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# South African Jewish Report

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## Ramaphosa's river chant reflects sea-change for ANC

TALI FEINBERG

At the African National Congress's (ANC's) last rally before South Africa went to the polls on 29 May, President Cyril Ramaphosa made sure he would be remembered as the president who took Israel to the world court accusing it of genocide, and calling for the genocide of Jews in Israel.

Deviating from his prepared script at the FNB Stadium in Soweto on 25 May, Ramaphosa chanted, "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free." He also chose to leave out the words "the hostages held in Gaza must be released" from his prepared speech. The entire rally focused relentlessly on the Palestinians, including the unfurling of a giant Palestinian flag, rather than South Africa's multitude of challenges.

The "from the river to the sea" chant is widely regarded as an antisemitic call for the eradication of Israel and all who live in it. In April, the United States House of Representatives passed a resolution condemning the chant as antisemitic. Back in November 2023, the Prosecutor's Office in Berlin announced that the slogan was a form of incitement to hate and subject to criminal penalty.

"It's unprecedented for a sitting head of state in South Africa to use chants expressing genocidal intent," says South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) spokesperson Rolene Marks. "The SAZF is considering potential legal avenues in response to this hate speech."

"The South African Jewish Board of Deputies [SAJBD] is reviewing its options for holding the president accountable for these hateful words," says SAJBD National Director Wendy Kahn. "This reconfirms our understanding that President Ramaphosa

and his government aren't looking for a peaceful solution to the conflict, but rather to cause discord among fellow South Africans against its Jewish community. The president's contempt for South African Jewry is evident in this unscripted outburst, which amounts to nothing more than Jew hatred.

"The chanting of this slogan by the head

of government that recurrently expresses its commitment to a 'two-state solution' is hypocritical to the full," says Kahn. "How does a sitting president reject his own government and party's international relations policy?"

"The president called for the elimination of the only Jewish state, speaking to

thousands of ANC members and on national television," she says. "The slogan and its call for the destruction of the Jewish state has its origin in the Hamas charter, with its goal of Israel being 'Judenfrei' [Jew-free]."

Says Marks, "This incident clarifies that the ANC government's case against Israel at the International Court of Justice is simply a ruse to delegitimise the Jewish state, and represents a significant shift in ANC policy from supporting a two-state solution to calling for the destruction of the world's only Jewish state.

"The SAZF is deeply concerned about the continued use of this dog-whistle for the annihilation of Israel, to the extent that we recently made a submission to Facebook owner Meta's Oversight Board, clearly explaining why the phrase constitutes hate speech and violates its community standards," says Marks.

"Calling for the annihilation of millions of people as part of a misguided attempt at electioneering is deeply destructive and hateful. It also violates the South African Constitution, which doesn't protect incitement to violence.

"Such hatred towards Israel, and a refusal to acknowledge its right to exist, places South Africa at odds with its largest trading partners and much of the Middle East," says Marks. "It has no connection to a call for Palestinian statehood, and is routinely used by extremists and terrorist groups such as Hamas calling for the elimination of Israel and the massacre of Jews.

"The SAZF calls on President Ramaphosa to immediately and unconditionally apologise to the South African Jewish community and all Constitution-abiding South Africans for his use of extremist rhetoric

during the ANC's closing election rally."

Local media, which is routinely anti-Israel, described Ramaphosa's chant as "a gaffe" and "controversial".

The moment contrasts sharply with Ramaphosa's address to the Jewish community at the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation in the early days of his presidency in 2018, where he said, "Our Constitution explicitly provides for the protection of cultural and religious rights. We must remain vigilant against all forms of intolerance and discrimination. We must respond to antisemitism with the same resolve as we respond to any act or statement that seeks to demean any faith, race, gender, or ethnic group.

"We must continue to play a constructive role in the quest for peace in the Middle East," Ramaphosa said at the time. "We're clear and unequivocal in our support for the achievement of a Palestinian state alongside the right of the state of Israel to exist in peace and security with its neighbours."

Hussein Solomon, senior professor in the department of political science at the University of the Free State, says, "The chant is deeply problematic because it wasn't in the original speech, which suggests a bend towards greater populism – anything that could get votes. I think we've moved away from a 'neutral position' that encompasses a home for both Israelis and Palestinians, to just a Palestinian state. This is extremely problematic, especially because Ramaphosa is head of state. I hope this unfortunate statement doesn't have severe ramifications for South Africa."

Commenting on the ANC's focus on Gaza until its very last rally, political analyst Daniel Silke says, "The script for the ANC in this election has been to use the Gaza conflict as

Continued on page 2>>



Edna Freinkel, 92, makes her mark at the ballot box in Johannesburg on Wednesday

Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

### Voting for change

See pages 3, 8, 9 and 10



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# Devastation in Rafah rattles Israel's most ardent defenders

RON KAMPEAS – JTA

For months, Zoe Buckman, a Brooklyn artist with more than 72 000 followers on Instagram, has posted about the hypocrisy she sees in critics of Israel who downplay the atrocities committed by Hamas on 7 October.

On Monday, she again decried hypocrisy. But this time, she aimed her criticism in large part towards fellow supporters of Israel.

"Folks who do not condemn loss of civilian life in Palestine are akin to the many who refuse to condemn 10/7, h@mas and what is being done to the hostages," she posted on Instagram Stories. "Turning a blind eye, the way others do to us, is not our way."

In the wake of Israel's strike on a displaced persons camp in Rafah on 26 May that killed dozens, Buckman was one of a number of pro-Israel advocates who said they couldn't look away. The viral images of devastation - including that of a decapitated child - triggered an outpouring of horror on social media. Some sought to contextualise the violence, noting that it was Hamas that started the war and could end it by surrendering

and freeing the captives. Others suggested that no end was worth the horror of at least 45 civilians killed in a single incident.

A range of world leaders also condemned the attack, which Israel says it's investigating as probably having been caused by a secondary explosion after it targeted two Hamas leaders, who were killed. But the responses underscored the degree to which support for Israel's war effort has eroded beyond the halls of government in the nearly eight months since 7 October.

"The scenes from Rafah overnight are horrific," Piers Morgan, the popular British TV host who has made a sport of sparring with critics of Israel on his show, said on 27 May on X. "I've defended Israel's right to defend itself after 7 October, but slaughtering so many innocent people as they cower in a refugee camp is indefensible."

Addressing Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin



Aftermath of an Israeli air strike in Rafah (southern Gaza Strip) on 26 May

Netanyahu, to whom he has previously afforded friendly interviews, Morgan said, "Stop this now @netanyahu."

Avi Mayer, a longtime pro-Israel activist and former editor of *The Jerusalem Post*, called for Hamas's surrender, but his tone was one of exhaustion. "The images from Rafah are terrible," he said. "This war has gone on for too long. It's time

for it to end."

Mayer wasn't the only Israeli who has accrued a massive following for public diplomacy, defending their country and its actions, to lament the strike and its aftermath.

Influencer Hen Mazzig posted that it was "undeniable" that Israel had taken measures to protect civilians in Rafah even as Hamas had shot rockets at Israel, but wrote, "None of this can ever justify the heartbreaking tragedy of Palestinian civilians losing their lives in the fire caused by the strike. We must always recognise the humanity in Palestinian civilians who aren't part of this war. When we fail to see their humanity, we lose our own," he said.

Israeli officials are defending the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) campaign in Rafah, which they say is necessary to eliminate the remnants of Hamas's fighting force. In an address, Netanyahu called the strike a "tragic" mistake, but said, "I will not yield or surrender. I will not end the war before achieving all our goals. Our fallen heroes will not have died in vain."

On 28 May, Rear Admiral Daniel Hagari, the spokesperson for the IDF, said the original aim of the strike, to take out senior leaders of Hamas, was successful. He said the civilian deaths were caused by a fire sparked by the strike that the military didn't anticipate.

Some Israeli right-wing extremists celebrated the incident, referring to it in now-deleted social-media posts as "Lag B'Omer in Rafah".

Tomer Persico, a scholar at the Shalom Hartman Institute who has decried antisemitism on the left since 7 October, posted a screenshot of one such tweet, since deleted, by a right-wing Israeli TV host. "This is joy at the death of children," he said.

Sarah Tuttle-Singer, a columnist whose posts since 7 October have described the anguish of Israelis, also called for an end to the fighting.

"This war has stolen so much from us," she said on Facebook. "We won't let it also steal our humanity."

## Ramaphosa's river chant reflects sea-change for ANC

>>Continued from page 1

best as it could to exact as much domestic political benefit as possible. The continuous use of Gaza in most of the major presidential addresses and even in addresses by other ANC politicians shows that this has in many cases usurped the domestic agenda within South Africa.

"The sloganeering from the president reflects the desperate need of the ANC to find resonance," says Silke.

"However, in all the polling, foreign policy issues haven't shown up at all in responses from voters."

Another local political analyst, Steven Gruzd, says Ramaphosa's chant "shouldn't come as a surprise, given his statements since 7 October and his wearing of a keffiyeh along with most of his cabinet. The ANC being anti-Israel is part of its DNA these days. People have already factored it into their voting choices."

Political journalist John Matson, who wrote *Cyril's Choices: Lessons from 25 Years of Freedom in South Africa*, says Ramaphosa is a thinking man who reads widely. He believes that perhaps he chanted the slogan because of "the heat of the campaign".

"I'm not sure that he understands what the chant implies," says Gruzd. "Or worse, he knows exactly what it means."

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## A piece about peace



Rebbetzin Temmi Hadar  
Pine Street Shul

What's the one blessing you seek most from G-d?

Is it financial success, health,

or perhaps the blessings of family and friends? This week's Torah portion, *Bechukotai*, opens with a series of the most beautiful blessings that G-d promises to bestow upon us if we walk in the path of the Torah. Among these blessings, G-d promises, "*Venatati shalom ba'aretz*." (And I will grant peace in the land.) Rashi elaborates on this verse, "You might say, 'Here is food, and here is drink, but if there's no peace, there's nothing!' From here, we learn that peace is equal to everything else."

Rashi highlights a profound truth: no matter the abundance of material blessings one might have, without peace, we lack the space and ability to truly appreciate and enjoy these blessings. Peace isn't merely an absence of conflict, but a state of harmony and completeness that allows us to experience life's goodness fully.

One of the ways we can draw down this *brocha* of peace is by actively creating peace within our environments - within ourselves, our families, and our communities. This week's *parsha* is always read during the Omer period, and this message aligns with this time of introspection and mourning for the 24 000 students of Rabbi Akiva who perished due to a lack of mutual respect. In spite of being great Torah scholars, their failure to honour each other's unique paths to connecting with G-d led to a devastating plague.

This tragic event in our history underscores the importance of *ahavat Yisrael* (love for our fellow Jews) and unity within the Jewish nation. Thus, the Omer period is a time to focus on increasing our love and respect for each other, emphasising the need for communal harmony and mutual respect.

This past Sunday, 26 May, we celebrated Lag

B'Omer, a day that breaks the mourning of the Omer period with joy and unity. Our beautiful Jewish Johannesburg community held an extraordinary parade, organised by Tzivos Hashem and Chabad House, designed to highlight our many wonderful communal organisations, schools, and shuls. Standing on the streets of Johannesburg on Sunday watching the floats and schools pass by, I - with my American passport - was immensely grateful to be living here in Johannesburg.

It's easy to focus on the problems and challenges in our lives, or the blessings we may still be praying for, and I acknowledge the issues we face living in this country. But in spite of those challenges, seeing so many segments of our Johannesburg Jewish

community unite to celebrate Jewish pride reminded me how fortunate I am to be part of such a special community, one that truly exemplifies peace, tolerance, and unity among Jews.

Let's not take for granted this blessing of living in peace with our fellow Jews. Let's remember that while material blessings are lovely, the proper foundation of a blessed life is peace - both internal and external. While we continue to pray for peace in our homeland, let's ask ourselves how we can foster peace in our homes, relationships, and community as a channel to draw down blessings for *Am Yisrael*.

May we see the complete fulfilment of the words of the *possuk*, "*Venatati shalom ba'aretz*." (And I will grant peace in the land) with the coming of Moshiach!

### Torah Thought

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Yom Yerushalayim (Jerusalem Day) which starts on Tuesday night 4 June, is the anniversary of the liberation and unification of Jerusalem under Jewish sovereignty that occurred during the Six-Day War. It is one of four holidays (in addition to Yom Hashoah, Yom Hazikaron, and Yom Ha'atzmaut) that were added to the Jewish calendar in the 20th century.

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# Jewish South Africans' hopes on the line

LEE TANKLE AND JESSICA CONNÉ

"The most important factor to consider when voting is who has a long-term plan and a realistic roadmap to rectify the list of problems," a young Capetonian man told the SA Jewish Report while waiting to vote on Wednesday, 29 May.



Voters queuing outside Sea Point Boys High School in Cape Town

The SA Jewish Report went to voting booths to get a sense of what South African Jews felt about the election. "Anyone who makes immediate promises is lying because none of the local issues - like water, electricity, roads, ports, corruption, crime, home affairs, education, healthcare, to name but a few - can be rectified without fundamental change at every level," said the Capetonian man voting in Milnerton. "Changes like this have legal processes to be followed, and can be very slow to implement, even with the best intentions."

"My hope for this election is that the majority of voters choose to vote for a party that has a socioeconomic policy that encourages a free market, freedom of expression, and strict fiscal and legal accountability," he said.

An elderly female editor voting at Summerwood Primary School in Fairmount,

Johannesburg, said she was voting for "whoever isn't a terrorist". She explained that she wanted to vote for "someone who has enough clout to do something and make a change".

"It has never been more important to vote," she said. "This is the most important election since 1994."

We need to take this chance to do something because otherwise, we'll be left without hope for the future of the country."

A fashion entrepreneur voting at the Sandton Fire Station said she felt it important to go to the polls because "If the people of South Africa don't see the importance of change now, how will we ever live in a corruption-free country?"

A 55-year-old man voting in Pretoria said he considered this election significant because, "It's the last chance to rescue South Africa."

We cannot afford another five years of ANC [African National Congress] rule for reasons across the board." He said he hoped "the DA [Democratic Alliance] wins an outright majority, with ActionSA, the FF+ [Freedom Front Plus], BOSA [Build One South Africa] and the like winning seats in Parliament. And that MK [uMkhonto we Sizwe], the EFF [Economic Freedom



Gershon and Caryn Bachrach at Summerwood Primary School

Fighters] and similar parties, receive fewer votes than they anticipated". He said if the ANC were to stay in power, he would be determined to get his children out of South Africa.

"None of the parties is perfect," said Linda Capon Kruger, a DA councillor at Summerwood Primary School. "There will always be things you don't agree with. You have to choose the party that you believe will help the country as a whole move forward."

Similarly, an 84-year-old man residing in Pretoria said the reason he went out to vote was to ensure that there was "less corruption and more employment



Daniel and Rachel Miller casting their votes at Summerwood Primary School

Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

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opportunities for white people". He believed this election was an opportunity to "defeat the ANC".

A Johannesburg-based teacher voting in Sunninghill, said that if the ANC stayed in power to the same extent that it has, she would be "devastated", adding, "I've never wanted to leave, but if they come in again, I will consider leaving South Africa."

A lawyer voting in Sandton said she took "the government's position on Israel and general level of corruption and ineptitude" into consideration when deciding who she should vote for. Though she doesn't think the ANC will lose its majority power and will rather form coalitions, she hopes her worst-case scenario of an ANC-EFF coalition doesn't come to fruition.

A female university student in Cape Town said, "My approach to voting is that I don't want the worst-case scenario - in terms of my interests - to happen. So, it's not necessarily focused on specific policies or issues, it's more about not wanting an incompetent party in charge of the province I'm in. Those parties would include the EFF and ANC. Their values and manifestos don't align with the country that I think South Africa could be, and they are actively opposing the future of South Africa."

She believes "the ANC will inevitably remain in power. A lot of South Africans feel like this as it has been our leading political party since democracy in 1994."

Another Cape Town University student,



Naama Jude and Elana Suttner at the voters' roll desk

Photo: Ilan Ossendryver



Centenarian Jaffa resident Ockey Salmenson

voting in the Southern Suburbs, told the SA Jewish Report, "The things that matter most about voting are definitely how the government in power views Jews and, more specifically,

Israel because you can't separate the two.

"Anti-Israel rhetoric and anti-Zionism is the new antisemitism, and I wouldn't feel comfortable voting for somebody whose views didn't align with the Jewish people being able to live comfortably and freely in the land. I would never want to support a government that endorses the violent behaviour that has been adopted by pro-Palestinian supporters. I would want a country that keeps all people's rights safe, regardless of their views," she said.

"The worst-case scenario is that we continue to have a corrupt government that doesn't care about its people. But on top of that, it leads to a bad fate for the Jews and Israel."

A male Capetonian voter at Camps Bay said, "My worst-case scenario is that the ANC just misses the required seats for an outright majority and forms a coalition with the EFF, which will then gain more practical power than its percentage of the vote should allow."

A middle-aged female voter, at Jabula Recreation Centre in Johannesburg, said that when she was deciding who to vote for, she had taken "the state of the country, the fact that our children are leaving South Africa, the state of our roads, and the state of our economy" into account as "soon, this country will be one filled with old people, so we need to vote to ensure that the young people want to stay".

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# 'River to sea' chant under scrutiny in metaverse

NICOLA MILTZ

The controversial anti-Israel chant "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free", which has surged in usage since the 7 October Hamas attack on Israel, is under scrutiny in the metaverse.

This follows complaints by users of Facebook and Instagram.

Thousands of people and organisations, including from South Africa, have submitted comments to Facebook and Instagram's independent Oversight Board about whether the apps should continue to allow the hurtful and hateful phrase to be used.

The submissions were made in response to the Meta Oversight Board's call on 7 May 2024 for public comment about whether social-media posts that include the phrase violate its community standards.

The board, which functions as a quasi-appeals court for content moderation on the Meta-owned apps, recently agreed to consider whether the phrase qualifies as hate speech because some interpret it as an antisemitic call for the elimination of Israel.

The South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) and the South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) are among the many organisations worldwide

relation to cyber hate.

A spokesperson for the Oversight Board said, "Conflicts create unique content-moderation challenges for social-media platforms where these situations are heavily debated, protested, and reported on. The board is deliberating three cases regarding this phrase because of the resurgence in its use after 7 October and controversies around its meaning. The board will issue its decisions and may, as is typical in its cases, provide additional recommendations to Meta."

The Oversight Board, created in 2019 by Meta Chief Executive Mark Zuckerberg, has members from around the world.

It's evaluating three instances in which people on Facebook used the phrase "From the river to the sea". In all three, Facebook left the phrase up after users reported it. The users who opposed the phrase then filed appeals.

Kahn said in the Board's submission that South African Jewry had experienced increased threats and intimidation in the wake of the 7 October attacks, including comments from "highly placed politicians".

"At the ruling party, the ANC, rally at the Israeli embassy, days after 7 October, senior members of the ANC were chanting, 'From the river to the sea' on the same platforms that they were calling

not just for the Israeli embassy to be expelled, but for the democratically elected representative body of the South African Jewish community also to be kicked out of the country.

"The term has become mainstream in South Africa, parallel to the many other types of attacks and threats on the Jewish community, including boycotts of Jewish business. What's tagged on all of these antisemitic initiatives is this slogan. It has become the rallying cry

of Jew hatred in South Africa," she said.

The Board and the SAZF have called on the Oversight Board to direct Meta to remove posts containing the phrase from its platforms.

The SAZF said the phrase violated Meta's community standards. The phrase "alludes to genocidal intentions of the terrorist organisations who have adopted the phrase as their mantra against Jewish people residing inside and outside of Israel", it said in its submission.

It was "universally understood" by its Jewish or Israeli audience as an antisemitic call for the violent eradication of Israel and its inhabitants, who are perceived as an obstacle to a free Palestine.

"The notion of a Palestine free from the river to the sea is incompatible with the Jewish right to continued self-determination, and a threat to continued Jewish existence. The chanting of this phrase or its use in social-media posts therefore contains an embedded message to Jews that their very existence as a nation is threatened," said SAZF spokesperson Rolene Marks.

The SAZF pointed out that the phrase had gained traction since 7 October as the main chant heard at any Pro-Palestinian rally during increasingly violent protests directed against Israel and its inhabitants, including on college campuses.

"Meta has acknowledged the complaint, and said the Oversight Board would take a few weeks to evaluate it," Marks said. "A decision will be posted on the Oversight Board's website once the process is complete."

"While all of our policies are developed with safety in mind, we know they come with global challenges and we regularly seek input from experts outside Meta, including the Oversight Board," the company said in a recent statement.

# ICJ again muddies the waters in Rafah ruling

STEVEN GRUZD

For the fourth time in five months, South Africa has taken Israel to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) under the Genocide Convention yet emerged with an ambiguous order that allows both sides to believe that they have won. This time, South Africa was asking the court to order Israel to stop its military operations in Rafah in southern Gaza.

It's hard to believe that the wording is deliberately vague from a professional body like the ICJ, but it has permitted both parties to spin the judgment to their advantage. The victory is hollow, and incentivises South Africa to relitigate this case in the future.

Here's the wording the ICJ used: "The court considers that in conformity with its obligations under the Genocide Convention, Israel shall immediately halt its military offensive, and any other action in the Rafah Governorate, which may inflict on the Palestinian group in Gaza conditions of life that could bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part."

Mark Oppenheimer, an advocate at the Johannesburg Bar, told the *SA Jewish Report*, "The ambiguity is whether Israel is required to halt its military offensive in Rafah entirely or whether its military offensive is limited in that it may not, during the course of that offensive, destroy the Palestinian group 'in whole or in part'. This ambiguity is reflected in the separate judgments of the court. Judges Georg Nolte, Julia Sebutinde, Bogdan Aurescu, and Aharon Barak all point out that there's an ambiguity that must be interpreted in such a manner that does not lead to a full halt of Israel's military offensive in Rafah. However, Judge Dire Tladi, from South Africa, takes the contrary view – that the

court's order implies that the offensive must be stopped in its entirety.

**ISRAEL CALLED SOUTH AFRICA'S CHARGES 'FALSE, OUTRAGEOUS, AND MORALLY REPUGNANT'.**

"What's puzzling about the situation is that all of the judgments would have been known to the whole court before publication, and it would have been open to the majority of the court to have resolved the ambiguity in one direction or the other. However, in light of the court's prior decision barring a ceasefire, it's reasonable to interpret the latest order as not requiring a ceasefire in Rafah now."

On the other hand, Tladi said: "Today, the court has, in explicit terms, ordered the state of Israel to halt its offensive in Rafah. The court has previously, albeit

in implicit and indirect ways, ordered the state of Israel not to conduct military operations elsewhere in Gaza because such operations prevent the delivery of human assistance and cause harm to the Palestinian people."

The South African government is also in no doubt. At an election rally in Soweto on 25 May, President Cyril Ramaphosa said: "There must be an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, particularly following the decision of the ICJ, after South Africa approached the court again.



Israeli Deputy Attorney General Dr Gilad Noam at the International Court of Justice

Photo: Screenshot YouTube

It has now ruled that yes, Israel must stop the attack against the people of Palestine in Rafah, in Gaza."

The court's order prompted Oren Marmorstein, Israel's foreign affairs ministry spokesperson, to publish on X a joint statement with the head of Israel's national security council. It called South Africa's charges "false, outrageous, and morally repugnant".

Echoing the United Nations (UN) Genocide Convention's language of "in whole or in part", the statement said, "Following the horrific attack against the citizens of Israel on 7 October 2023, Israel embarked upon a defensive and just war to eliminate Hamas and to secure the release of our hostages ... Israel has not and will not conduct military actions in the Rafah area which may inflict on the Palestinian civilian population in Gaza conditions of life that could bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part. Israel will continue its efforts to enable humanitarian assistance and will act, in full compliance with the law, to reduce as much as possible harm caused to the civilian population in Gaza."

The ICJ also ordered Israel to open the Rafah crossing, but it's closed on the Egyptian side, a fact over which Israel has no control. It called for

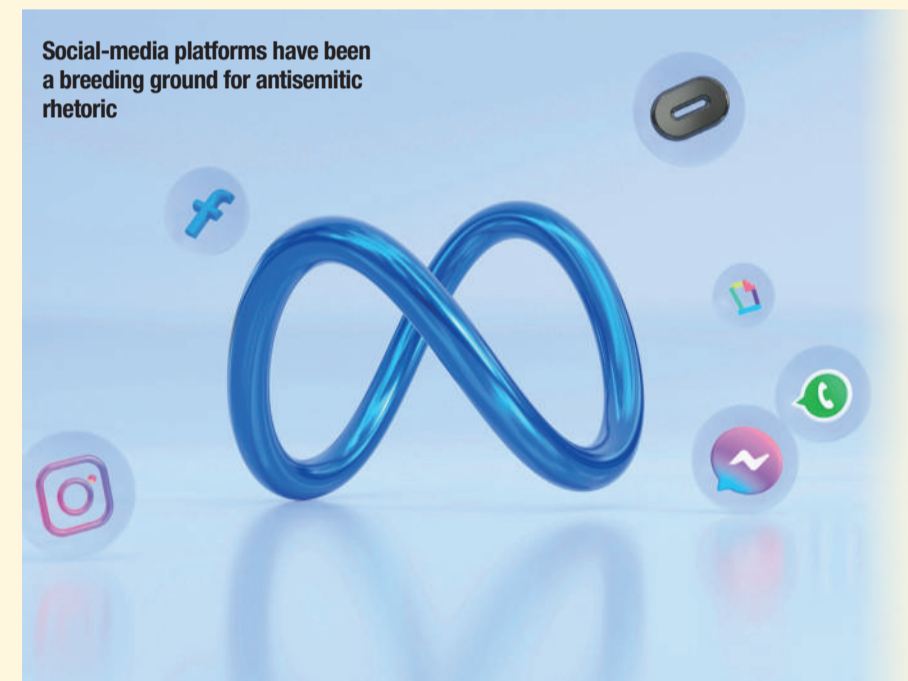
Israel to allow fact-finding and other UN missions unhindered access to Gaza. Given the well-established UN bias against Israel, it won't be enthusiastic about this element. Finally, the ICJ requires Israel to produce a monthly report on the situation, which Israel has already been producing.

Israel's compliance with international law hasn't been helped by wild statements by right-wing cabinet ministers calling for the destruction of the Gaza Strip and the cessation of all aid.

Israeli lawyer Yuval Oz wrote in the *Times of Israel*: "This isn't the first time in history that judges whose opinions differ try to find a form of compromise that everyone can agree on ... But in the present case, an unacceptable situation was created in which the compromise brought about such a vague text that each side is now reading it as it wishes."

The bottom line is that Israel will push forward in Rafah.

Social-media platforms have been a breeding ground for antisemitic rhetoric



to have made submissions.

The phrase refers to the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, an area that includes both the Palestinian territories (the West Bank and Gaza) and all of sovereign Israeli territory.

Some interpret it as a general appeal to Palestinian nationalism, while others, including terrorist organisation Hamas, have used it to call for a Palestinian state over the entire area, meaning that Israel wouldn't exist as an independent state.

Many users don't even know which river or sea the phrase refers to.

President Cyril Ramaphosa chanted the phrase at the African National Congress's (ANC's) final election rally on 25 May.

Jewish advocacy group the Anti-Defamation League submitted a comment calling the phrase antisemitic hate speech because it implies "the dismantling of the Jewish state". It has the effect of making members of the Jewish and pro-Israel community feel unsafe and ostracised, according to ADL Chief Executive Jonathan Greenblatt.

"This is a slogan that delegitimises the world's sole Jewish state and calls for its eradication. It has come to encapsulate an ideology that categorically denies the legitimacy of a sovereign Jewish presence in any part of what is today the state of Israel, the ancestral Jewish homeland," said SAJBD National Director Wendy Kahn, in the Board's submission.

"Its proponents are for the most part those who overtly seek the destruction of any such independent Jewish entity, and to that end, engage in and/or support unceasing acts of violence against it," said Kahn, who represents South Africa on the World Jewish Congress Online Hate Working Group, which addresses global antisemitism especially in





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## Focus on South Africa, Mr President!

Throughout the election campaign, the ANC made it clear that its love and care for Palestinians far outweighed its love and care for its own people. It reiterated that again and again, and how Palestinians' future was so intrinsically linked with that of South Africans.

At the ANC's final rally, the country's president, Cyril Ramaphosa - whom I have nicknamed "Brutus" for stabbing us, his former friends, in the back - shouted, "From the river to the sea ...!"

There wasn't a South African flag in sight at that rally. If you didn't know that it was a gathering of the ruling party of South Africa, you may have thought it was set up somewhere in Gaza to promote the Hamas jihad. The focus, especially visually, was on hating Israel and demeaning what the Jewish state stands for. If it wasn't so devastating to the Jews of this country and abroad - as well as the Western world - it would have been amusing in its absurdity. There was nothing that said it was the governing party challenging others in a national election in South Africa. It was all about a war in the Middle East. And as such, it was horrifying.

When a man like Ramaphosa, who has responsibility for an entire country and all its various communities, calls for the total destruction of the Jewish state and its people, it's shocking!

It's not difficult to decipher the meaning of the chant, and Ramaphosa is a smart man. When someone calls for everything from the Jordan River to Mediterranean Sea to become a free Palestinian state, they aren't calling for a two-state solution. They aren't calling for a friendly dialogue that leads to peace.

They are calling for the annihilation of the Jewish state and its people.

Mr Ramaphosa, although you haven't yet bothered, please don't demean us in trying to convince us that you didn't mean it like that. Clearly, you believe your responsibility is first and foremost to people who don't live here, and whom you don't even know. Clearly, you're quite happy to take the word of others, rather than finding out both sides of the story for yourself.

I'm so disappointed in you, our president. I and so many in our community believed that you were going to take power and build and fix this country for all who live in it, not sideline and ostracise specific communities.

I find it unconscionable that a South African political party - the ruling party at that - focuses its election campaign on a war in the Middle East. That's not to say that many of us in our community and in others in South Africa aren't devastated by what's happening there. We are. There's no good news in war. There's no joy in death. There's just sadness and pain - and lots of it. Too many innocent people on all sides have been and are being killed and harmed. Remember, Hamas is still holding more than 130 Israelis hostage in Gaza.

However, the national election this week was meant to be about South Africa and all its people. I always understood that a party wins an election because it convinces the electorate that it will build the economy, provide much-needed jobs, maintain or fix infrastructure, and I could go on.

That's what I've always believed gets votes, and that's what I hoped the ANC would fight for.

In fact, we desperately need a party like that to take charge in our country. How we need a government that truly will be for the people, providing all those essentials! Our country isn't flourishing. Our country is battling. We're battling, but our ruling party is fighting for the rights of Palestinians, not South Africans.

While I agree that too many people are dying in the war with Hamas, are you, Mr President, cognisant of the fact that too many people are dying right here? Judging by the latest South African Police Service statistics, there are an average of 85.7 murders in our country every day, and 169.8 sexual offences committed daily. There are also 88 attempted murders on a daily basis, right here in our country.

So, though I'm sure your foreign friends appreciate what you're doing for them, it's hard for most of us to understand why you're not fighting to stop death and destruction at home. It has been hard not to notice this as we went to vote.

By the time people read this, we will have voted, so it's a moot point that you, Mr Ramaphosa, and your party, focused on supporting Hamas's battle rather than that of our own country. But I guess we all have our priorities.

Perhaps I'm wrong, and most people choose the party that cares more about others than its own people. I could be. However, I find this to be an absurd strategy. But the outcome will be the outcome. I wonder at what cost you did this, Mr President.

Suffice to say, you lost the support you may have got from us when you stopped caring about all of your people and chose those of another country to take precedence.

Fortunately, we live in a democracy and have a strong Constitution. We can manage very well without your support, and clearly you believe you can manage well without ours. We are and will remain a strong community, and we'll survive your vitriol.

We'll prevail, and bring our best to the country we love.

Throughout our history, many Jews fought for what's right, not necessarily for the government of the day. Many Jews fought the Nationalist Party because they knew it was wrong. Many joined organisations like the ANC or aligned with it to fight apartheid. We know what's right and wrong, and have always fought for the good.

We'll continue to do so. We'll continue to do what we believe to be right and fitting within the framework of our beliefs as Jews.

**Shabbat shalom!**

**Peta Krost**  
Editor



## European countries recognise Palestinian state that doesn't exist

OPINION

STEVEN GRUZD



Ireland, Norway, and Spain have formally recognised "Palestine" as a state on 28 May, even though it doesn't fulfil any of the accepted criteria for statehood.

On 22 May, these three states brought to 145 the number of countries in the United Nations (UN) that recognise "Palestine", out of 193 member states.

The fact that this quasi-state doesn't fulfil accepted criteria has been ignored for political expediency and increasing diplomatic pressure on Israel to assent to a two-state solution to the Palestinian problem. This is hard for Israelis to stomach in the wake of the 7 October terror attack, with the high probability of a neighbour hell-bent on its annihilation.

The four main elements for statehood were agreed almost 100 years ago, in the Montevideo Convention of 1933. They stipulate that to be a state, a territory must possess "a permanent population, a defined territory, a government, and the capacity to conduct international relations".

The Palestinians claim that millions of refugees from 1948 and 1967 and their millions of descendants are part of its population, which is vehemently opposed by Israel. The land that constitutes "Palestine" is also highly contested. Though all the talk is about a state in Gaza and the West Bank, everyone knows that Palestinians covet the entire territory that comprises modern-day Israel. Whatever one thinks of the Palestinian Authority created by the 1993 Oslo Accords, it's not a full government in the true sense of the word - and hasn't held elections for almost two decades. And while it has embassies dotted all over the world, the Palestinians are restricted in the foreign relations they can conduct, and don't control their own national security.

an observer state at the UN. Since April 2024, four Caribbean states have recognised "Palestine": Barbados, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and the Bahamas.

Announcing the decision, Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre said, "In the midst of a war, with tens of thousands killed and injured, we must keep alive the only alternative that offers a political solution for Israelis and Palestinians alike. Two states, living side by side, in peace and security."

Irish Prime Minister Simon Harris said he hoped his government's declaration would "offer hope and encouragement to the people of Palestine at one of their darkest hours".

"This recognition isn't against anyone, it isn't against the Israeli people," Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez told Parliament. "It's an act in favour of peace, justice, and moral consistency."

Recognition by other European states could follow in coming weeks. The recognitions add momentum to the diplomatic pressure on Israel to revive long-moribund negotiations with the Palestinians. The two-state solution is something that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has rejected throughout his many years in office. His government would see recognition as a perverse reward to Hamas and Iran for the terror attack of 7 October.

Israel reacted sharply to the co-ordinated announcement from the three states, including the recall of its ambassadors from Dublin, Oslo, and Madrid, and summoning their ambassadors to Israel for a formal dressing down, known as a *démarche*. The ambassadors would also be made to watch video footage of the Hamas terror attack.

Netanyahu said "80% of the Palestinians in Judea and Samaria [the West Bank] support the terrible massacre of 7 October. This evil

mustn't be given a state. This will be a terrorist state."

"History will remember that Spain, Norway, and Ireland decided to award a gold medal to Hamas murderers and rapists," Israeli Foreign Minister Israel



Prime Minister of Ireland Simon Harris and Spanish President Pedro Sanchez expressing their willingness to endorse a Palestinian state

The main point, of course, is that Israel doesn't recognise a Palestinian state at this point, so the state, in effect, doesn't exist. Israel's experience of its unilateral withdrawal from Gaza in 2005 wasn't a good one, with essentially an aggressive terrorist statelet run by Hamas on its western border.

The announcement of recognition by the three - the first Western European states to do so since Sweden in 2014 - is a political move that dealt a diplomatic blow to Israel. It has steadily lost sympathy on the international stage as its war on Hamas has proceeded. This development will bolster the Palestinian cause, and pile more pressure on Israel to stop the war.

The formal campaign for recognition of "Palestine" in the UN commenced in 1988, in the middle of the First Intifada. South Africa became the 100th state to recognise "Palestine" in 1995. In 2012, it was designated

Katz said. Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich threatened to stop transferring tax revenue earmarked for the Palestinian Authority.

Israeli analyst Dr Einat Wilf wrote on X, "A recognition of a state of Palestine is a great way to finally clarify - is the other state in the 'two-state solution' the Jewish state of Israel? Or, is it, as Palestinians continue to believe, a temporary aberration that will revert to being Arab in due course?"

It's doubtful that the recognition of "Palestine" by the three European governments will bring Israelis and Palestinians any closer to a lasting peace. It's a provocative, symbolic act that has put up Israel's back.

• Steven Gruzd is a political analyst in Johannesburg. He writes in his personal capacity.



# South African tells of narrow escape from Nova

ELKA COHEN

South African-born Israeli Joey Avinir, 26, had been looking forward to going to the Nova Festival on 6 October. Like thousands of others, it was the highlight of his calendar.

He and two of his Israeli friends, Gal (25) and Noam (26), bought tickets for what promised to be a superb line-up of 16 international DJs.

Bloodshed, murder, rape, and kidnapping turned this event of 3 500 festivalgoers to Kibbutz Re'im in the Negev desert into the deadliest violation of innocent lives by Hamas terrorists.

Avinir, who matriculated from King David Victory Park before making aliya in 2019, tells of a series of life-changing choices he made that resulted in a "lucky escape".

Four months after he emigrated, he was conscripted into the Israeli army, and over the next three years, attained the rank of first sergeant commander.

He recalled a strange anxiety creeping in on their drive to the Negev. "All three of us felt it," he says, "but we simply shrugged it off as normal pre-party jitters."

On arriving at the open-air venue, they noticed more policemen than usual, but being close to the Gaza border, they thought nothing more of it.

"We drove in on a sand road to find hundreds of rows of parked cars – it was packed! We decided to park our car next to a fallen tree." This turned out to be

one of many decisions that saved them.

"By 23:00, our tent was pitched, and we went to explore the venue. Nova Productions did an amazing job. There were stages set up for the DJs, different dance areas, bars, and food stalls, massage and retail stations. Nova met all our expectations," Avinir says.

"As the sun started to rise, I split up from the girls to go to the bathroom. I was making my way back to the main stage when I first noticed the rockets flying overhead. The entire sky was lit up, and many people mistook it for fireworks. But because I had previously lived close to that area, I knew there were too many being fired to dismiss it. My first thought was to find the girls and get us out of there.

"The ground shook under my feet, shrapnel flew in all directions, and the police told us to drop to the ground. As more and more rockets kept firing, the music was turned off. I ran around looking for Gal and Noam through a sea of people.

"When they called to inform me that they were safe and together, we decided to meet at our tent, pack our stuff, and leave immediately. Adrenaline-fuelled focus took over," says Avinir.

They ran towards the car, carrying all their belongings. Their survival instinct kicked in a lot sooner than it did for many others.

"It's not unusual in Israel to hear a phase of rocket fire until it subsides. I remember running past people who were oblivious – waiting, talking, laughing, and taking videos with their

phones. I assume they hoped it would pass, and the party would resume. My aim was to get to the car and drive to the nearest bomb shelter.

"Things started to get scary when we couldn't find our car. We ran between hundreds of parked cars, looking for the fallen tree. Eventually Noam shouted, 'It's there!'"

At this stage, Avinir had no idea that Hamas terrorists had surged across the border on foot, in trucks, and on motorised paragliders, with the aim of torturing, killing, and capturing anyone in their path.

"I had a sense of safety inside the car," Avinir says. "It was a relief when the loud banging of the rockets became muted to some extent. I remember checking the time. It showed that 25 minutes had gone by since the first rockets were fired over the dance floor.

"We drove towards the exit, where police were trying to stop people from leaving. They were instructing us all to get out of our cars and onto the ground for safety, and to wait for the rocket phase to pass. This is what people do in normal cases of rocket fire, but my instinct as a soldier had kicked in. I knew it wasn't a normal situation.

"Police were causing more and more cars to back up. I decided to ignore them. I jumped out the car to start directing cars the other way. I needed to start the flow of traffic somehow. My brain was on autopilot.



Joey Avinir

took became an inescapable ambush in which many cars just minutes behind us were trapped."

When Avinir saw cars pulled over on the side of the road, he joined about 20 others from the festival in a shelter, relieved to have found safety from the relentless rocket fire.

"We were in there for about 15 minutes before a policeman came to inform us of a mass invasion. He instructed us all to evacuate the shelter immediately, and get as far away as possible from the area as terrorists were hunting them down and blowing them up with grenades. That's when the fear kicked in," says Avinir.

"When I heard gunshots, I thought the police were firing warning shots to get attention and create order. Even when I got back into the car, I still didn't register the magnitude of the situation we were in. I saw bodies strewn on the sand road, yet I thought people had been injured in a collision. I couldn't compute the bloodshed of a deadly terror attack over the likelihood of a car accident. Yet, nobody stopped or got out to help, which was unusual."

The trio made a series of quick-thinking decisions and managed to get out onto the tar road, where they continued to drive in search of a roadside shelter.

"I learnt later that the route we

"Many in those shelters died that morning, including a friend of mine whom I saw at the party," he says. "If it weren't for that policeman's warning, it would have been me."

As many as 364 people were shot, bludgeoned, or burned to death at that party, and those who were lucky enough to survive the atrocities spent hours trapped, injured, hiding, and exposed to life-changing trauma.

Avinir's escape comes with devastating grief. "I lost friends, I lost soldiers. My experience is mild compared to the stories of people who managed to get out only hours later. No one in their lifetime should have to go through what they experienced."



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# UCT prof targeted for exam depicting antisemitism

TALI FEINBERG

UCT 4 Palestine, a small, extremist anti-Israel group at the University of Cape Town (UCT), has launched a petition against a respected law professor, demanding that he face “immediate and severe disciplinary action”. The petition is in response to an exam question he set that describes a fictitious terrorist attack outside a Jewish school in Cape Town, bringing to the fore the possible repercussions of the rise in antisemitism. WP Schreiner Professor of Law at UCT, Anton Fagan has been a persistent voice in questioning the dominant narratives around the Israel-Gaza war since 7 October both at UCT and further afield.

In the question Fagan set, which examined law students on delict – a violation of the law – the perpetrator, who one later reads isn’t Muslim, shouts “Allahu Akbar!” before opening fire on Jewish pupils and their families, killing several of them. Security guards fire at the perpetrator, but cause death and injury to innocents. Students are asked to look at possible negligent and wrongful failures of the security company and the guards employed by it.

The UCT 4 Palestine petition, created on 25 May, states that the fact-set “portrayed deeply offensive, Islamophobic stereotypes and harmful rhetoric towards Muslim and Palestinian students. This is a symptom of white supremacist ideology being perpetuated and protected at UCT.

“The fact-set went so far as to name and give ages to the children it claimed were murdered, exploiting violent imagery to traumatise students while totally erasing the actual loss of countless Palestinian children’s lives due to Israeli occupation and genocide,” it stated. “While Palestinian families grieve their real slain children, Fagan chose to fabricate racist lies painting Palestinians as terrorists and Israelis as noble victims.”

In the exam-question scenario, “The security guards returned fire, but none of their shots found their target. The uncle of one of the children, who was visiting from Israel and had served in the IDF [Israel Defense Forces], took one of the security guards’ rifles and fired at the terrorist. He was killed instantly.”

The reader then learns that the fictional



Professor Anton Fagan

faculty undertake comprehensive restructuring guided by anti-racist, decolonial frameworks”.

Fagan told the SA Jewish Report, “The examination process involving the delict question is still underway. I’m therefore not at liberty to say much about it.”

However, he shared what he wrote to his students in light of the petition. “Of course, the case that I created didn’t have to involve a massacre at a Jewish school. But the war in Gaza and the protests it has caused have been very much in my thoughts, as, I’m sure, they have been in yours. I like to make my fact-sets topical, so, the first thing

that came to mind as I was casting about for a setting for the ‘security company case’ I had to create, was a shooting at a Jewish school.

“From that starting point, one idea led to another. For example, the security guards had to be inept, so someone else had to step in to save the day. It’s a Jewish school, so who else than a former member of the IDF?”

When he drafted the fact-set and findings, “I knew that it was possible that some would be surprised by the revelation at the end [that the perpetrator wasn’t Muslim],” wrote Fagan. “I knew it was possible that some of you, possibly because you are in the thrall of certain stereotypes about Muslims, or about the kind of man who wears a keffiyeh and shouts, ‘Allahu Akbar!’ and shoots parents and children outside a Jewish school, would, having read only the first paragraph, draw the conclusion that the man was Muslim.

“But this doesn’t in any way entail that I endorse these stereotypes. On the contrary, I was subverting those stereotypes. Your surprise shows that you haven’t yet mastered a critical legal skill, which is not to draw conclusions prematurely.

“It’s true that I’ve published several pieces about the conflict in Gaza. However, contrary to what the authors of the petition believe, nothing in the fact-set or findings expresses, reflects, or presupposes any of the views that I put forward in those pieces.”

Mark Oppenheimer, an advocate at the Johannesburg Bar, says, “Having read the exam paper, it’s abundantly clear that there’s nothing Islamophobic about it in any way whatsoever. No one mentioned in the

perpetrator was Scottish, schizophrenic, a neo-Nazi, Holocaust-denier, had been arrested for assaulting someone at a pro-Israel march, and had sent threatening emails to the school in question.

The petition goes on to say that “glorifying and idolising the Israeli occupation forces [Israeli army], is an intolerable endorsement. This is especially egregious given the South African government’s firm position of prosecuting its citizens who attempt to join the Israeli military. For an academic to undermine the state’s stance is an inexcusable ethical breach.”

The petition states that “this paper was seemingly crafted as retaliation against UCT’s senate vote declaring criticism of the Israeli state as not antisemitic. Promoting racist conspiracy theories to justify ethnic cleansing is criminal hate speech. The university cannot claim to uphold values of ‘transformation’ while empowering staff like Fagan to disseminate genocidal propaganda that deliberately traumatises students amid an active genocide against Palestinians.

“Most critically, the fact that Fagan chose to inject his racist Zionist fantasies and Islamophobic propaganda into an exam is an unacceptable violation of his role,” the petition states. “Fagan effectively held students’ academic success hostage to his own personal bias.”

The petitioners’ demand “full transparency into all processes that allowed this material to be approved; an independent, external investigation into all law faculty leadership; and that the law

exam is even Muslim. What’s clear is that the question is an excellent way of testing students’ ability to understand a complicated set of facts, the law of negligent omissions, and to see if students make assumptions when the facts don’t warrant it.

“Professor Fagan is one of the most admired legal academics at the University of Cape Town. He’s renowned for maintaining rigorous standards of assessment, which makes him unpopular with weaker students looking for an easy pass. The UCT 4 Palestine petition is an outrageous attack on a professor who dared to express an independent view on the Israel/Gaza conflict. The demand that students be given a fresh exam is a cynical attempt to improve their grades.”

Sara Gon, the director of the Free Speech Union of South Africa, says, “Sadly, one

could have anticipated that there would be outrage about ‘harmful’ stereotyping [in the exam]. ‘Harmful’ is a matter of choice that accords with the ‘faux frailties’ associated with the progressive left. Would students have been outraged if the question was worded in terms of stereotypes associated with the other side? Freedom of speech and academic freedom at universities should always be about challenging and provoking, but not just for students.”

UCT spokesperson Elijah Moholola told the SA Jewish Report, “UCT has been made aware of concerns relating to one exam paper in the faculty of law. UCT is addressing the issue through the applicable internal channels. The university will provide any updates as and when necessary once all internal processes have been concluded.”

## Cheering on change – first-time voters make their mark

LEE TANKLE

First-time voters went out in their numbers in order to take a stand on their future South Africa in the country’s national election on Wednesday, 29 May. The SA Jewish Report spoke to many first-time voters about their experience and their hopes for the outcome.

Kayla Lowenstein, a 22-year-old BCom student, said, “Voting in the South African elections is crucial as it empowers citizens to influence government decisions, hold leaders accountable, and ensure their voices are heard in shaping the country’s future. Democratic participation is essential to address issues like economic inequality, social justice, and corruption, thereby fostering a more inclusive and equitable society.”

Matthew Kimmelman, 22, agrees. “It’s important for us to vote to show that we’re not just at the whim of a government that doesn’t represent

us. It’s hard to complain about the African National Congress [ANC] if you’re not willing to do something to make change. The easiest thing any one individual can do to spark change is simply to go out and vote.”

An anonymous Business Science Analytics student at the University of Cape Town (UCT) said, “Voting is a right and a privilege. Once I’m allowed to have a say in my future in South Africa, I’m going to take it.”

The youth haven’t taken the decision which party will get the “X” on their ballot lightly, and many spent time researching the different parties and what they could do for them.

Michael Tankle, a 20-year-old Mathematical Sciences student at the University of the Witwatersrand, said he read the manifestos of certain parties and decided who he was going to vote for based on what the manifesto could do for him and the whole of South Africa.

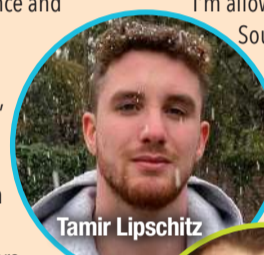
Eli Worms, a 20-year-old Varsity College student, said, “My decision who to vote for is rooted in an assessment of the actions and principles of various political parties. For instance, if a party advocates policies or values that I find disagreeable, I opt not to support it.

“Considering the state of South Africa, it’s imperative to choose a party capable of revitalising the nation and restoring its prominence on the global stage. I believe South Africa has the potential to emerge as one of the premier places to live in the world.”

Ruby Kapeluschnik, a Bachelor of Arts in Law student at UCT, spent a lot of time studying the South African legislature, engaged in many discussions about the different parties, and researched which party would get her vote.

Many factors outside of their research influenced their vote, such as ongoing corruption and the views of those around them. Said Kimmelman “It’s easy to decide who to vote for when you’re sitting in your third stint of loadshedding for the day. The truth is, I don’t need to be influenced by those around me to see that something needs to change, and splitting the vote among smaller parties isn’t a solution either.

“Also, I believe the ANC has made us a laughing stock, not only in Africa but around the world, while aligning us closer to the



Tamir Lipschitz



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# Keeping the faith: raising kids in a mixed marriage

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

It's one thing for you and your partner to work through religious differences, it's quite another to decide which faith your children will follow. While such issues are the undoing of some couples, others find a shared path for their families.

"But how will you raise the children?" When they're building a future together, interfaith couples are unlikely to avoid such questions. If they're planning to become parents, it's a discussion that they inevitably have to confront. Though in many faiths, children follow their father's religion, in Judaism, if your mother is Jewish, you are too. However, in many interfaith families, the reality isn't always so clear-cut.

Though her husband, Chris, is Christian, Kerri Rogerson, who is Jewish, says she's grateful that religion never caused any issues in their relationship. They did, however, discuss the topic long before they contemplated marriage, and laid out their plans for raising kids before their wedding eight years ago. "It's so important to have these discussions early on because they can have a huge impact on family dynamics later on," she says. "We built mutual respect and understanding from the outset, and pre-emptively addressed potential conflicts."

When it came to parenting, the couple, who today have two sons, aged five and three, decided to expose their children to both their religions. "In spite of our religions being different, we share a focus on teaching our children to be good people rather than adhering rigidly to any particular faith," says Rogerson. "In our family, we celebrate religious traditional days that apply to Christianity and Judaism, such as Christmas and Easter, as well as Purim and Pesach. Both sides of the family get involved in both sets of traditions, and we all enjoy them. We've maintained an atmosphere of acceptance and support of all these celebrations."

Rogerson says she finds Judaism and Christianity to be quite compatible. "Our kids are still young, but as they get older, we'll provide them with answers from both sides," she says. "Even now, we always try to be as honest as possible. We let them



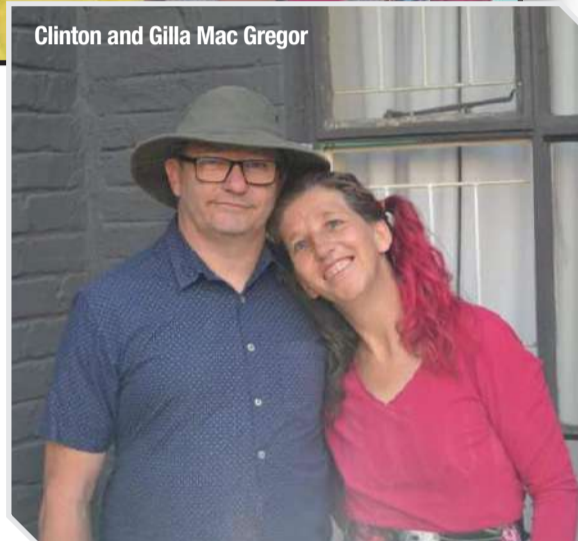
Chris, Ethan, Jarrod, and Kerri Rogerson

watch kids' movies based on biblical stories, and talk about what they've just viewed. We have open dialogue with our kids all the time."

The Rogersons plan to send their sons to a Jewish school next year as their oldest enters primary school. They know that the boys may be exposed to numerous religious events and rituals, including the possibility of having Barmitzvahs. When the time comes, they feel their children will be old enough to make their own informed decisions about whether or not to mark this milestone, and they plan to support their choices either way.

"Ultimately, navigating a marriage with different religious backgrounds requires open communication, mutual respect, and a willingness to understand each other's beliefs," Rogerson says.

Kim van Eeghem, who has been married to her husband, Georg, for 26 years, also emphasises the importance of respecting one another's beliefs. "Before tying the knot, we had extensive discussions about how we would incorporate our faiths into our home and the upbringing of our children," she says. "Georg, being a practising Catholic, understood the importance of my Jewish faith and supported my decision to continue practising it. It was crucial for us to establish this understanding early on to avoid any



Clinton and Gilla Mac Gregor

potential conflict down the road."

She says that though he never converted, her husband's openness and curiosity about her faith touched her heart. "He took the initiative to meet our rabbi, who warmly welcomed him into our Jewish community. The rabbi explained the significance of Jewish practices and traditions to Georg, and he wholeheartedly embraced them. In spite of not formally converting to Judaism, Georg actively participates in our synagogue activities and has become an integral part of our Jewish community." Van Eeghem feels that coupled with a foundation of love, communication, and respect, seeking guidance from religious leaders or counsellors can be immensely beneficial in navigating any challenges that may arise for interfaith couples.

Together, the Van Eeghems made a conscious decision to raise their children, now in their 20s, within the Jewish faith, honouring Kim's heritage and beliefs. "Our home primarily observes Jewish holidays and Shabbat, and we've instilled Jewish values and traditions in our children from a young age," she says. "It was essential for us to provide them with a strong foundation in Judaism while also fostering an understanding and

respect for their father's Catholic background. When they reached an age of understanding, we explained to them that their father practises a different religion, but we've always emphasised the importance of tolerance and acceptance of diverse beliefs."

Gilla Mac Gregor and her husband, Clinton, have been married for 24 years and practise Judaism, observing all the associated holidays. "Growing up, I went to shul with my parents," Mac Gregor says. "Even though we weren't religious, we celebrated all Jewish holidays and kept Pesach, and even now, I clean my house for Pesach and follow the rules. My husband doesn't really follow any religion and went to church only a handful of times to attend family weddings. I'm not kosher or religious, but I do my best to keep the Jewish religion as that's how I was brought up."

Before they got married, the couple agreed to bring their children up Jewish. This decision caused some problems with Clinton's parents in the beginning. "They asked that we still do Christmas as a family with them, which we agreed to in order to keep the peace and to give our two daughters [now 18 and 21] the background of both religions," Mac Gregor says. "However, we wanted to give them a religious background and a sense of belonging in a community." The girls were named in shul, and both had Batmitzvahs. As they become adults, they have the choice of whether they want to continue practicing the Jewish faith, says their mother.

## Cheering on change – first-time voters make their mark

>>Continued from page 8

'axis of evil' – Russia, Iran, China, and North Korea. Another five years of that trajectory will be a net negative."

"All of the parties are pretty much useless," said Tamir Lipschitz, a third-year student at the University of Pretoria, "but the one I'm voting for is both the least useless and the direct opposition to the ruling party – which happens, arguably, to be the most useless. Therefore it was a 'no-brainer'."

Students at UCT have been exposed to the political environment firsthand. "You're able to see all the parties and how they behave on an intimate level," said one anonymous UCT student, "so I'm very much able to come to my own conclusions about how I feel about the parties."

An anonymous 21-year-old University of Johannesburg student said, "I didn't need to conclude who to vote for. I think we're all conditioned to vote for certain parties."

Similarly, Jaime Tarlie, an 18-year-old completing her A levels, said that even though she wasn't interested in politics, she knew it was important for her to have her voice heard, and has been educated about who to vote for. "I'll be voting for the party that


my parents vote for," she said. "My dad is clued up on everything going on, and I trust his judgment more than my own. Even though it's not completely just, I believe it's the best thing I can do in the circumstances."

Worms hopes for a "significant reduction in corruption". Though it may be impossible to completely eradicate it, he said, "addressing it is crucial, considering that corruption exists to some extent in every country. I also hope these elections will remove all the rules and regulations hindering South Africa from competing effectively on the global stage."

Tankle, like many first-time voters, hopes for "any sort of positive change, policies that address the issues being faced in the country, and greater representation".


Kimmelman hopes that "this election won't further divide our country, but rather bring us closer. I hope that if the cards align and people go out and vote, there will be a peaceful transfer of power."

"I hope this election brings positive change to our country," said Tarlie. "We have a long way to go, but hopefully, this is the start of something productive for South Africa."




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# Jewish Board's observer team makes elections count

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

The drive to “turn *chutzpah* into action” and ensure voter turnout was just one aspect of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD’s) Make Us Count campaign, which empowers voters through various initiatives and oversees the electoral process through an observer team.

“With such a hotly contested South African election and the possibility of confusion with the three ballot papers this year, it was that much more crucial to have independent observers present at the voting stations,” says Alana Baranov, the founder of Make Us Count and social and political justice liaison for the Board’s national office.

“Our team worked alongside the

Independent Electoral Commission [IEC] as official observers in voting stations in various cities across the country to make sure that everything went through the correct procedures, that the ballot papers were in place, and that there was no harassment or intimidation,” she says. “As our team is accredited with the IEC, we can also observe the vote counting process and ensure that the results are collated correctly.”

In place since the 2009 national elections, Make Us Count began as an awareness and educational project to involve the Jewish community in the electoral process. Today, the SAJBD works to ensure free and fair elections through its interfaith election observer team. This year, the team was made up of 96 observers, most of them concentrated in stations around

Cape Town, Durban, Johannesburg, and Pretoria, with others serving in other outlying areas.

“When we started in 2009, we had a really small group of mainly Jewish people who gave their time to be a part of the day and observed polling stations in Johannesburg only,” says Baranov. “Since then, we’ve observed every national and provincial election in major centres, and proudly grown to become an interfaith group.”

The group not only has members from different religious communities, it includes foreign nationals, including refugees and asylum seekers from countries including Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, and the Congo, who, although they cannot vote, are accredited observers.

Though observer teams from different faith-based groups have

existed in elections since 1994, the SAJBD team’s inclusivity for more than 10 years sets it apart. “From what I understand, we were the first national interfaith observer team. There aren’t many that bring different religious groups together,” Baranov says.

On election day, each member of the team constantly updates the IEC, with concerns called in to the IEC observer hotline. At the end of the day, individual reports are collated into one report and sent to the IEC on behalf of the SAJBD.

This year marks the third election for which Zimbabwean national Dumisani Dube has volunteered as a member of the observer team. Having come to South Africa in 2009 in search of greener pastures, he’s grateful for what the country has given him. “It’s important to observe these elections because South Africa is my host country, and it has helped me a lot,” he says. “The only thing I can do to give back is to be an observer because I cannot vote as I don’t have an identity document. Yet, I want to ensure that my host country has free and fair elections.”

Dube heard about the SAJBD team through his church. The Board provides its team with extensive information on how best to observe elections, and maintains constant communication, he says.

“It’s important for religious institutions to be involved in elections because politics emanates from religion. In this day and age, it’s important to have an interdenominational team of observers because it brings different



Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

SAJBD National Director Wendy Kahn with her husband Lance

their choice because they know how important it is.”

SAJBD National Director Wendy Kahn says the election process is uplifting and hopeful. “Having lived in a country where voting wasn’t a right for the majority makes it even more special. Every time I walk into an election centre, memories of 27 April 1994 come to mind.

“So, having the opportunity to be part of this process as an election observer, literally watching and monitoring democracy, is a real privilege,” she says. “I’ve been an observer in every election since the SAJBD started its Make Us Count observer team, and I treasure these opportunities. As we watch the doors open in the early morning, we know that the possibilities begin.”

The Make Us Count campaign not only oversees an election observer team, it facilitates voting for expat community members around the world, many of whom were particularly keen to vote this year. As a result of the Board’s advocacy, voting hours in certain major cities were extended to accommodate those who keep Shabbat. Yet, in spite of tireless efforts, the Board didn’t manage to find a solution for Israel-based voters who were unable to make their mark due to the closure of the South African embassy.

The campaign also urged local community members to register, focusing on the younger generation, many of whom voted for the first time this year. “We liaised with schools, shuls, and Jewish community organisations,” says Baranov. And prior to elections, the Board facilitated open debates in Cape Town and Johannesburg, bringing representatives from different political parties to speak to the Jewish



Ela Gandhi from the Phoenix Settlement Trust with Alana Baranov, founder of Make Us Count

community. “When we come together, we’re aiming for the same thing – peace for the nation.”

Dube bemoans the voter apathy he has witnessed among the younger generation. “Most of the time, I’ve seen older women going to cast their votes, unlike young people, who say that they’re not going to vote as things won’t change. Even if the older generation can’t see or walk, they’ll vote for the party of

## Yedid friendship circles bring guidance home to teens

LEE TANKLE

In a sometimes confusing teenagers’ world, there are few places one can express one’s feelings in a judgement-free zone. Often, it’s teens who best understand and can offer guidance to other teens.

For this reason, Grade 7 and Grade 11 pupils at Yeshiva College are being given the option of learning how to deal with bullying and how to build resilience, self-esteem, and other social skills to help themselves and others. This is all part of the *Yedid* (friend) initiative, implemented by The Ki, an organisation that offers affordable therapy to those who need it in the Johannesburg community.

The idea is to “create a programme that empowers the community’s kids”, said The Ki Director Tova Goldstein.

“There’s a need to improve mental health in the school system,” Goldstein said. “Through teenagers coming through our doors and using our services, we realised that we needed to offer our students more at school.” The organisation has launched the programme at Yeshiva, but plans to spread it out to all Jewish schools.

“Our goal with *Yedid* is to create a community of resilient teenagers who have self-worth and strong values, and to increase emotional intelligence across the Johannesburg Jewish community,” said Goldstein.

The Grade 11s who are accepted into the programme take part in a six-week basic counselling and personal-growth course. They are then put with a small group of Grade 7 pupils, with whom they meet every week for a session where they work through an information pack provided by The Ki, Goldstein said.

“In the training course, we teach Grade 11 pupils to get to know themselves, their values, what’s important to them, how they feel about bullying, their code of ethics, and what it looks like to stand up for their values and morals,” Goldstein said. “In terms of the basic counselling element, we tackle elements like empathy, listening skills, and being able to contain a situation. This is the foundation of social-work skills so that the pupils can have an open-ended conversation with somebody in a non-judgemental space in which they feel completely accepted.”

Similarly, Goldstein said the training for Grade 11s ensures that if a situation of bullying was to arise with a Grade 7, they would have the necessary skills to empower the Grade 7 or take it further.

“A lot of kids feel isolated. [Through this programme], they feel like they’re part of something. There’s a sense

of safety and security. Kids thrive when they are safe and secure. To feel that someone has your back is a game changer. This is what *Yedid* is trying to do,” said Goldstein.

“We train the Grade 11s to speak to somebody like a school social worker, or to discuss with a Grade 7 what they could do in that situation, perhaps something they could do differently, or maybe even communicate with the Grade 11 about the bully in the other group and see if there’s something that can be done.”

Goldstein said there’s a hierarchy students are trained to follow. “If a Grade 11 pupil sees that there’s an issue, they would go to the school social worker or they would speak to one of the therapists with The Ki who can guide them on the best plan of action,” she said.

“There’s absolute confidentiality between the student and the Grade 11s with two exceptions, which is the same rule that operates in a therapeutic setting,” said Goldstein. “If the person is concerned that they are a danger to themselves or others, or if there’s abuse, then obviously it would have to be taken further. If that’s the case, the Grade 11 pupil has been trained on which protocols to follow.”

Each week’s session covers a different topic, anything from talking about bullying, to self-esteem issues, to general social skills. The Grade 11 pupils use prompt cards to ensure that the Grade 7s are guided in facilitating conversations and creating and sharing a space of friendship.

“For example, in the pack covering bullying, there can be a question like, ‘If you saw someone being bullied, what would you do?’ and ‘If you saw someone you don’t like being bullied, what would you do?’” said Goldstein. “It just creates conversation. That’s really what it’s about. For 10 minutes, you have a little interesting conversation and then off you go into class.”

The Grade 11 pupils have just completed their training, and their sessions with Grade 7s are going to start before the month is out.

In addition to the weekly sessions between pupils, there’s monthly supervision of the programme in which The Ki therapists and the school social worker meet Grade 11 pupils to mould the programme to suit the needs of the children.

“The point is that these Grade 7s know that there is this one Grade 11 kid that is their person,” said Goldstein. “So, if they’re struggling emotionally, if they’re feeling like they aren’t safe, if they feel like they’re being bullied, they know that they’ve got this older person in the school who has their back, no matter what.”

Youngsters can go to their big buddy because they are assured that “the Grade 11 pupil has the skills to deal with whatever the Grade 7 student is dealing with. And they’ve also got this little group of three or four or five boys or girls to become their circle.”



Tova Goldstein



# Septuagenarian vaulter gets back on the horse

SAUL KAMIONSKY

Johannesburg septuagenarian Fred Oppenheimer is the last horse vaulter standing of the five Jewish athletes who showcased their gymnastic skills on top of a horse at the Welkom Show in 1968.

Oppenheimer and the other four were children when featured in a photograph in the *South African Jewish Times* in March 1968, and the only amateur horse vaulters in the country at the time.

"Michele Isserow passed away; Linda Sonntag is in America; and Jack Hochfeld [absent when the photo was taken] is in Australia. Sandra Labe, as far as I know, lives in Johannesburg. I lost touch with Rudolf Eastern. They don't do vaulting anymore," Oppenheimer says.

Having done horse vaulting, described as gymnastics on horseback, for about a decade, Oppenheimer stopped participating in the sport in 1973 at the age of 23. He never did it again until he turned 70 three years ago.

"We stopped because we were at varsity or working, and the team kind of dissolved, everybody went their own way," Oppenheimer says. "In 2020, I decided that if I didn't do it now, I would never go back. I found a place called Randjesfontein Vaulting Club. It does competitions among the different riding schools."

The vaulters at the club are mainly youngsters between the ages of five and 20. "But there's a lady, Moe Fitzgerald, who is 79 and still does vaulting. So it doesn't have to be kids, but we're the only two seniors, if you put it that way."

Oppenheimer was riding horses at Blue Hills Riding School in Midrand when the school's circus man, Harry Carre, introduced the riders to vaulting in 1964. "What I liked about it was more about doing gymnastics on the horse as opposed to having to control the horse.

We worked in a ring with a ringmaster who had a lunge rein attached to the horse. He would make the horse go around for us at a canter. We would then go into the centre of the ring and run up to the horse, jump on top, and do various routines."

Oppenheimer has footage of himself vaulting in his younger days. While the horse cantered around, he performed acrobatics like standing, doing a headstand, kneeling, twirling a hula hoop, and the wheelbarrow, which involved two people on the same horse.

He was inspired to return to the sport by his love for it. "You don't have to be the best horse rider, you don't have to ride the horse as such, somebody controls the horse for you, and you can get creative. That's what I enjoy, doing my own thing, as opposed to taking the horse jumping. All that stuff is quite expensive. In other words, what's nice about this is that you can have one horse, one person running it for you, and you can have, say, four or five vaulters doing it in one hour. You have some freedom because you don't have a saddle. You have



Fred Oppenheimer vaulting on his horse

a mat on the horse's back, and you have a strap with two handles, so you use that strap with handles to get on."

Horse vaulting was featured in the Roman Games about 2 000 years ago, and the sport was used to train cavalry soldiers in ancient Greece. It was also used as a form of entertainment at the Roman Colosseum. In the Middle Ages, it was used to train horses for battle and for entertainment at the royal courts.

Vaulting has been included as an official sport at the 2032 Brisbane Olympics, having previously featured at

the 1920 Olympic Games in Antwerp and appearing as an artistic demonstration at two other Games.

Oppenheimer took off in South Africa in 2005 after the first international coach came to the country.

The Randjesfontein Vaulting Club, run by Shea Wright, has a horse for vaulters, and holds vaulting shows in Midrand. "It's pretty popular," Oppenheimer says. "You might easily get 50 competitors at a show. You have to do a particular routine, which is compulsory, and then freestyle. The kids dress up, so it's quite fun for them. They do their routine to music."

"Back in the day, we could do any trick we wanted and we would have, say, two people on a horse. Most of the tricks would have been done at a canter because a trot is too bouncy for vaulting. We did certain things at a walk but mainly at a canter. There were no competitions. We were, I think, the only team doing vaulting, and we would give displays at the Indoor Horse Show at the Rand Show in Johannesburg. Our vaulting school gives a vaulting display at Montecasino once a year at a pet expo."

Oppenheimer practised horse vaulting by just jumping on the horse and honing his tricks. "Today," he says, "they have what they call a barrel, a 44 gallon drum, to practise on."

Born in Orchards, Johannesburg, Oppenheimer went to Orange Grove Primary School and Highlands North Boys High School. "Then I went to the army for a year. They had a sports day on a Wednesday, and allowed me to go back to Johannesburg with the people who played golf, so I would trundle along with them, and I vaulted while in the army but not for the army. I studied accounting after the army. I still run my own accounting practice. I also trade in antique maps and documents as a hobby, but I've built it into a business."

Oppenheimer has accumulated a collection of antique documents, certificates, indentures, military medals and seals. He has two children, Mark, an advocate specialising in hate-speech cases, and Pammi Joy, who works in the hospitality industry.

## Ms Rachel sings 'for all children' after backlash

JACKIE HAJDENBERG – JTA

Following a campaign of criticism over a video fundraiser for children in multiple conflict areas, including Gaza, popular US children's video educator Ms Rachel released a song on 23 May in support of "all the children", including hostages and those in Israel.

"This is a prayer for children in Gaza," she sings, "This is a prayer for children in Israel. This is a prayer for all the children: please stop hurting them. This is a prayer for all the civilians. This is a prayer for all the hostages. This is a prayer for all the innocent. Please stop hurting them."



Rachel Griffin Accurso, better known as Ms Rachel

\$50 000 (R916 175), benefits children in Gaza, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ukraine, "and more", according to the description on Cameo, where she's recording the 500 videos purchased so far.

Though most of the response to the fundraiser has been positive, one vocal segment of the internet that has been divided over it is Jewish mothers who felt that Israeli children were left out.

Save the Children doesn't operate in Israel, and the website instead directs visitors to partner charities that do. Save the Children has also issued multiple statements about the situation in Israel and Gaza, including one that expressed concern about

the status of child hostages. Currently, two child hostages remain in Gaza, Ariel and Kfir Bibas.

Other critics say that the fundraiser downplays the atrocities of 7 October, and some have even created parody videos of Ms Rachel's content to show footage of the attacks.

Griffin Accurso has gone public about her experience being the target of cyberbullying as a result of the fundraiser.

In a video filmed in a dark room, uploaded on 16 May, she said, "The bullying is so bad. It's so bad. But I can handle this. Saying I don't care about all kids, it just hurts so bad."

In the caption for the video, she wrote, "I care deeply for all children. Palestinian children, Israeli children, children in the US - Muslim, Jewish, Christian children - all children, in every country. Not one is excluded."

## Today in History:

### Looking Back and Moving Forward Afrika Tikkun to host 30th Anniversary Gala Dinner

Afrika Tikkun's journey of impact, service and excellence began 30 years ago, forming its roots as a philanthropic organisation to gradually branching out as a social impact giant. **The 30th Anniversary Gala Dinner**, themed: **"Today in History: Looking Back and Moving Forward"**, will be an occasion to celebrate and reflect on the outstanding vision, leadership and contribution of its founders and Marc Lubner. In partnership with the Houghton Hotel, Afrika Tikkun will host the Gala Dinner on **22 August 2024**. It presents an opportunity for the organisation to express gratitude to its invaluable supporters for their dedication and commitment to the cause. Join us in celebrating this momentous occasion, table bookings are available for R30 000 a table and individual bookings for R3000 per person. **For table bookings email: Colleen@ninesquared.co.za. We look forward to celebrating 30 years of Afrika Tikkun with you!**

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# Orlin dances from 'irritation' to accolade at Naledis

HANNA RESNICK

Internationally renowned South African dancer and choreographer Robyn Orlin was awarded the coveted Dawn Lindberg World Impact Award at the recent 19th annual Naledi Theatre Awards.

Orlin was one of a few Jewish personalities acknowledged on 21 May for their hard work in the world of theatre. Actress Talia Kodesh was another, winning her first Naledi for Best Lead Actress in a Musical Theatre Production for her role in the new original musical, *Actress*, which she co-wrote with Bruce Dennill.

Orlin, who has been working as a professional dancer for 46 years, said she was honoured to be recognised by her South African contemporaries.

"It's interesting because I was very much just an irritation in the dance world in South Africa because I challenged it politically quite a lot," Orlin told the *SA Jewish Report* this week. "And so, I never really got anything, any acknowledgement from the dance world, or from South Africa, quite frankly, until the past few years. Although, of course, there were individuals who encouraged me, as well as Dance Umbrella, which was a very important platform for me in South Africa because

there really was nothing else."

Orlin has studied around the world at institutions such as the London Contemporary Dance School, Goldsmiths University, and the Art Institute of Chicago. Some of her most popular works include *Daddy, I've seen this piece six times before* and *I still do not know why they're hurting each other* (1999); *When I take off My Skin* (2005); *At the same time we were pointing a finger at you, we realized we were pointing three at ourselves* (2014); and *We must eat our suckers with the wrappers on* (2023).

She has lived in Germany for the past 23 years and was unable to attend the awards ceremony, but had her friend, Gerard Bester, accept the award on her behalf.

"All my work is about South Africa and the political structures that have been in our way," said Orlin. "Johannesburg is my place. It's where I was born.



Talia Kodesh at the Naledi Theatre Awards

that there I was walking out onto the stage as somewhat of a newcomer and performing to these massive names in the industry."

Kodesh was then nominated for Best Performance in a Musical in 2008, for her performance as Belle in *Beauty and the Beast*. But it was only this year that she got the nod nationally from her peers. As well as receiving her award, she performed one of the original songs, *I'm Here*, from *Actress* on the night of the awards. "It feels like things have come full circle in a way," she said, regarding the opportunity to perform at the ceremony 18 years after her first appearance.

Because *Actress* had such a short run, many in the audience and the industry didn't get to watch the show, she said. "So, I felt proud to be flying the flag of Bruce Dennill and Paul Elliot's compositions and arrangements as well as their combined musical direction.

"I'm just so lucky that people came to see the show," she said. "That's huge, because nobody forces anyone to go and see any show. It was lovely to be supported by the Jewish community and, let's be honest, it knows how to spread the word quickly. That meant I had an audience to perform to every night, and I could hone my skills and then be nominated for this incredible award."

The National Children's Theatre's production of *The Hobbit*, directed by Alan Swerdlow, won Best Production for Children and Young Audiences. Moira Katz, the former chief executive of The National Children's Theatre, accepted the award on the evening.

*Vincent*, produced by Daphne Kuhn, took home Best Cabaret/Revue/Small-Scale Musical Production. The show received other accolades such as Best Lead Actor in a Musical, awarded to Daniel Anderson.

"It's thrilling that so many Jewish artists not only partake in the industry but have thrived and made such a contribution," said Kuhn. "It was a beautiful evening, and it represented the talent in our country like never before with lovely acts, but most of all, a kind of acknowledgement of future excellence."

## Lag B'Omer around SA



Umhlanga Jewish Centre



Pretoria Hebrew Congregation



Lag B'Omer Unity Funfair event in Sea Point



Sydenham Shul



Umhlanga Jewish Centre



Rabbi Dovid Hazdan with Gabriel Marcou, Asher Shaulov, and Rafael Marcou



Pine Street Shul



## Lag B'Omer parade shows strength of Johannesburg Jews

Youth group Tzivos Hashem, in partnership with Chabad House, hosted a Lag B'Omer parade on Sunday, 26 May, which brought together more than 3 000 people from all segments of the Johannesburg Jewish community.

Jewish schools and communal organisations built floats and took part in the grand parade along George Avenue in Sandringham. The parade showcased the unity and pride of the Johannesburg Jewish community, and that we're strong and here to stay.

It was followed by a



Tzivos Hashem Lag B'Omer parade

concert and fair, with a performance by international singer Yossi Rodal.



Maya and Aaron Talpert with Sam and Ruby Meisel at Great Park Shul

Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

Photo: Ilan Ossendryver



# Sorry, not sorry

It's not difficult to spot a fellow South African anywhere in the world. At a restaurant, they'll be the ones trying to get the attention of the waiter by calling, "Sorry!" while others say, "Excuse me!"

When the server eventually does arrive, because they had no idea they were needed, and spills hot coffee over them, the South African will be the one apologising for the mishap. And then will reassure whoever is listening that there was "no harm done" as they move swiftly – and quietly – to find an emergency room to treat their second-degree burns.

Because they didn't want to make a fuss. To be South African is to say, "sorry" when someone's kid trips and falls. It's to start a sentence with "Sorry to bother you" and to say "sorry" when someone mutters something inaudible. As if the inconvenience of making the mumblor repeat the sentence is apology worthy. And to say sorry when bumped.

In some ways, it's endearing, gentle, polite, and rather sweet. But in others, it's dangerous and life expectancy limiting.

We might live in urban areas, we might think that we no longer walk on the wild side, but the jungle remains a deep part of us. And in that world, the life span of the apologiser is short. A sorry-saying lion is a hungry beast, and an apologetic impala is lunch.

It's possible that the South African need to apologise is borne out of guilt. That our past has us feeling shame, and that as a result, we have an aversion to hurting anyone. Again. We therefore avoid conflict, and capitulate rather than confront.

The problem is that much like the impala, we've become lunch. The appalling

## INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



treatment by the African National Congress (ANC) of many citizens, and especially Jewish ones, is to some extent the result of our own timidity. Where organisations like AfriForum – like it or not – have taken an aggressive approach to the government, when necessary, we've opted for dialogue and reconciliation. Where it has gone out guns blazing, we've written strongly worded statements.

It's not meant as criticism. Especially as the approach worked in the past. But it's clear to me that it no longer does. Because dialogue require two parties that have a shared goal. And at least a measure of respect awarded to the other. In our case, it's clear that the ANC doesn't respect or value the community. A feeling now returned in abundance.

It's time to reframe our thinking. We're not visitors in South Africa. We're citizens of the country and have every right, as anyone else does. Rights that are entrenched in our Constitution. If the president doesn't like it, he's free to leave and he's welcome to take his dishonest friends with him. He serves at the behest of his people, and he serves even those who have chosen not to vote for him. That's his cross to bear.

Our responsibility is to respect the laws of the country, to do what we can to improve the lives of others, and mostly to stop apologising for the behaviour of others. Sorry. Not Sorry!

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

# Hypocrisy and hope

At the time of writing, we were counting down the final hours until the election. For the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD), polling day marks the culmination of its flagship #MakeUsCount election awareness and education project, with a Board-led multifaith observer team, as on all previous occasions since 2009, assisting the Independent Electoral Commission in monitoring the voting and ensuring that everything is fair and above board. How things transpired on the day will feature in next week's column.

The weeks leading up to the election were undeniably difficult ones for South African Jewry. Our community in the post-apartheid era has always felt accepted and a welcome component of the greater population, and our participation in the country's democratic culture was never in question. This time, however, we saw the ruling party on several occasions excluding Jewish community representatives from its pre-election interfaith platforms. As National Director Wendy Kahn pointed out in her recent article, the African National Congress's tagline, "Let's do more together", while designed to give the impression of promoting national unity, hides the reality that for the first time, South African Jewry wasn't invited to give a prayer at the ANC's final Siyaquoba election rally, as we had done at every such event since 1994.

Added to this was President Cyril Ramaphosa invoking at the rally the notorious chant "From the river to the sea", today widely recognised as a call for the annihilation of the state of Israel. It further appears that the president chose to omit from his speech a call for the release of the hostages in Gaza, in spite of the fact that even the International Court of Justice that his own government has frequently approached has again insisted on this in its most recent ruling. In our responses to the media, we stressed that this simply reconfirmed our understanding that the government



## ABOVE BOARD

Karen Milner

isn't looking for a peaceful solution to the conflict, but rather to cause discord among fellow South Africans against the Jewish community.

Regardless of how it's spun, calls for the eradication of the world's only Jewish state mean incitement to exterminate its Jewish population. Last week, the SAJBD joined its counterparts around the world in making a submission to Meta, the tech giant behind social media, virtual reality, and artificial intelligence products, explaining why the slogan indeed amounts to a call for genocide. The chanting of this slogan by a head of a government that recurrently tries to express its commitment to a two-state solution is, to say the least, thoroughly hypocritical.

However difficult it is to be confronted by the current government's stance, far from concluding the situation to be hopeless, the opposite is the case. Foremost in our minds should be that the Freedom Charter's opening declaration, "South Africa belongs to all who live in it", isn't just a statement of principle but legal fact. Our status as full, equal citizens of a democratic state continues, and neither the present government nor any other party has the power to change that. As we stand poised on the threshold of a new, and hopefully better, political era, we will, as we have always done, continue to play our part as engaged, connected, and identifying South African citizens and find ways to make it the kind of just, secure, prosperous, and inclusive society that we know it can be, for ourselves and our fellow citizens.

• 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



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# Spiegel-Wagner takes on the Queen of Crime

**Sharon Spiegel-Wagner** has become well known to us in musical comedy theatre such as *Locked Upside Down*, but she's now venturing onto the stage as the lead in Agatha Christie's courtroom drama *Witness for the Prosecution*. The SA Jewish Report caught up with her.

**Audiences have recently got used to seeing you in light musical comedy theatre, which you have taken part in writing. What does this change feel like to you?**

Indeed, this is a large shift from what I'm used to portraying and from what audiences expect from me. It's exhilarating and terrifying. I'm blessed to be able to flex other acting muscles and, of course, there's plenty of doubt, insecurity, and fear. But these things are there only to help me grow in my career and in my understanding of the world of theatrical expression. It's been a ride, I tell you!

**Which are you more comfortable doing?**

We're naturally more comfortable doing more of the same things over time, but I don't ever want to get too cosy because that can breed stagnation. Even if I feel more confident in comedy, I still work hard not to get overly sure of myself.

There's always room for more nuance and discovery. The moment one thinks one has it all worked out is precisely the moment one can stop learning and progressing.

**You've mastered television, theatre, musicals, and serious film. Which do you prefer and why?**

I truly love them all. In a creative setting – any creative setting – I'm the most free. It's the content and people I work with that shape the joy and ease of the final product.

**Describe your character in *Witness for the Prosecution*.**

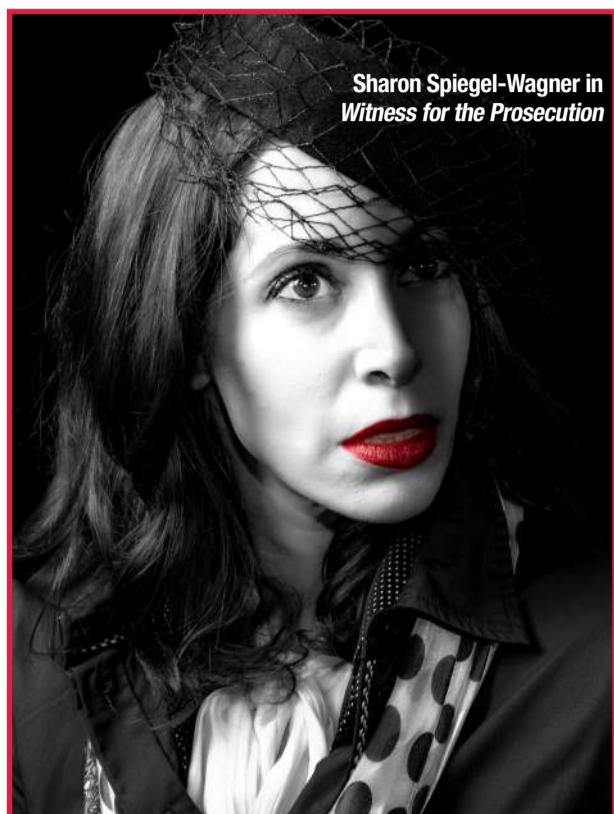
I can't say too much! It's all a mystery. She's a foreigner from Berlin. She's an actress, and she's glamorous and strong-willed. She's magnetic, calculating, and smart. She's written in a way that leaves the audience guessing. And much of her purpose in the piece is to elicit speculation, mystery, and intrigue. So she's even a mystery to me. Playing a woman whom even I can't fully understand has been interesting.

**How do you feel about her?**

The only information an actor gets about a character is what's written on the page. The actor relies on research and his/her own imagination and experience to create a fully believable human being on stage. I have a deep empathy for all my characters. They are all puzzles for me to solve. Romaine has an enigma about her that I find intoxicating. But her humanity is what I need to tap into to make her mine and make her relatable to the audience. And her essence – as you'll see when you come watch – is pure magic.

**How did you get into this role, and how do you go back to being you?**

A lot of it resides in posture, breathing, and vocal inflections. Romaine breathes differently to me, stands differently. She has a German accent, so the way I speak when performing isn't very Sharon. All



Sharon Spiegel-Wagner in *Witness for the Prosecution*

these tools help me to inhabit a different persona. Her situation and the time period also inform me further. Imagination is my biggest asset. I visualise her world before I enter a rehearsal or performance space. My colleagues provide great support as they inhabit their own characters. I get wrenched out of this frame of mind the minute I get home, and hear, "Mommy!" So, my kids and my husband keep me grounded in reality. I'm grateful for that anchor in my life.

**What did you particularly enjoy or find tough in working with a "Queen of Cunning" script?**

Agatha. Dame Agatha. Every time we played a scene, reread a line, some new thought or hidden meaning surfaced. It's uncanny! She writes in a maze. You have to keep searching for different pathways and clues to understand the story and indeed the mystery. It's been a glorious experience, and working alongside Alan Swerdlow is a double-firstwhammy bonus because his remarkable intelligence and knowledge holds us all gently and gracefully.

**It's a fairly large cast, many of whom have been in the industry for decades. What's that like?**

It's simply divine. I get to work with colleagues across the board – young first-timers in theatre, and the most distinguished, experienced actors.

What more could a girl ask for?

It's sensational working with the incomparable Graham Hopkins, Peter Terry, Craig Jackson, and Mike Hough. And the up-and-coming talent is equally astounding. It's a whopper of a cast.

**And, once again, you're being directed by Alan Swerdlow. How does that work for you?**

As Romaine says, "It suits me very well." I have the greatest respect and fondness for Alan. He's truly a man I love working with, and he has become a dear friend. I'm quite precious about him since we've been collaborating for so long. He gets me, tames my fears, calms my madness, and most of all, believes in me.

**How close is this production to the original book, and if there are changes, why were they made?**

There are some changes, all carefully done to serve dramatic purposes and to make things practical for production regarding budget, running time, and so on. But even with some changes, there's no compromise on quality and standard.

**What kind of audience are you expecting, and what will they take home?**

I'm expecting everyone to come! This play is a puzzle for us and the audience. Who doesn't love a murder-mystery/courtroom drama. It's full of all the good stuff. It's quirky, nuanced, full of suspense, drama, and intrigue. I'm hoping that the audience will get involved because it has an important part to play. I can say no more, or I'll be giving away too much.

**What comes after this?**

Nothing in writing at the moment, but that's an actor's life! As far as I'm concerned, it's only upwards and onwards from here.

## Katzen blazes a trail in comedy that's pure Jozi

*Soweto Blaze*, a South African action comedy is doing well on Netflix. The SA Jewish Report speaks to its director and writer, **Brad Katzen**, to find out more.

**What inspired you to write and direct *Soweto Blaze*?**

I wanted to make a film set in South Africa that I would want to watch, something that didn't concern itself with an agenda or a self-serious message of poverty porn, just a fun, entertaining, light-hearted story that explores quirky characters in quirky situations, which was something I felt was lacking in the local cinematic landscape when I started putting this project together.

**How would you describe it?**

*Soweto Blaze* is a hyper-stylised stoner-comedy set amidst Soweto's vibrant streets in South Africa. It's about a small-time pot dealer whose dreams go up in smoke when his clueless friends sweep him up into a wacky kidnapping caper, and their fiery hostage, a feisty young woman, flips the script on them with her own plans.

The film has no agenda other than to entertain with a strong South African flavour, a healthy dose of romance, humour, and spectacle, and maybe to show that getting high sometimes can be a fun time.

I wanted to showcase characters that are eager to better themselves and improve their life situation. It doesn't shy away from the harsh reality of South African life, but embraces it, giving us a fun, tongue-in-cheek glimpse into a group of larger-than-life, quirky characters doing whatever they can to get by in the urban jungle of Jozi.

The film had its international world premiere at the Austin Film Festival 2023 as official selection, and is enjoying a fruitful run on the international film-festival circuit, playing around the world, including in Berlin and Toronto.

**What audience are you are trying to appeal to, and what's the message of the film (if any)?**

We're appealing to anyone looking for something a bit different, stoner youth culture, and supporters of indie and international cinema.

One of the goals of making *Soweto Blaze* was to infuse the film with a youthful energy and optimism that reinforces positive themes of self-improvement, friendship, and love. It's something all audiences can embrace, especially as a pleasant distraction from some of the more sombre world events happening around us.

The overall message is that with enough drive and motivation, you can better your situation and achieve your goals with the right people beside you, no matter where you come from. It's a familiar story told in a – hopefully – unique way.

**How did you select the actors? What were you looking for specifically?**

There was an extensive casting process to bring together an ensemble of performers such that there's almost no single lead character – every character in the film has something unique or quirky about them to make them memorable.

**What drew you to this career? When did you know this was what you wanted to do?**

I've been dreaming about making films since I could talk.



Brad Katzen with his SAFTA award

I've never wanted to do anything else. I blame my father, who was a huge movie buff. I was that cliché in high school, dragging my friends back to my house to make shitty home movies every weekend! Filmmaking is a medium that encompasses every other art form – prose, music, performance, photography – and the idea of being able to bring those elements together in a cohesive way to tell a story just tickled me pink.

**You've won awards for your productions. What have you won, and what was it like?**

I've been fortunate enough that some of my work has been recognised in delightful ways across a myriad international festivals. The more noteworthy include a short film I wrote, directed, and edited, *The Beginning*, which was featured at the Cannes Film Festival Short Film Corner 2015. The Mzansi film *Stick-Up* won Best TV Movie at the SAFTAs (South African Film and Television Awards) 2017, and my first feature film, a horror film called *The Domestic*, which was bought by Amazon Prime and is streaming on the platform, won the Dark Matters Jury Award at the Austin Film Festival 2022, and Best Music and Best Actor at ScreamFest 2022.

***Soweto Blaze* is showing on Netflix to an international audience. How did this happen?**

My script, *Soweto Blaze*, was selected out of more than 200 submissions to go into production following a Netflix-NFVF (National Film and Video Foundation) talent-search initiative for upcoming filmmakers after the COVID-19 pandemic. Made on a low-budget of just R4 million, the film was shot in 2022, while an extensive post-production concluded in 2023. The film was a labour of love for all involved and a testament to the resourcefulness of all local creative industries.

**What response have you had for *Soweto Blaze* so far, and from whom?**

The response has been very encouraging. Within the first week of release, we made the Netflix top 10, and the film has played at a variety of international festivals, including the Austin Film Festival, where it was nominated for the Comedy Vanguard Award. It's enjoying a fruitful international film festival run around the world.

**Tell us a bit about your career to date. How did it start, and what have you done to get to this point?**

It's been a lot of writing and networking. After studying film and screenwriting at AFDA and the University of the Witwatersrand, I began working in the industry as a researcher and editor in post-production, where I met and partnered with my producer, Shaun Naidoo, and we started a production company 33 Films. From there, we collaborated on a short film, and after the positive response from that – at Cannes and other festivals – we got the attention of M-Net and Mzansi Magic,

which allowed us to make a film. The recognition from that film – the SAFTA awards and so on – pushed us to make our first feature.

Alas, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, that feature project fell away at the last second. But from the ashes, the money we had saved for it allowed me to double-down and write a feature film that could be done on a smaller scale, which ended up being *The Domestic*. That also got some festival recognition, and after selling it to Amazon, got us in the door to meet Netflix, which got us to *Soweto Blaze*.

**What has been your most incredible moment in your career to date?**

My first day on set directing my first feature film. It was a surreal moment that was the culmination of nearly 20 years of dreaming and wishing.

**And the worst?**

My first day on set directing my first feature film! The mix of terror and excitement in rallying a crew to tell a story of my own invention was a wild time. Not to mention the fact that it rained that very day and our entire location and equipment got flooded. And we were shooting in my sister's house. She wasn't impressed. It was a good start to production.

**What does being a part of the Jewish community mean to you?**

It allowed me to have a Barmitzvah, which still haunts me to this day. Also a helpful community of friends and family, which has been a pillar of support without which I wouldn't be where I am today. I cherish 99% of them.

**How, if at all, has being Jewish had an impact on your life and career?**

Big time. It allowed me to kick-start my career, as one of my earliest projects was partially funded through a mysterious benefactor whom I wouldn't have had access to if it weren't for my Jewishness. I thank Hashem every day for my circumcised life.

**What's next for you?**

I'm developing my next feature film with Amazon, which is co-financing the project, and a slate of other projects with Netflix.



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## Norman Friedman – no spare rib at 100

Golden Acres resident Norman Friedman, known for introducing spare ribs to South Africa, celebrated his 100th birthday on 23 May.

Born in 1924 in Johannesburg, Norman is the eldest of four children raised by Oscar and Eva Friedman.

He was drafted into the army but wasn't deployed to any active war zones during World War II. His pursuit of a career in chemistry led him to Cape Town, where he secured an apprenticeship at Epic Oil Mills, where he remained for many years.

In 1947, fate intervened when Norman met Naomi, another Friedman, hailing from Oudtshoorn, where her family owned a sweet factory. Their shared surname didn't deter them, and they were married on 6 April 1948. They had four children: Merle, Basil, Debra, and



Norman Friedman

Lewis. Merle is the only child who remains in South Africa, while the others have found homes in the United States. Norman's legacy extends to seven grandchildren and six great-grandchildren, scattered across the United States and the United Kingdom.

Norman successfully ran the family business, Verona Meat Market, alongside his brother,

David (Doddy). It was there that, in a stroke of brilliance, he introduced spare ribs to South Africa in the early 1970s after an American customer lamented their absence. Eventually, Norman convinced Mike's Kitchen to embrace this new cut of meat. The rest is history!

Retirement in his 80s proved to be short-lived for the ever-active Norman. The workplace lured him back, this time to the familiar environment of a local Spar's butcher counter. Travel was another passion, with adventures taking the couple across the globe.

Today, Norman lives independently in his apartment at Golden Acres. He's fortunate to have his younger brother, Mervyn, and his wife, Maureen, nearby, and he sees them frequently.

## King David's Woolf wows Mikolot judges

King David High School Victory Park pupils Jethro Crawford, Zara Weiner, Aimee Shull, Daniel Segal, and Joshua Woolf represented their school with eloquence and passion at the semifinals of the Mikolot public speaking competition hosted at King David Linksfield on 22 May.

Daniel Segal earned runner-up position, and the competition's winner, Joshua Woolf, will represent South Africa in Sydney on 9 August at the Mikolot public speaking competition.



Joshua Woolf and Daniel Segal

## Lurie's The Accordionist a winner of My Family Story

King David Primary School Linksfield pupil Zac Lurie's project, *The Accordionist*, was selected as one of the winners of My Family Story 2024. Lurie's project will be mentioned and parts shown during the final ceremony broadcast live from Israel throughout the world on 6 June.



Zac Lurie

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