since I was eligible to vote in the 2009 general elections, the ANC government will make it impossible for South African citizens in Israel to cast their vote to bring about much-needed change in government. I was told a week ago by Independent Electoral Commission [IEC] officials that I should go to other missions outside Israel to vote, such as Ramallah, Amman, or Cairo. Really? That’s effectively telling me, ‘You can’t vote!’

“The IEC and South African government are duty-bound to ensure that all South African citizens in the diaspora can participate in the upcoming extraordinary elections,” said Mokgathe. “I stress the importance of voting to all South Africans in the country and in the diaspora as it remains our only tool to affect positive change. For all South Africans in the diaspora, especially in conflict-ridden areas like Israel, Sudan, and Ukraine, it should be made possible for everyone to participate in

this upcoming historic election. There’s a need for all citizens to participate in spearheading political change in our country.”

Said Kahn, “We’re pleased that the request we made to the IEC in 2019 to accommodate *shomer* Shabbat voters in overseas countries where there is a high concentration of Jewish voters has again been provided for. For this election, voting stations in New York will remain open late, while the

embassy in London will be open on both Friday, 17 May, and Saturday, 18 May.”

Since Dirco closed the South African embassy in Israel on 17 November 2023, the SAJBD has been working to assist community members in Israel to access consular services, Kahn said. “Thus far, we’ve helped community members urgently needing to return to South Africa apply for travel documents or passports; a family with a baby requiring a passport in order to access critically needed medical care; community members to replace lost passports in Israel; as well as those waiting for months to receive passports and other documents.

“We’ve also had countless conversations and correspondence between ourselves, Dirco, and the department of home affairs to address these situations. The majority of these cases are seemingly being handled.”

Isaacson said the decision to keep the embassy closed demonstrated that “once again, the South African government shows it cannot act as an honest broker in any aspect of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. How sad that South Africa, with its rich history of conflict resolution, removed itself from any meaningful role in the Middle East conflict settlement.”

Kahn said anyone needing consular assistance should email casales@dirco.gov.za and send a copy to segevl@dirco.gov.za. They are also welcome to contact sajbd@sajbd.org

The *SA Jewish Report* reached out to Dirco for comment, but hadn’t received a response by the time of going to print.

Our bond with Israel is unbreakable



ROWAN POLOVIN

OPINION

Seven months have passed since that fateful day of 7 October, a day that will forever be etched in our collective memory as the darkest chapter in our history since the Holocaust. The pain of that day reverberates through our community, a haunting reminder of the 1 200 lives cut short, the hostages still held captive by terrorists in Gaza, and the brave soldiers who have fallen defending Israel and the Jewish people.

These weren't mere statistics; they were vibrant lives, each one a unique thread in the tapestry of our community. Mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, sons, and daughters, all torn from us by the relentless march of Jew-hatred that stretches from Hitler's death camps to Hamas's tunnels of terror. This hatred, fuelled by an unyielding refusal to accept the existence of Jews, whether in their ancient homeland of Israel or anywhere on earth, seeks to extinguish the light of our people.

The past year's events have been made all the more bitter by an African National Congress government that has lost its way, aligning itself with those who seek the destruction of Israel and our people. This isn't merely a political disagreement; it's a betrayal of the fundamental principles of justice and humanity. By choosing to support, defend, and propagate the narrative of those who call for the annihilation of the Jewish state, our government has abandoned its moral compass.

Yet, as we mark Israel's 76th anniversary, the South African Jewish community stands united, our spirits unbroken and our resolve unwavering. We stand tall in the face of an ongoing war, the anguish of hostages held captive, and a climate of hostility that seeks to undermine our very existence.

But Israel's story, and indeed the story of the Jewish people, is one of hope triumphing over despair, of light prevailing over darkness. Just three generations ago, our people emerged from the ashes of the Holocaust, carrying with them the audacious dream of Theodor Herzl to reclaim our ancestral homeland. Against all odds, with unwavering determination and courage, we transformed that dream into a reality.

It's from the well of resilience that has sustained our people through centuries of adversity that we must draw our courage.

We must remember that the world's sympathy for our cause is often fleeting, and we cannot depend on the understanding or support of others. The brief window of opportunity that allowed for Israel's rebirth in 1948 could easily have been missed, and even now, as Israel faces existential threats, we must draw strength from within.

It's from the well of resilience that has sustained our people through centuries of adversity that we must draw our courage. We must stand proud in our identity, refusing to be silenced or intimidated by those who seek to break our spirit.

For Israel is more than just a nation. It's a promise, an eternal vow that the Jewish people won't only endure but thrive. It's a beacon of innovation and progress, a light unto the nations, a testament to what can be achieved when a people refuses to succumb to fear or despair.

As South African Jews, our bond with Israel is unbreakable, our support for the world's only Jewish state not a matter of choice, but a sacred



Yom Ha'atzmaut celebrations at Yeshiva College on Monday 13 May

Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

duty and our destiny. We'll not be swayed by the moral confusion of our detractors, nor will we apologise for our steadfast Zionism.

On this Yom Ha'atzmaut, as we hold those still in harm's way in our hearts, let's reaffirm our commitment to Israel's enduring spirit and her role as a light unto the nations. Let us draw strength and inspiration from Israel's story, which is the story of the Jewish people, a beautiful mosaic in which our South African Jewish community is deeply embedded.

In this defining moment, let's

ensure that the sacrifice of those who have fallen wasn't in vain. Their memory calls us to live fully, as proud and upstanding Jews. May Israel's light continue to guide us through these difficult times, and may the strength of our community and the resilience of the Jewish people be a source of inspiration for generations to come.

• Rowan Polovin is the national chairperson of the South African Zionist Federation.



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'There are no lone soldiers – we're all one family'

PETA KROST

The post-7 October Yom Hazikaron ceremony at the Israeli embassy in Pretoria on Monday morning, 13 May, was particularly poignant, not least of all as the name Daniel Perez has now been added to the names of South Africans on the memorial cenotaph in the embassy garden.

Following the sounding of the memorial siren, lighting of the memorial lamp, and laying wreaths in the garden of remembrance, Yaakov Finkelstein, a visiting Israeli foreign affairs dignitary, said he believed there were no lone soldiers in Israel because they were simply part of the *Am Yisrael* (the people of Israel) family.

He told of a young Golani unit soldier, known as Nat, who was killed in the line of duty in the massacre of 7 October 2023. He was called a lone soldier because he had made aliya, leaving his family behind in England. Nat was Finkelstein's daughter, Naomi's, good friend and she was devastated by his loss. "My daughter and I were worried that not enough people would be there at his funeral because he had been in Israel only for a short time, but we were wrong. There were hundreds of people there for him, and so many weren't even able to get close to the grave on Mount Herzl. They may not have known Nat, but they all wanted to show their support for this "lone soldier" who gave his life for his people," said Finkelstein.

He recalled seeing a big burly "thuggish-looking man" coming forward to the grave, and he discovered that he was the father of the soldier whose funeral was next. "The man's son was in Nat's army unit, and he wanted to pay his respects to this hero, or "tzaddik" as he called him, who wasn't obliged to lay down his life for Israel. This father was the one who made the point that there are no lone soldiers in Israel as they aren't alone, they are a part of us. This is the bond between Israel and Jews around the world. It's a covenant of the blood we share."

And, said Finkelstein, now we have to add Daniel Perez, whose family lived in South Africa, to the memorial in the embassy garden.

However, in the words of Daniel's father, South African-born Rabbi Doron Perez, the chairperson of the Mizrahi World Movement, "Bitterness ought never define us." These words were heard at the Yom Hazikaron event on Monday morning when the eulogy Perez gave at Daniel's funeral in March this year was read by Rabbi Daniel Kaplan.

"The challenge, pain, and blood are all part of our story, but they are not the story itself. The story is one of resilience and redemption, of freedom and destiny," he said.

Kaplan continued, "We know that the power of life which we so deeply believe in will ultimately triumph over those who celebrate death."

Captain Daniel Perez, who grew up in Johannesburg, was killed on 7 October, but for 163 days, was believed to have been taken

hostage. His family didn't have his body to bury as it's still in Gaza, taken on that fateful day. "The blood-stained shirt of your army uniform with your rank and blood found in and around your tank was all we were able to bury," said Rabbi Perez at the funeral.

They buried his blood in a decision to "salute" him, to honour him, and, the rabbi said, to "bow our head to you and appreciate your self-

sacrifice and courage". In his eulogy, the rabbi told how former Prime Minister Naftali Bennett had told

the mourning family that Daniel's two-hour battle "was among the most heroic he had heard of". He

did, who knows how many more terrorists may have ambushed Yonatan in the base that day."

went on to say that Daniel had "saved people in the Nachal Oz army base and Nachal Oz kibbutz".

"It's possible you saved not only generations of people you don't know, but perhaps even the life of your brother, Yonatan," the rabbi said. "After all, Yonatan also fought later that day in Nachal Oz and was injured 100 yards [91m] from where you were taken. Had you not done what you

In the eulogy, Perez appealed to the Israeli government to do all it can to return all those who had fallen in the war against Hamas, and those of the 132 still being held hostage in Gaza. "To an extent, all of us are still trapped there, for we're one nation. We're not a weak society, but one built with bonds of love, mutual responsibility, swords of iron – the bonds of a blood covenant. This isn't weakness, this is strength."

In this war alone, 650 soldiers have fallen, and 1 200 Israelis were killed on 7 October alone. As many as 2 540 people have died just for the sake of wanting to live in the Jewish homeland. The loss was felt by all around the world as well as at the embassy this week.

However, as Yair Lapid wrote in a poem titled *It is not true that life goes on* recited at the ceremony, there's no getting back to normal after this kind of loss of loved ones. It's not true that life goes on as it had been before your loss, he said. "When you lose someone that close, your life as you know it has ended. It ends and it begins again. Differently."



Deputy Israeli Ambassador, Adi Cohen-Hazanov, and Israeli dignitary Yaakov Finkelstein laying a wreath in the garden of remembrance

Force for good: poignant ceremony salutes heroic soldiers

LEE TANKLE

When news of the massacre at the hands of Hamas in Israel on 7 October filtered down to Omer Cohen*, who was living in Cyprus, he didn't think twice before getting on a plane home to defend his country.

When he heard that his close army friend, Ben, had been at the Supernova festival and hadn't been heard from since the massacre, he was even more determined to get back into the army.

And it was to salute the many heroes who had fallen in the past seven months that Cohen was willing to fly out to South Africa to speak at the Yom Hazikaron ceremony at Yeshiva College on 12 May. He wanted to share the stories of his friends, Ben, one of 1 200 killed on 7 October, and Netanel, a soldier in his unit who was one of the 650 soldiers killed in the war since 7 October.

Cohen told hundreds of people who came to Yeshiva College on Sunday evening that he had been injured during Operation Protective Edge in 2014 but had recovered and chose to participate in this war as a senior combat paramedic in honour of those who died on 7 October.

He's a part of the elite Yahalom Special Combat Engineering Unit, whose main focus is on entering the Hamas terror tunnels and dealing with the horrors that lie therein.

Members of youth movements lit candles at the memorial for fallen Israel Defense Forces (IDF) soldiers and victims of terror attacks, with particular mention of Daniel Perez, who grew up in South Africa and lost his life fighting Hamas terrorists on 7 October. His body is still being held captive in Gaza.

Cohen heard that his friend, Ben, had gone to party at the Supernova festival on 6 October. "Two days later, a friend told me that Ben never left the Nova festival," he said. Cohen later found out that Ben had fought off Hamas terrorists at the festival as best he could, even taking weapons off the bodies of fallen soldiers so that he could try to fight back against the crazed terrorists. Cohen later found out that his friend was one of the 1 200 people killed on 7 October.

He told the story of Netanel, a commander in an elite unit in the IDF, who gave up his rank as a commander so that he could go into Gaza and defend his country. After serving in Gaza for a month, it was time for his unit to return to Israel. One of the protocols before leaving the building they were working from was that the soldiers had

to make sure that there was nobody in it so they could demolish it to ensure that terrorists couldn't re-enter the building and attack IDF soldiers.

Rotem, the deputy commander, entered the building to do some last checks that it was safe to demolish when suddenly, two terrorists jumped out and started shooting at him. Cohen said Netanel ran into the building to try and save his deputy commander. When he reached Rotem, another gunshot rang out, and Netanel was hit in the chest and died a few minutes later.

Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein told the gathering that though many in the world claim to grieve for all those brutally murdered on 7 October and since the establishment of Israel in 1948, they make the point that they won't grieve for the soldiers.

"There are a lot of people in the world who have sympathy when Jews are dying," he said. "They'll say, 'Never again!', they'll cry for the Holocaust, they'll cry for 7 October, and they'll come and hug the Jewish people. But we're here tonight on this Yom Hazikaron to say that our hearts are in pain for all of the victims of terror, but we're also here to pay tribute to the fallen soldiers, the real heroes of *Am Yisrael*."

"Every Yom Hazikaron is filled with pain, but this Yom Hazikaron is the most painful of all," Goldstein said, because since 7 October, so many Israeli soldiers have given their lives to fight the darkest form of barbarism, and their actions are in the name of making the world a better place.

Adi Cohen-Hazanov, the deputy Israeli ambassador, told the crowd the war Israel was fighting was "forced upon us".

"Our enemies have once again challenged our natural right of independence, and we're still mourning the death of civilians who were

murdered in their homes, the young people who were massacred at a music festival, and the death of the brave soldiers who rushed in to rescue them," she said.

"The Israel Defense Forces is a powerful army, not only because of its advanced capabilities and innovative technology. The source of the army's strength is its people. Our army is made up of diverse societies of Israelis fighting for one common goal," Cohen-Hazanov said.

Cohen made the final point that he believed his friends who had fallen would have wanted us "to love each other and to be united because only when we're united, only when we act as one person, can we defeat our enemies and live our best lives".

*Omer Cohen is not his real name. His name was changed for his security.



Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

No raining on Joburg Yom Ha'atzmaut parade

LEE TANKLE

It may be difficult to get into a party mood for the 76th year of Israel's independence in light of the war and global rise in antisemitism, but Yom Ha'atzmaut in Johannesburg this year was a reminder how much we have to celebrate.

"We're here to declare on Yom Ha'atzmaut that we're Zionists, and we're proud to be called Zionists," Goldstein said. "It's the greatest badge of honour for *Am Yisrael*, for the Jewish people to be called Zionists, and to stand up for the only free democracy in the Middle East, for the only country in the Middle East where Jews, Christians, and Muslims can live in harmony."

Israel, and so does Hezbollah. What's holding them back are the brave soldiers of the IDF [Israel Defense Forces] and tonight, we come together to pay tribute to the IDF and the state of Israel, and to give thanks to Hashem for these incredible blessings because it's not 1938, it's 2024 and we are *Am Yisrael*. We bow before nobody, we're afraid of nobody," he said.

Said Cohen-Hazanov, "Our independence today isn't up for a political discussion. It's fact. The Jewish and democratic state of Israel is the crushing answer



Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

Photo exhibition by Ilan Ossendryver

"These past seven months, our world has been filled with darkness and pain. But tonight on Yom Ha'atzmaut, we come together to remind ourselves that we need to celebrate Israel," said Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein.

The Johannesburg Jewish community descended on Yeshiva College Campus in their thousands on 13 May to celebrate 76 years of Israel's independence. Young and old, all those who attended were celebrating the only Jewish state in the world.

Though the mood was upbeat, with children running around and going on various rides, there were constant reminders about the war in Gaza and the 133 hostages held by Hamas.

"That's what we celebrate on Yom Ha'atzmaut. As we look back on these hard seven months and feel the pain of all the families grieving in the state of Israel, we gather here tonight to say that our hearts are filled with gratitude to Hashem," Goldstein said.

"For 2 000 years, Jewish communities didn't know what it was to be able to live in Israel, to travel to Israel, to have a sovereign Jewish government, and a sovereign Jewish army. We have that blessing now."

Goldstein said we should continue to celebrate Yom Ha'atzmaut in spite of the massacre on 7 October and the hostages still being held because, if there



Yom Ha'atzmaut celebrations at Sydenham Shul Nursery School

to antisemitism, and to those who try to undermine [Israel]. Israel will always be the home of the Jewish people, with a strong Jewish army that will ensure the survival of the nation.

"We'll never be ashamed that we're willing to defend our right to live and to exist in our country. We're the oldest nation in the world, and we'll continue to survive thanks to our resilience and spirit."

She asserted that Israel would never stand alone because of Israel's allies and



Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

the Jews in the diaspora. "Most importantly, we have hope that hasn't and will never be lost. Together, we'll restore, we'll build what was destroyed. We'll laugh again and we'll dance again. Our hope isn't lost. The hope is 2 000 years old. We'll be a free people in our country, the land of Zion and Jerusalem," she said.



Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

Memorial dedicated to the hostages on the volleyball court at Yeshiva College



Yom Ha'atzmaut celebrations at the Durban Jewish Centre

Attendees could view a photo exhibition by Ilan Ossendryver, in which he showed the brutality of the Hamas attacks on 7 October, and the school's volleyball court was turned into a memorial dedicated to the hostages being held by Hamas, an unavoidable sight for attendees.

was no Israel, our reality would be very different.

"People say that on 7 October, more Jews were killed in one day than since the time of the Holocaust, but I think it's important to say tonight on Yom Ha'atzmaut, that there wasn't a Holocaust on 7 October for one reason, because Hashem blessed *Am Yisrael* to have an independent Jewish state."

"There would have been a Holocaust because Hamas wanted to murder every single Jew. There would have been a Holocaust because Iran wants to murder every single Jew in



King David students performing at Yom Ha'atzmaut

Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

Whether it was the children from all the Jewish schools performing on stage or just running around and going on all the rides, everyone in attendance was able to see that the Jewish community is the vibrant community it is because we have the state of Israel.

Even though the night ended in a hailstorm, there was no rain on Israel's parade with hope emanating from everyone in attendance.



Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

Aliyah Tucker celebrating Yom Ha'atzmaut at Yeshiva College

Deputy Israeli Ambassador Adi Cohen-Hazanov said, "Israel's 76th year has been marked by enormous pain and loss as we're still collecting the pieces of our shattered nation seven months after Hamas's deadliest and most brutal attack on Israel."

However, she said this year's celebration was the most important one yet.

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The honey and the sting

OPINION

You may be familiar with a famous Hebrew song which speaks of “all these things, the honey – and the sting”. It’s the perfect explanation of life in Israel – the bitter and the sweet.

It has been more than seven months of agony, but it feels like years. I don’t remember life before 7 October, and I don’t think most people do either. There’s 7/10, and life before that, which is blurred and fuzzy. We’re not the same people who went to sleep on 6 October. We never will be again. How could we be?

This year, the national holidays in Israel had a distinctly different tone. They are sacred days, filled with sorrow and dread. Yom Hashoah (Holocaust Memorial Day) in the shadow of 7/10 was poignant and difficult. The images of our brothers and sisters burnt to ash or herded onto the back of trucks and taken away as well as the raw, unbridled hatred that fuelled the attack was reminiscent of the experiences of our ancestors.

After 7 October, many of us pondered how we would cope on Yom Hazikaron. It was a day of agony. We knew this day was coming. We tried to prepare ourselves for it but in truth, there was no preparation for the tear in the soul as that first siren wailed its mournful cry across the country. Israel came to a complete standstill and wept for the 25 040 fallen and



Photo: Screenshot from YouTube

Coming to a standstill in Tel Aviv for the Yom Hazikaron siren

5 100 victims of terror throughout our history. The siren shattered me as I stood sentinel on my balcony. It shattered us all.

We mourn our sons and daughters of Zion, the human and the canine, and just after the horrific atrocities of 7 October, the grief is still raw. The passage of time may have moved on, but for us in Israel, every day is 7 October. The freshly covered graves increase, and we agonise over the 132 souls still held hostage in the terror tunnels of Gaza. For many families who

have lost their loved ones, every day is Yom Hazikaron.

I thought of the orphans, the widows, the parents, the siblings, the grandparents, the partners, the friends, the families, and the loved ones.

The sacred days of Yom Hazikaron and Yom Ha’atzmaut were purposefully meant to follow one another. They are a stark reminder of the massive price that we have and continue to pay to live as a free people in our land. The price of freedom is high, but it’s one that however painful, we’re willing to pay.

The transition from Yom Hazikaron to Yom Ha’atzmaut is an emotional whiplash as we move from sorrow to celebration, but this year, it was significantly

more subdued. How can we celebrate when we’re at war? When our sons are paying the ultimate price? How can we celebrate when 132 souls aren’t with us but held captive? Gone were the fireworks, in a nod of respect not only to the situation, but our soldiers experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder. The annual flyover, the most highly anticipated event in the calendar, was cancelled.

Yom Ha’atzmaut was a day spent in quiet

thanksgiving for the miracle that is the state of Israel, our haven in our ancestral homeland. The rising tide of antisemitism threatening to engulf our communities around the world weighs heavily on our minds. We’re watching with alarm and horror as it manifests itself in this latest vicious iteration of anti-Zionism.

I believe our collective trauma has bonded us more strongly to the land and to each other. Inside every one of us is the strength and defiance in the face of hatred that the generations before us have endured. Today we have a state, a home to call our own with a vibrant, resilient people and a strong army. We are, as the government YouTube media released in time for Yom Ha’atzmaut states, an extraordinary people living in an extraordinary land. We must never lose sight of this.

The story of Israel, of the Jewish people, is written perfectly in the lines of the song *Al kol ele* (Of all these things). Our story is of the *dvash ve oketz* (the honey and the sting), the bitter and the sweet. This year, we’ve experienced the bitter, may we soon experience the sweet.

May the memories of all we have lost be eternally blessed. May they rest in the holiest of heavenly places. May we continue to write our next chapters in the story of the Jewish people, redeemed in our land. *Am Yisrael Chai*.

• Rolene Marks is a Middle East commentator often heard on radio and TV, and is the co-founder of *Lay of the Land* and the SA-Israel Policy Forum.



ROLENE MARKS

In uncertain present, reflect on Israel’s resilient past

OPINION

BENJI SHULMAN



Yom Ha’atzmaut, Israel’s Independence Day, is a time to celebrate the birth and resilience of the state of Israel. This year, marking the 76th anniversary, is particularly poignant as it follows the tragic events of 7 October. While it’s easy to get lost in discussions about geopolitics, internal Israeli debates, and the looming elections in the United States, perhaps this Yom Ha’atzmaut calls for reflection on more fundamental ideas about Israel and its enduring spirit.

A fascinating historical parallel emerged from archaeological research several years ago. Letters from a Jewish military commander named Hosea, defending the kingdom against Babylonian invasion, were found. One letter, written in Hebrew, requested at headquarters “send the four species” – referring to the lulav and etrog used in the Jewish festival of Sukkot. Centuries later, during the Yom Kippur War against Egypt, another commander named Yeshoua sent the exact same request. Both messages are exactly the same, written in the same language, for the same festival, by commanders with similar names, fighting an existential enemy on its border, and highlight a profound continuity in Jewish history.

Fifty years after the Yom Kippur War, during another holy time, we’re reminded that Israel’s enemies have always sought to undermine its existence. From the Babylonians to modern-day adversaries, the Jewish people have faced attempts to destroy their homeland. If our enemies succeed, it results in death, destruction, and dispersion.

The enemies of Israel have historically used all means at their disposal to achieve their goals. The Babylonians destroyed the First Temple and exiled the Jewish people. The Egyptians during the mid-20th century enlisted ex-Nazi officers to bolster their military efforts against Israel. Today, accusations of genocide are levied against Israel, in spite of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) not making such a finding, not even a finding of “plausible genocide”, something confirmed by the former chief justice of the ICJ, Joan Donoghue, in a BBC interview just a few weeks ago.

This leads us to another important lesson of

these dispatches. That we can and should fight back against our enemies until they no longer pose a threat. But that this can be done within the ethics of the Israel Defense Forces and the morality of Jewish law. The current conflict, taking place in densely populated urban areas, has resulted in a challenging and tragic civilian-combatant casualty ratio. In the Swords of Iron operation, the ratio is roughly one Hamas combatant to 1.5 civilians, a stark contrast to the operation to rid the world of ISIS (Islamic State) by the most advanced military in the world, which had a ratio of 1:9 according to the Institute of Modern Warfare. Perhaps that’s why the United Nations has begun revising its civilian casualty estimates downward.

As we celebrate Yom Ha’atzmaut, it’s essential to remember these historical and contemporary realities. The requests for the four species from two military commanders centuries apart remind us that the Jewish people’s connection to their land and traditions is deep and unbroken. In spite of facing relentless adversaries, the spirit of Israel endures, anchored in a rich cultural and religious heritage.

This Yom Ha’atzmaut, let’s take a moment to think beyond the immediate political and military issues. Let’s appreciate the enduring spirit of Israel, the continuity of its traditions, and the profound resilience of its people. In a world where the future can often seem uncertain, the story of Israel serves as a powerful reminder of hope, perseverance, and the enduring importance of cultural and national identity.

As we celebrate this 76th Yom Ha’atzmaut, let’s remember the lessons of history, honour the sacrifices made by those who defended the land, and cherish the enduring legacy of a nation that continues to thrive against all odds. Let’s also do our part to support the Jewish people in Israel and the world with our prayers, money, voice, vote, and a continuous campaign for the immediate release of the hostages and a proper permanent peace in the holy land.

• Benji Shulman is an executive office bearer of the South African Zionist Federation.

Yom Ha’atzmaut and the mazel of the Mauser

OPINION

DAVID BERMAN

The state of Israel, born on 14 May 1948 from the ashes of World War II, was soon attacked from all sides by surrounding hostile Arab countries, but in one of the greatest ironies of world history, it won its independence with the aid of the German Nazi Mauser K98 rifles.

Jewish-Arab conflict escalated in 1936, and Britain started to reduce the inflow of Jews into British Palestine. This occurred at the same time that the Nazis were advocating for the murder of Jews in Europe. It’s common knowledge that the Arab mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Al-Husseini, met Adolf Hitler in 1941 in Germany as they felt that they had common enemies – the Jews; communists; and the English. A civil war engulfed Palestine. The Haganah had very few weapons at its disposal, and was able to make only a few weapons in primitive hidden workshops or buy a few guns on the black market. It also tried to smuggle in weapons from Europe at the peril of being caught by the British. The Arabs in Jerusalem, having also formed a pact with the Nazis, compounded the situation, exposing the Jewish population to even greater peril.

“Mauser” was and still is a well-respected German arms manufacturer. Its bolt-action rifles have been produced since 1874 for the German-Austrian armed forces. The factory continues to make one of the most well-made and reliable firearms in the world today. In 1898, the Mauser rifle design became the basic infantry weapon of the German army, and was used worldwide because of its unique, reliable, and durable features such as superb accuracy and easy loading. The Mauser Karabiner 98k was manufactured in the 1930s, and was adopted by Hitler’s Nazi Germany as its standard infantry rifle until the end of World War II. From 1944, Karabiner 98k production changed to

the *Kriegsmodell* (war model). Proudly emblazoned on the metal receiver of the rifle was the Nazi eagle and swastika.

Post-World War II Czechoslovakia, then under Stalin’s Soviet control, was prepared to sell at a huge price surplus World War II small arms, ammunition, and used aircraft to Israel. This was possibly more to infuriate the British than to help Israel.

A national arms embargo went into effect in Truman’s United States in 1947, and it wouldn’t supply Israel with arms. Soon, the Nazi K98 German rifle became one of – if not the main – small arms used by Israel, among other surplus armaments.

The Nazi Mauser rifles were re-bored to a new calibre – 7.62mm – and refurbished in Israel before they were certified by the Israel Defense Forces and new Hebrew military proof markings were placed on the metal receiver of the rifles, next to the Nazi swastika and eagle. Israel also purchased the Nazi Mauser bayonets that fitted the K98 Mauser rifles. And it made its own “Mauser-like” bayonets, with Hebrew manufacture markings. A large amount of surplus-captured Nazi ammunition was also purchased to use in these rifles. Israel also made its own ammunition to fit the new calibre of the rifle.

These and other Mauser rifles were later made in Belgium’s Fabrique Nationale arms factory at Israel’s request in the 1950s, and were emblazoned with the Tzahal military emblem of the Israeli army on the receiver of the rifle. They were still in use in the 1967 Six-Day War. The Mauser K98 Nazi rifles meant to murder and annihilate the world’s Jewish population had the total opposite effect in the long term, coming to the aid of the young Jewish state and nation, enabling its brave young soldiers to fight battles on even ground and in many instances, give them the advantage of superior fire power.

The last use – although limited – of the K98 Mauser rifle by Israeli forces was in the 1973 Yom Kippur War.

• David Berman has a keen interest in Jewish history and the history of the Jews of South Africa and their participation in the various wars and conflicts.



Israeli soldier davening at the Kotel with his K98 Mauser rifle in 1967

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Shembe Church leaders visit Israel, pledge solidarity

STEVEN GRUZD

Many South African Jews have felt violated, isolated, and vilified since the savage Hamas terror attack on Israel on 7 October 2023 and the hatred spawned by the ongoing Gaza war. But they shouldn't forget that they have allies in the Christian community.

From 9 to 16 May, leaders of the Shembe Church, which claims to have more than eight million followers in South Africa, travelled to Israel to demonstrate solidarity and deepen ties with the Jewish state. The trip was organised by the South African Friends of Israel (SAFI), which works in partnership with the South African Zionist Federation to build bridges with sympathetic Christian sects. The Shembe leadership

has publicly signed a "declaration of indigenous friendship" with Israel.

The Shembe Church, also known as the Nazareth Baptist Church of South Africa, Nazarite Church, or iBandla lamaNazaretha,

has most of its supporters in KwaZulu-Natal, but also has a strong presence in Gauteng. It's the second largest African-initiated church in the country. It was founded in 1910 by Isaiah Shembe, the

Sabbath on Saturday, and eschewing pork and premarital sex.

A few months ago, a SAFI event at Sydenham Shul hosted about 250 Gauteng Shembe leaders for a prayer service, and held a workshop on developments in the Middle East. Seeing the church's strong support for Israel, SAFI decided to organise a visit to the country for its top leadership. Fourteen Shembe leaders – 10 from Gauteng and four representing Nkosi Sizwe Shembe from KwaZulu-Natal – were accompanied by SAFI Chairperson Shaun Zagnoev, SAFI Director Daniel Yakcobi, and SAFI spokesperson Bafana Modise.

Their trip included visits to the Kotel; the south of the country to see the aftermath of the Hamas terrorist attack; the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial; and the cemetery on Har Herzl. They travelled to the Jordan River for baptismal ceremonies, and participated in the Yom Hazikaron and Yom Ha'atzmaut commemorations in Jerusalem. They also



Israeli Ambassador Eli Belotserkovsky, King Phakama Shembe, and SAFI Chairperson Shaun Zagnoev

great-grandfather of the current king of the Shembe in Gauteng, Nkosi Phakama Shembe. It reveres its founder as a divine prophet, and shares many practices similar to Judaism, including observing



SAFI Director Daniel Yakcobi with King Phakama Shembe in Israel

met Avi and Devorah Kay, the parents of late South African Eli Kay who was stabbed to death at the Kotel in 2021.

"The Shembe met Ethiopian Jews, whose story fascinated them," said Zagnoev. "They have been very engaged, and this trip has dispelled the accusation that there's apartheid in Israel as an insult to those who suffered under real apartheid. They have seen with their own eyes people treated fairly and indiscriminately. They are prepared to make public statements in support of

Israel and the Jewish entitlement to the land."

Zagnoev said that though the Shembe were well disposed towards Israel, many leaders had never experienced Israel to get a full appreciation of the place and its significance, and to strengthen their faith. Now, the leaders got first-hand exposure to Jewish practices similar to their own.

Israel's ambassador to South Africa, Eli Belotserkovsky, who hastily left the country in November 2023 before a parliamentary vote to kick him out, was present at one of the events.

Speaking through Bafana Modise as translator at that event, Nkosi Phakama Shembe said, "We're here to share the pain that you're going through as a country. We saw something terrible that happened on 7 October. We're here to declare that what has been done by our government, it's not the *ubuntu* we were taught by our forefather, Nelson Mandela. This doesn't come from the believers of South Africa. We're here to say, 'Not in our name as South Africans.' We must make it clear that Israel isn't an apartheid state."

The delegation signed the indigenous friendship declaration with SAFI leadership and the Israeli government. The document says, "While we acknowledge the challenges and adversities faced in preserving our indigenous identities, cultures, and traditions, we draw strength from our resilience and determination. We stand united not only in recognition of our shared struggles, but also in celebration of the remarkable achievements and potential that lie within our communities. As stewards of our ancestral lands, we pledge to protect and nurture our territories, ensuring that they remain vital sources of cultural identity and spiritual connection." Yakcobi signed on behalf of SAFI.

"Their supporters come from all political parties, and the Shembe are highly regarded by South African political leaders," said Zagnoev. "I'm not sure they would go so far as telling their supporters not to vote for the ANC [African National Congress], but they are clearly dissatisfied with the ANC's position on the Middle East. This trip isn't the end but the beginning of the process to garner grassroots support for Israel in South Africa. They want the embassies in both countries to be fully functioning again."

Their trip is significant, Yakcobi said, because "The leaders are intending to engage with their millions of followers and aren't keeping their support for Israel secret. They know that the views of the South African government aren't the views of the vast majority of the people of the country."

Grade 10 Israel tours altered for safety reasons

PETA KROST

Grade 10s routinely go on programmes to Israel for a few weeks every year, but with Israel at war and parents concerned about their children's safety, the three organisers, Bnei Akiva, Habonim Dror, and Yeshiva College, have reconsidered this year's trips.

Bnei Akiva decided to postpone its Hadracha programme to 2025, doing a special Grade 10 programme in South Africa instead. Habonim moved its Shorashim programme from Israel to four cities in Europe. Finally, Yeshiva College opted to take its Grade 11s, who missed out on going to Israel on Kfar at the end of Grade 10 because of the war, on the programme this May. The Grade 10 group will go later in the year, according to Natalie Altman, the principal of Yeshiva Girls High School and the director of Yeshiva's kodesh and ethos.

The idea behind taking specifically Grade 10 teenagers to Israel is that they are mature enough to understand the complexities they are learning and to be independent in Israel. It's also just before the real academic pressure begins in Grade 11.

In all three cases, the challenging decisions were made with participants' security in mind. Said Altman, "Certain parents have chosen not to send their children [on Kfar]."

Instead of a trip this year, Bnei Akiva will offer a dual programme for Grades 10 and 11 to Israel in 2025. "Though we still believe Israel is a safe, unbelievable place to visit and learn from, we feel a deep sense of responsibility for providing the best programme for as many people as possible," said Ben Swartz, who is part of the leadership of Bnei Akiva South Africa. "It's with this in mind, coupled with the fluidity of the situation in Israel, that we postponed the programme."

Swartz said Bnei Akiva would still be offering an "incredible programme" for Grade 10s in South Africa this year. "This is in no way to replace the programme in Israel, but rather to provide inspiration and direction at this crucial age in their development," he said.

As the time for Habonim's Dror Shorashim trip to Israel drew closer, this youth movement opted for Plan B because parents and *channichim* were concerned about going to Israel now. They moved Shorashim to Budapest in Hungary, Bratislava in Slovakia, Prague in the Czech Republic, and Vienna in Austria.

"We pivoted because of legitimate security concerns about travelling to Israel with an active war on many fronts. Europe isn't just a safe option, but one which is attractive and meaningful," said Brad Gottschalk, Habonim Dror SA's

sgan maskir.

Though some Habonim parents voiced concern that the Europe trip would be too Holocaust-centred, Gottschalk said it would only be one feature of a bigger exploration of 2 000 years of Jewish history in Europe. "There's so much happiness and beauty in this history, which is seen the more it's explored. Crazy Yiddish tales, beautiful synagogues, understanding where so many of our traditions come from – there's much to explore," he said.

A group of Grade 10 Shorashim participants last year in Israel



"There's also a portion of the programme at a lakeside resort with 80 Grade 10 Israeli kids, the tour guides will be Israeli, and the madrichim are determined to bring Israel to the Europe trip," Gottschalk said.

Altman said that although they cancelled last year's Kfar because of the war and security issues, she believes sending the two tours to Israel this year was wise as "many international trips are going ahead this year. We believe this is a deep time to be in Israel and really see the strength of *Am Yisrael* in the best way."

For the Grade 11s in Israel now from 7 to 28 May, the experience would probably be more powerful than any other time since the state was established. "We believe our children will be changed forever from this," Altman said.

Yeshiva, Altman said, has worked closely with a security team and tour advisors in Israel to ensure that the safety of its school children isn't compromised. "They won't visit any danger zones in Israel," she said.

Changing the tour from last year to this year "allowed our parents to feel safer in sending their children. Some still have security concerns, but we have assured them that we

won't put their children in any danger. They are visiting safe areas that are constantly being monitored by the teams in Israel."

Habonim said there was an outpouring of relief and support from Grade 10 parents and *channichim* when the plan was changed. "Planning the Israel experience was proving to be tricky, with parents and *channichim* wanting a Habo experience, but not being completely on board with travelling to Israel."

It's still putting safety first even though it isn't going to Israel. "We're still travelling with a highly trained guard, ensuring the safety of the group throughout," said Gottschalk. "We're also implementing measures such as a 24-hour Shorashim hotline which *channichim* can call in case of emergency. That said, the areas we're travelling to are safe and well-known. Over the past 20 years, we have run Shorashim with well-tested safety measures, and have had success with these."

Swartz said Bnei Akiva's Hadracha programme "infuses a love of the land of Israel with a fun and meaningful experience. At its core, Hadracha aims to instil a genuine understanding of religious Zionism. Even though we're not going to Israel this year our Chavaya (Experience) Programme that we'll have in South Africa will still focus on the same goals and relay the same messages."

He said Hadracha was postponed based on understanding the anxiety and concerns felt by the Bnei parent body, but Israel still remained an unwavering pillar of the movement. "We're doing our utmost to ensure that our *channichim* will receive unbelievable programmes this year and next, centred on the foundational value of Israel in our lives."

All the organisations behind the Grade 10 programmes are clear that there's no more important time to stand with Israel than now. Whatever decision they make reiterate that. Though plans had to change for safety reasons, the ethos of all these trips and those who make them happen is unchanged, and focuses solely on the youth with whom they work.

Israeli travellers nervous about coming to South Africa

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

With a government that has launched genocide accusations against Israel at the ICJ (International Court of Justice), repeatedly welcomed Hamas representatives, and threatened to arrest South Africans serving in the Israeli army, South Africa is perhaps unsurprisingly becoming a less attractive destination for an increasingly nervous number of Israeli travellers. Yet many of those who have faced their fears and come here anyway have a different story to tell.

Considering the political climate, Israel has increased the threat level in South Africa from level two to level three out of four, meaning Israelis should travel here only on vital visits. So, when the South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) began inviting speakers from Israel to its Yom Hazikaron ceremony on 12 May, it battled to find someone willing to visit to the country.

The eventual speaker, who has requested anonymity for security reasons, was also extremely nervous about it but was convinced to do so by those working in Jewish South African organisations as well as people in the Israeli embassy. He also knew that it was important to share his story and message of unity. "If I can inspire at least one person, it's worth the visit," he said.

When he first visited South Africa two years ago, this speaker wasn't nervous at all. "This time, I was more afraid," he says. "Having served in the army, I was worried about getting arrested at the airport especially after hearing the things Dr Naledi Pandor has said about Israelis and Jews."

Even though Pandor has threatened only South

Africans serving in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) with arrest, many Israeli-born travellers evidently fear detention too. "I was also scared of having other issues in the airport, and also about any threat during the ceremony itself because it was going to be in a Jewish area." And, he was stressed about Israel's increased threat level to Israelis visiting South Africa.

The speaker said he was also concerned about what could happen during his visit, especially regarding the IDF beginning its Rafah ground operation, which did occur. His worries about South Africa's reaction were justified, with the country now set to argue for emergency orders to be imposed against Israel's Rafah offensive at the ICJ.

From the minute I arrived, I was surrounded by people who made me feel that they loved me, that they care about us, and that they appreciate what we're doing.

"I don't know what the short and long-term effects against Israelis will be," he said. "Whether it will be related only to some diplomats or government officials, or also soldiers. I was worried whether I'd have enough time to leave if that happened." He has since left South Africa safely as scheduled.

Nonetheless, upon arriving in the country, the speaker was pleasantly surprised at how smooth his airport experience was. He wasn't questioned, and though wary, he soon relaxed into the embrace of the community, with strong ties to the Israeli embassy. "From the minute I arrived, I was surrounded by people who made me feel

that they loved me, that they care about us, and that they appreciate what we're doing.

"As a media consumer, you would think that there are guns on the street and they're arresting every Israeli coming to South Africa. I can understand why people are anxious to come. I wouldn't start shouting, 'I'm an Israeli!' in the streets, but for now, it feels safe. Just keep your eyes open and follow the news."

Benji Goral came to South Africa for two weeks as a special *shaliach* with the Jewish National Fund over Israel's national holidays. Initially, he too had reservations.

"Seeing South Africa taking us to the ICJ for absurd, antisemitic accusations, I was concerned about the

attitude towards Israelis," he said. "I mistakenly thought that the government and people shared the same sentiments.

I've travelled all over the world and have never hidden my Judaism and nationality, and I was concerned about whether I would have to hide these things in South Africa."

Like the SAZF speaker, Goral was concerned about being detained by South African border control. Yet he and other Israelis on his flight went through without any questions.

"As I entered Johannesburg, I saw Jews openly wearing kippot and tzitzit. I was introduced to CAP and the CSO [Community Security Organisation], which increased my sense of confidence. Both Yom Ha'atzmaut

and Yom Hazikaron were celebrated openly with Israeli flags and music. I felt safe wearing a kippah everywhere, putting on tefillin at the airport, and wearing a 'Bring them Home' bracelet. Even most of the local people I met, especially on a tour to Kliptown, Soweto, where people belonged to the Zion Christian Church, were happy that I was from Israel."

Goral was, however, unnerved by seeing a big Palestinian flag in one of the mosques. "I also heard that around Cape Town, it might be less welcoming for Israelis. But I still feel that the country is safe for Israelis. I've worked with many Jewish communities around the world and this was the fastest it felt like home."

However, even some South African expats are reluctant to come to the country. This was the case for Israeli-born Darya Short, who grew up in South Africa and then returned to Israel in 1999. She and her family cautiously came to South Africa in December for a long-awaited family reunion.

"When we arrived at the airport, a kind Afrikaans gentleman stamped our passports, asked us how we were, and how things were for our family in Israel," she said. Yet when reporting damaged luggage at the airport, they were snubbed when they said they were from Israel. The Shorts also experienced negative sentiment in KwaZulu-Natal.

"Billboards all over the place were hostile, and we didn't dare let anybody know where we were from." Yet at a Johannesburg shopping centre, people who heard the family were from Israel came over to say how much they loved Israel, and that they were praying for them.

While there may be a mixed reception for Israeli travellers, South Africa's spirit of *ubuntu* clearly lives on.

'Remembrance means we can't remain silent'

LEE TANKLE

"Remembering the systematic genocide of the European Jews, a crime against humanity on an unprecedented scale, and the horrors and atrocities perpetrated in Germany's name under the Nazi regime of terror remains a perpetual responsibility and obligation for us Germans."

So said Professor Monika Grütters, German minister for culture and freedom from 2013 to 2021, at a talk on coming to terms with Germany's past at the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre on 2 May.

"Germany's path to freedom, democracy, and the rule of law was a long, hard, and rocky road full of setbacks and wrong turns. It's laid through the darkest abyss in history. The Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre shows what Germany lost with its marginalisation of German Jews," Grütters said. "Remembrance occupies a special position within Germany's cultural policy. National remembrance and commemoration cannot be limited."

Grütters said that the responsibility for ensuring a culture of remembrance in Germany didn't fall solely on the shoulders of the government and policymakers, but was enshrined within each German citizen. It was therefore always in part a public matter.

"Our aspiration as a nation is to deal appropriately with our history," she said. "In this way, we can lay the foundations for the present and future. It's therefore all the more devastating to see some of the reactions to Hamas's brutal attack on Israel on 7 October last year.

"Germany's announcement of support for Israel is of symbolic importance given the history of the Holocaust in which the Nazis murdered six million Jews in Europe. Israel was founded as a haven for Jews following World War II in the shadow of these atrocities. German government spokesman Stefan Lieberstein said that Israel is defending itself against the inhuman attack by Hamas.

"There are alarming developments taking place in Germany and Europe," Grütters said. "Right-wing and populist parties are garnering strong support, and their representatives are being elected to parliaments in growing numbers, even in Germany. In particular, following the horrific events on 7 October, Germany has experienced a rise in antisemitic attacks, including and especially in Berlin. The question of why Jews specifically are so hated is a question that has been troubling us since long before Hamas's devastating attack on Israel.

"The irrational, delusional, and absurd nature of the ever-present, centuries-old scourge of antisemitism is perhaps also one of the reasons why there's a sense



Professor Monika Grütters and Tali Nates

of helplessness when it comes to attacking it, as we're finding out once again. Especially when confronted by it in environments that we thought were too intelligent, too thoughtful, and too tolerant for such fakes and attacks in culture and academia." Grütters was commenting on the surge in antisemitic activity on university campuses globally.

"Holocaust survivors have formed words for experiences that go beyond all normal measures of what's conceivable and imaginable. Their words have helped us to see not just the horrifying stark figure of the millions who were murdered, but also the fate of individual people, people from whom the Nazis took everything but their lives. People who lost their parents and children. People who were robbed of their homes, their dreams for the future, their enjoyment of life, and their dignity. People who were emotionally broken by the suffering

inflicted on them. The fewer Holocaust survivors there are who can tell us their stories, the harder it becomes to convey, and the more important authentic sites of remembrance become," she said.

"We're preserving concentration camps in particular as contemporary beacons for future generations. The national collective memory should be based on

historical facts, not distortions of history, myth-making, or oversimplifications of political monopolism on how things should be interpreted.

"Remembrance means that we cannot stay silent when hatred is torn up against Jews or Muslims, or refugees and immigrants, for example. Remembrance means never retreating into the comfortable but irresponsible belief that our voices, our actions, don't matter. The opposite is true. It's up to every one of us. Let's not forget that the silence of the majority was what paved the way in Germany for the so-called final solution to the Jewish question – the systematic Europe-wide organisation of genocide that was discussed and agreed upon at the Wannsee Conference 82 years ago. Whereas the courageous and valiant efforts of very few by contrast saved lives in the Third Reich and preserved pockets of humanity in an intellectual and moral wasteland, as was the case, for example, with Oskar Schindler. The wind of freedom blows only where people are willing to stand up for freedom and defend it. Our culture of remembrance can and should contribute to this," Grütters said.

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Failure to approve dual citizenship could impact Litvaks

SAUL KAMIONSKY

Although close to 200 Litvaks – Jews of Lithuanian descent – voted in the Lithuanian presidential elections on 12 May at Beyachad in Johannesburg, the result was insufficient to secure the right for all Lithuanians to hold dual citizenship.

The referendum, which formed part of a multi-pronged election on Sunday, was unsuccessful in overturning Article 12 of the Constitution of Lithuania, which precludes dual citizenship, and results in only a small number of Lithuanians having the right to hold dual citizenship.

According to the Central Election Commission, 59.02% of voters took part in the referendum. The constitutional amendment on dual citizenship was supported by 73.94% of voters, but this wasn't enough, because more than half of the population with the right to vote must support the proposal in order for it to be adopted. Less than half of eligible voters voted in favour of change.

This wasn't the outcome that most Litvaks and many in the Lithuanian government wanted, because it means Lithuanians could potentially prevent Litvaks from holding dual citizenship when most Lithuanians don't have this privilege. In the lead-up to the Lithuanian election, members of the Lithuanian government called on South Africans holding Lithuanian citizenship to vote in the upcoming election, saying its outcome could determine the future of dual passports.

Voting was essential, they said, because part of the election included a referendum on giving Lithuanian citizens the right to

hold dual passports. As it stands, Jews of Lithuanian origin are among the few entitled to this. So, should dual citizenship not be accepted across the board, it may have a negative impact on those who hold dual passports and those trying to attain them.

There are believed to be between 3 000 and 7 000 South Africans holding Lithuanian citizenship.

"It's crucial for South

Africans holding Lithuanian passports to participate in the elections as their votes can influence decisions related to citizenship laws, including the possibility of allowing dual citizenship," said the Lithuanian ambassador in South Africa, Rasa Jankauskaitė. "By exercising their right to vote, they can advocate for policies that have a direct impact on their status and rights."

Diana Kopilevic, the chairperson of the Election Commission at the Lithuanian embassy in South Africa, said she was "very happy" with the turnout of voters with Lithuanian citizenship.

"We had one referendum quite a few years ago and the motion didn't pass," she said. "This year was the second try."

Indeed, the 2019 referendum on Article 12

failed because votes in favour represented less than 40% of the total electorate. Changing Article 12 requires that more than half of all eligible voters vote in favour of the motion.

Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda, a 59-year-old former banker, and Prime Minister Ingrida Simonyte, a 49-year-old fiscal conservative with liberal views on social issues, will face off in the second round of the

Baltic state's presidential vote on 26 May after the incumbent failed to win an overall majority in the first round on Sunday.

Voters at Beyachad had access to information on all eight presidential candidates who appear on the ballot.

Jankauskaitė said none of the candidates had direct connections to South Africa, "but they have the connection to foreign policy and relations, which covers all countries including Africa. The African continent becomes more and more important for European states."

"Currently, the law on citizenship allows dual citizenship only in exceptional cases, for those whose ancestors left Lithuania before the restoration independence in 1990, but still had Lithuanian citizenship in 1940," said the ambassador.

The changes to the Citizenship Law of Lithuania in 2022, which was supported 100% during its parliamentary vote, were

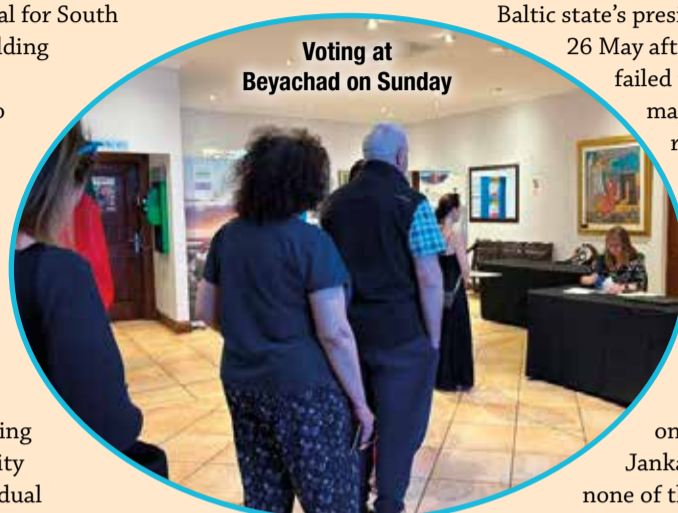
spearheaded to make the process of applying for citizenship reinstatement for South African Jews whose ancestors once held Lithuanian citizenship easier and simpler, and it removed unnecessary legal obstacles which had created much frustration and anger for South African Litvaks.

Litvak David Saks said recently, "Lithuania was the heartland of one of the greatest Jewish civilisations in the diaspora, and as a community largely of Litvak origin, South African Jewry have been able to build on that proud legacy. Since the downfall of communism, it has been possible, albeit to a modest extent, for people in our community to re-forge that connection. Allowing them to hold dual citizenship would obviously go a long way towards building on this in future."

"Being a South African Jew of Lithuanian descent, I know our roots are important," said Reeva Forman, another Lithuanian citizen. "To have dual citizenship for whatever reason reminds me of my roots and being able to have a say in an election that's not in the country I live in but one that I consider to be my own is extremely important."

It was back in June 2016 when the Lithuanian government made a promise to acknowledge Litvaks' right to citizenship, which was for years denied to them and their descendants for bureaucratic reasons. These amendments guaranteed the right to citizenship to Jews who were forced to flee Lithuania between 1918 and 1940, and who were citizens prior to 1940. It also recognised their descendants right to citizenship, going back four generations.

Voting on Sunday was also held in Pretoria at the Lithuanian embassy, which also attracted scores of people.



Voting at Beyachad on Sunday

Nature pic – a giant step for young photographer

LEE TANKLE

King David High School Linksfield matric student Jaime Freeman discovered a talent for wildlife photography during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 while on a trip to the bush, where he took pictures of anything he could, no matter how big or small.

It was this love affair with photography that led him to win the prestigious 2023 Young South African Photographer of the Year award earlier this year. And it wasn't his first award.

"I fell in love with the idea of capturing the wild beauty of the natural world, and I've been shooting ever since," he said.

In a short period of time, he has developed his skills to take acclaimed photographs, which he showcases on his Instagram page, where he has more than 1 300 followers. In his artistic photographs, he shares all the wildlife he has seen on various trips, ranging from something as large as an elephant to as small as a bush cricket.

It was on a family trip to Sabi Sands Nature Reserve in 2022 that Freeman was able to take two award-winning photographs, *Dwarf on a Giant* and *African Lioness*.

Dwarf on a Giant, a picture of a bush cricket perched on an elephant, was the 2023 Young South African Photographer of the Year winning photograph. The award showcases a striking and memorable image taken by a photographer under the age of 18.

Said Freeman, "As we were about to leave the reserve, we came across an elephant feeding on the side of the road. We stopped to watch this incredible animal one more time, and while I was watching him, I noticed a

green speck on his tusk. I took a closer look, and realised that it was a bush cricket resting on the elephant's tusk.

"I thought it a rare opportunity to capture and contrast the largest land animal on earth with a tiny insect, and how they each seem to be completely oblivious to the other's presence, yet they are living in the same world," Freeman said.

A year later, at the end of 2023, he entered this image into the awards along with thousands of other applicants.

In March 2024, he was informed that he had won the 2023 Young South African Photographer of the Year award. "Needless to say, I was excited beyond belief, and all of my friends were so happy for me," he said.

"We're so proud of Jaime and his photography prowess," King David Linksfield wrote on Facebook.

Jaime flew out to Cape Town to attend the awards ceremony on 5 April, where the image was displayed along with other winners of the competition showcasing all different forms of wildlife.

He was given various prizes, including a brand-new Canon R7 camera with a Canon RF 100mm-400mm lens, valued at about R46 000, to take his career in photography to the next level.

During the 2022 trip, he also took a picture of a lioness in a tree, which won the Youth in Africa category of the 2022 Benjamin Mkapa African Wildlife Photography Awards in November 2022, when he was just 15 years old.

Whenever he goes on a trip to the bush, Freeman makes sure to pack all his camera equipment so he can capture the next nature marvel, and he hopes to turn his passion into a career.



Jaime Freeman with his winning photograph

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Joining the call for a ceasefire



INNER VOICE
Howard Feldman

It might have taken me some time, but I've made the decision to support the call for a ceasefire. As a Jew, I cannot ignore the fact that my grandparents were Holocaust survivors, that we understand what suffering is, and that each day results in the unnecessary deaths of so many innocent civilians. Civilians whose greatest crime is to live where they do, and civilians who haven't asked to be caught up in the choices of their government.

I'm joining the call for a ceasefire in South Africa now because South Africans deserve better than to live and die in a country where 80 people are murdered each day. They deserve better than to have little access to healthcare, flushing toilets, electricity, and employment. They deserve better than to have a government that they cannot trust with their milk money, and a government that behaves as if it's the spokesperson of the Iranian regime.

I call for a ceasefire in South Africa now. To talk of a two-state solution is premature. And naïve. Where the Cape Independence Party might imagine a scenario where Capetonians and those from Gauteng might live side by side in perfect harmony, those who understand history, economics, and political ambition know that this isn't possible. They know that try as they might, "Joburgers" will never dress as well, will never speak in lilting faintly British accents, and will always pronounce the word "pizza" differently. Just as those from the City of Gold are aware that they will never be as wealthy as those from the Cape, but will never look as poor as those with homes in Bantry Bay choose to look.

I might even consider adorning my X profile with useful and meaningful slogans that reflect my recent depth and magnificent humanity. In this vein, I'll be printing t-shirts emblazoned with "From the (Orange) River to the (Atlantic) Sea",

while denying that this reflects a desire to ethnically cleanse anyone from Brakpan, Springs, or Benoni. Even maybe Germiston.

So passionate am I about my newfound caring nature, I'm prepared to have a tent pitched on the Fairmount Field, being close to all the decent kosher places and Woolworths Food, and not far at all from Urban Grind should I need a coffee fix. I recognise the immense and moving sacrifice, but in my darkest hours (loadshedding), I'll be inspired by Nelson Mandela's iconic words, "We know too well that our freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the Kaapies." Or something like that.

Where I will be unlikely to become successfully vegan for the cause, I would consider inviting the JVP (Jewish Voices for Pizza) to a multicultural prayer service. We'll print our very own booklet, otherwise known as a menu, and we'll take turns in reading in sincere whispers. We'll begin with dessert and move backwards to starters, because it's indeed a world that's upside down. Or back to front. Or something.

I will, of course, live tweet the event. As someone who has been told that he stands on the wrong side of history, I finally understand what it means to be part of something so magnificent. And so, I humbly appeal to you to join my Ceasefire in SA cause right now. That said, please understand that should you choose not to, I'll consider you to be an apartheid loving, genocide supporting murderer. And I'll tell everyone.

Peace and love.

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Freedom and democracy



ABOVE BOARD
Karen Milner

The South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) has had pre-election initiatives at every national and municipal election since 2009. They are part of our engagement with the broader society. Such is also true of our annual Freedom Seders, in which we share the lessons our heritage on the themes of freedom and human rights with political leaders, civil society, diplomats, other faith groups, university and student leadership, and the media. This event has become a highlight of our calendar, allowing us to engage meaningfully with various allies and stakeholders from different communities. Our Freedom Seder dinner this year was held just ahead of Pesach and Freedom Day at the end of April. What has always been a special and meaningful evening had added significance on this occasion. A record number of people accepted our invitation, so many that we had to get a bigger venue. Over chicken soup and kneidlach, charoset, and matzah, our speakers talked about issues of slavery and freedom, which this year had added resonance with an empty table, set in yellow, with photographs of the more than 100 hostages still held by Hamas.

Guest speaker Muzi Kuzwayo, the co-founder of South Africa's Promise, drew parallels between Jewish freedom as symbolised by the exodus, and that of South Africa celebrating Freedom Day. Sharing his own experiences of growing up in Springs, he reflected how Jews and black South Africans lives were interconnected. For my own part, I spoke about how South Africa's freedom was hard won, including through the hard labour of Nelson Mandela and the many others who gave their lives and liberty for the right to vote. I urged those present to honour their sacrifices, not be cynical, and to do the right thing by making sure that they vote, particularly now when it counts so much.

On Sunday, 19 May, as part of our traditional pre-election Make Us Count campaign, we'll host an Election Indaba in Johannesburg and an election debate in Cape Town, which will be broadcast live by eNCA.

The indaba in Johannesburg will be attended by nine political parties and moderated by journalist Mandy Wiener. What's more, Wayne Sussman will be providing an analysis of the political landscape, and for the first time, we'll offer attendees the opportunity to engage with political leaders one-on-one over cheese and wine. We encourage community members to reserve their places quickly as seats are limited and demand is high.

Additionally, as part of this campaign, the SAJBD is leading an interfaith observer team. The team is made up of 93 people from across the country and different religions, races, backgrounds, and languages, who have volunteered their time to ensure that the election is conducted in a fair and just manner. This undertaking is a clear demonstration of the community's commitment to democracy in South Africa, and willingness to be actively involved in the election process.

We're so proud to have witnessed extremely large attendances, not only at the Freedom Seder, but also at Yom Hashoah, Yom Hazikaron, and Yom Ha'atzmaut. Truly, the community is showing that it's engaged, active, and willing to participate in these very important moments in spite of the challenging period we are experiencing.

• 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

Daniel Perez's heroism immortalised in song gone viral

>>Continued from page 4

Elchanan says his relationship with Daniel was at first, a "normal cousin relationship, but in the months before 7 October, we started chatting and connected more. He helped me a lot. We started really getting close. I actually spoke to him the day before [that tragic October date].

"When I got the terrible news, I was watching a movie. I was heartbroken. It was very hard. But he died, got killed, for me."

Hundreds of mourners attended Daniel's funeral on 18 March at the Mount Herzl military cemetery in Jerusalem. People also thronged the streets of Yad Binyamin, where Daniel lived, with Israeli flags to pay respects to their fallen hero, who served as a tank commander in the 77th battalion of the 7th "Storm from the Golan" formation.

Daniel's family, meanwhile, was thrust into the spotlight as global advocates for the release of soldiers

The translation of the song lyrics:

*"In the battlefield, morning of explosions
You promised to stay alive
All the time you said everything is fine, it's okay
We have the right to defend the homeland
I haven't seen with my own eyes you killing terrorists
Looking at the sky, not seeing God
I haven't seen wars yet, I'm only 20
There are still dreams I haven't fulfilled
In smoke and dust, you smiled happily
You said if we fall, we'll fall with honor
I swear I got angry, I didn't understand you, no chance,
it's over, I'm coming back with you
Mom is waiting, sitting and crying
Full of hope for a message from you
You promised to travel after the army, instead, I'm at
your grave praying that
You'll come back, how did you fall, my hero
I miss you a lot
The heart is about to fall again
I'll always remember you, my hero
How did you go to battle without thinking twice
How did you fight, didn't see bombs in your eyes
You left everything important behind
In the heart, there's only to guard the country
Suddenly knocks on the door, mom falls, denial
ignites, the heart stands quietly
Feeling no time, just want to go
Just to believe it's a lie and hope it's okay
To remember to smile, it's not weakness
Your saying that went with you
You always said not to worry
And if something happens, know it's for the best
Because they won't take happiness from you
Like we sang that you're going to the army
So don't worry, I promise to take care of myself and
mom
Please come back, I miss you a lot
The longing doesn't stop, it pierces the bones,
I love you a lot"*

and hostages. Daniel's older brother, Yonatan, 24, was shot and moderately injured on 7 October following a heroic battle in the same area as his brother. He went ahead with his wedding a few weeks later.

Elchanan has also made a movie about post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). "I dedicated the movie to the memory of Daniel especially, but also to his two teammates who were killed and one teammate who returned after being kidnapped."

The movie is titled *Shrinking Silence*. "Originally, I wrote it last year, and then I stopped. After what happened to Daniel, and with my brother being in Gaza, I decided that we would put the movie out to create awareness of PTSD – a terrible thing. In the movie, you see how the soldiers are broken, and their other experiences."

• You can listen to the song on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=26cgCCBTNME> and watch the movie on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OxTO4urikXE>

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King David students master the art of public speaking

Daniel Segal and Aimee Shul from King David High School Victory Park are among only 30 Johannesburg students to be awarded certificates of excellence in master of ceremonies by the Speech and Drama College of South Africa. This is in recognition of their outstanding achievement at the High Schools' Public Speaking Festival in April.



Aimee Shul



Daniel Segal

Yeshiva tournament puts ball in Summerwood's court

Twenty-three competitive netball teams lit up the courts at Yeshiva College Girls High School on Sunday, 5 May, in a tournament to raise funds for Summerwood Primary School. Initiated and organised by Eliya Ossin, the event aimed at funding the upgrade of Summerwood's netball courts.



Yeshiva College Girls High School and Summerwood Primary School

Mosaic in honour of Ackerman reflects life's tapestry

A mosaic tapestry wall in honour of late Pick n Pay founder Raymond Ackerman was unveiled at the Tahara house at Pinelands Cemetery #2 in Cape Town on 7 May. The project was funded by Suzanne Ackerman and Kathy Ackerman Robins with artist Lovell Friedman and landscape architect Tarna Klitzner being commissioned to do the artwork and design.



Photo: Shawn Benjamin

Kathy Ackerman Robins and Suzanne Ackerman

The previous tapestry that had hung for many years in the Tahara house was in bad shape due to over exposure to the elements, damaging it beyond repair.

The new mosaic, with its thousands of ceramic shards, metaphorically represents the mosaic of the Cape Town Jewish community. It represents community unity, the "bigger picture", and the notion that when you "love your fellow as yourself", you mirror the holiness of Hashem.

Lovell drew inspiration from the original embroidered cloth that hung on the wall of the Tahara house. "There's something about the muted earthy colours, the spiritual blues of Techelet, and Jewish symbols that's timely, reflective, and meditative," she said.

The idea was to create a textured landscape that is poetic, with symbols of plants, roots, and allowing the tassels of the previous tapestry to reference roots and *tzitzit*. "There will be 613 tassels referencing the 613 *mitzvot*," Lovell said. "The words, 'I fear no evil for the Thou art with me' will be made in blue mosaic, with the stone behind them providing continuity with the outside mosaics in cemetery wash structures."

Letters

DA NOT SWAYED BY PERSONALITY CULT

The Democratic Alliance (DA) has a proud history of response and openness to the *SA Jewish Report*, and it's sad that one person in the field can carry the reputation of the party in the newspaper's editorial when they don't even hold political office.

Richard Newton doesn't need my defence as he has his own proud career highlights blasted on the internet. However, voting for character over principle is something South Africa still has to learn. We have a culture of personality led parties in which people feel that if they vote for that party, that's what they are getting. This isn't true. In a national election, you're voting for a party and its whole list of candidates. In some of the parties that the *SA Jewish Report* is promoting, there are outspoken anti-Zionist champions that border closely on the cusp of antisemitism. Some parties parade on stages protecting Israel, but when it comes down to the real debates in the committee, their representatives are a no-show. In other parties, you may not like their leaders, but there may be a multitude of talented politicians that carry the party and contribute to their policies and programmes. This is when balance, fairness, opportunity, and justice should be at the forefront of your choice.

It's a positive contribution to the community to have all parties represented and their manifestos placed for all to see. We applaud and appreciate this. We also appreciate our relationship with your paper, and its constant attempts to be balanced and inclusive.

Make no mistake, this election is a key event in the progress of our country. It boils down to voting for an axis of good and productive or anti-progress and economically destructive. Your vote should be for a party that has the potential and experience to push the current administration out of power. You should take this vote as serious as if your life savings depended on it. - **Darren Bergman, Johannesburg**



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