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The Three Weeks and Tisha B'Av

The prophet calls these fast days "days of goodwill before G-d" – a time to turn past failings into a path toward a deeper, renewed bond with G-d. Fasting brings cleansing, mourning carries the promise of redemption, and beneath the sadness is a quiet sense of hope and joy.

SA community donates to upgrade Israeli bomb shelters

GILANA LAB

The South African Jewish community has raised enough money in the past few weeks to refurbish more than 30 urgently needed bomb shelters in Israel, according to the Jewish National Fund South Africa (JNF-SA). “We don’t realise that the existing bomb shelters or public bomb shelters aren’t being maintained. They need to be upgraded quite desperately for the kind of missiles being launched towards Israel,” JNF-SA chairperson Michael Kransdorff told the SA Jewish Report.

Due to the unfortunate reality that Israelis live with, bomb shelters are needed more urgently than ever, he said. The Jewish National Fund (JNF) partnered with Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael to refurbish existing public bomb shelters across Israel. The JNF then put out an appeal on a recent SA Jewish Report webinar about the Iran-Israel war and the money was raised. Kransdorff said that as the war with Iran escalated, civilians across Israel once again faced the devastating consequences of regional aggression. It became evident that many communities in Israel didn’t have access to safe and secure bomb shelters. According to the June JNF newsletter, up to 60% of local authorities are estimated not to have any access to public shelters at all.

Kransdorff said that in the past, JNF-SA was involved in building bomb shelters in the Gaza envelope, including one funded by the Samson Foundation. A few years ago, the organisation built a nursery school with a covered play area designed to be a bomb shelter, essentially a protected space where children

can play safely. JNF-SA National Director Bev Schneider said she believed they would raise enough for 18 shelters, but were grateful that they had almost doubled that. Because the South African rand isn’t very strong, she said, “We’ve focused on upgrading existing bomb shelters. For a relatively small amount of money, we can make a big impact, because the structure is already there, it just needs some investment to bring it back to full functionality.”



The refurbishment process is dependent on the state of the shelter, she said. “They’re in various states of disrepair. Some just have mould and need to be cleaned and repainted, while others are filled with rubbish or have plants growing out of the walls. It really depends on the location and condition of each shelter. “The doors have been repaired, air conditioning units installed, walls repainted, and in some cases, toilets have been added. It’s a big project and we’re proud to be part of it,” she said. Each refurbished shelter will have a plaque somewhere within the space showing gratitude to the South African Jewish community and giving those who donated some credit. The public bomb shelters are located across Israel,

including areas such as Tel Aviv, Beit She’an, Tiberius, Ashdod, Ramat Gan, Be’er Sheva, Sderot, Ashkelon, as well as many other cities in Israel. “A lot of them are located in older buildings, and in those, people don’t have their own *mamad* in the apartment,” said Schneider. “They have to go out to a public bomb shelter. That’s what these are, public shelters meant for the whole building or neighbourhood.” SA Jewish Report Chairperson Howard Sackstein, who ran the webinar, said, “During the war between Israel and Iran, Iran launched more than 1 000 drones attacking Israeli civilian areas and more than 500 ballistic missiles, many of which contained cluster bombs. Twenty-nine Israelis were killed, about 3 500 civilians were injured, and 9 000 people were made homeless. “There was an urgent need for bomb shelters to protect civilians, and it was clear that many of the older bomb shelters in Israel needed to be upgraded to protect the population from these Iranian war crimes. We were hosting webinars with Colonel Miri Eisin in collaboration with the JNF, and we wanted to use the opportunity to allow people to participate in this humanitarian mission. “We were deeply moved by the generosity and commitment of so many people, who each wanted to help in whatever way possible. That’s what it means to be part of a community. Each of us is responsible for each other.” Said Schneider, “The funds have already been remitted to Israel, and the work has been done or is in the process of being done. “It also feels good to know exactly where the money is going. Donating to something so tangible helps all of us feel like we’re contributing and even saving lives, even while we’re sitting here in South Africa,” she said.

Courage to change the world

Torah Thought

Women seldom feature in the Torah, less often by name. And rarer than both is when their words are recorded. When that happens, we need to pay extra attention. So, despite this week’s Torah portion being named after Pinchas, whose actions are described in last week’s parshah, it’s in the latter half that we meet five remarkable women – Machla; Noah; Tirzah; Hoglah; and Milcah – the daughters of Tzlofchad.

“And the daughters of Tzlofchad ... stood before Moses, Eleazar the priest, the chieftains, and the whole assembly, at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, and they said ...” (Num 27:2) They take the bold step of leaving their tents and approaching the seat of power – the Tent of Meeting where the decision-makers of the day sit – and demand that they are able to inherit the land of their father. In their case, there was no male heir, so it would seem the right and just ruling for their case to be accepted. But it would require a change in the newly-developing Jewish law, and Moshe Rabbeinu, Moses our teacher, throws it upstairs to let G-d

handle it. And indeed, with G-d’s blessing, the law is changed so that women, in specific circumstances, are able to inherit from their father. It would be premature to see this as a victory for feminism or egalitarian law. In fact, a few chapters later, we see how the men of their tribe petition Moses to require any daughters who inherit land to marry within their father’s clan, which is also granted. But this is a victory for courageous leadership and for those with less power speaking up to those who have more. Rashi, following the Midrash Tanchuma remarkably teaches that, “Their eyes saw what Moses’ did not.” (commentary to Num 27:7). In other words, were it not for their intervention, the law wouldn’t have been interpreted correctly. This doesn’t teach us that Moses was upstaged or wasn’t our greatest teacher of Torah. It does teach us, however, that no person alone is perfect no matter how gifted, and that in a healthy community we need to hear from many voices in order to comprehend the truth fully. The daughters’ bravery leads to a deeper

Rabbi Greg Alexander
Temple Israel



and more nuanced understanding of inheritance law. This Friday, 18 July, we mark Mandela Day, remembering the courage and contribution of a leader who wasn’t prepared to sit by while his country suffered under apartheid. Mandela spoke out at great personal risk, and was “rewarded” with 27 years in prison. But that didn’t stop his activism, and he continued to mentor leaders and serve his people from jail on Robben Island. As we mark his contribution, the same week we mark the daughters of Tzlofchad’s, may we be inspired to take on the cause of justice, to speak truth to power, and to contribute to making our community and our country fairer for all who live in them. • Rabbi Greg Alexander is part of the team that leads the Cape Town Progressive Jewish Congregation. www.templeisrael.co.za

Extremist Islamic party blocked after outcry

NICOLA MILTZ

The Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) has thrown out Durban businessman and alleged terror financier Farhad Hoomer’s bid to register a political party under the incendiary name Islamic State of Africa (ISA).

The decision brought relief to political leaders, security experts, and civil society alarmed by the prospect of extremist ideologies entering South Africa’s democratic space.

The IEC rejected the application on multiple grounds, including the party’s failure to meet procedural requirements, inadequate public notice of the application, and overwhelming public objections – more than 200 formal submissions – that pointed to the party’s dangerous ideological underpinnings rooted in Sharia law and extremist rhetoric.

The decision ends – for now – Hoomer’s attempt to enter South Africa’s political space under a name that evokes immediate associations with the global terror network ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant), an organisation he has been allegedly accused of funding and supporting.

The IEC’s decision is final, but Hoomer, who applied in May, has 30 days to lodge an appeal against the rejection and is reportedly planning to appeal the decision.

Professor Hussein Solomon, of the Department of Political Studies and Governance at the University of the Free State, said the very name “Islamic State of Africa” conjured up images of a party promoting a radical Islamist and militant agenda fundamentally at odds with South Africa’s secular Constitution. Solomon warned that allowing such a party could “instil violence in the country’s democratic political process and thereby constitute a violation of Section 16 of the Electoral Commission Act”.

He noted that Hoomer had made his disdain for democracy abundantly clear, having previously labelled it “evil”, a “tyranny”, and a form of “enslavement”.

“Why would Hoomer, who holds such anti-democratic views, then partake in a democratic process? One would assume that his purpose would be to make use of electoral platforms and media attention to spread his pernicious ideology,” Solomon said.

The IEC confirmed that among the deluge of objections were submissions from religious organisations, political parties, academics, and security specialists. The South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) lodged a comprehensive and scathing objection, detailing not only the constitutional violations embedded in the party’s ideology, but Hoomer’s troubling history, domestically and abroad.

The name of the party alone – Islamic State of Africa – is a direct invocation of ISIS, an entity synonymous with terror, violence, and

the destruction of civil societies worldwide, said the Board. Coupled with Hoomer’s intention to impose Sharia law, and his documented rejection of democracy, this party posed an existential threat to South Africa’s constitutional values, it said.

The African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP), which also lodged a formal objection, welcomed the IEC’s move. “While we stand for freedom of religion, the specific choice of this name could indicate affiliation with the Islamic State [ISIS/ISIL] and its affiliates,” the party said. “Islamic State is designated a terrorist organisation by the United Nations and many countries around the world. The South African government has acknowledged the presence of ISIS sympathisers since 2016, and has expressed ongoing concern about the group’s potential threat.”

The ACDP argued that registering the Islamic State of Africa would amount to “the propagation or incitement of violence or hatred” and would cause “serious offence to any section of the population on grounds of ... religion, conscience, and belief”, prohibited by section 16(1)(c) of the Electoral Commission Act 51 of 1996.

Security analyst Ryan Cummings, the director of Africa Focus Risk Management Consultancy at Signal Risk, said that though Hoomer’s association with ISIS had yet to be proven in court, the IEC clearly took heed of the concerns raised by South Africans.

“What’s clear is that the messaging Hoomer espouses doesn’t resonate with South Africans,” Cummings said, “particularly within the Muslim community, which hasn’t been swayed by his fundamentalist ideology.”

The IEC cited three primary reasons for rejecting Hoomer’s application. First, the party failed to submit the required 300 signatures of registered voters endorsing the formation of the party, and it didn’t meet the legally mandated format.

Second, the party’s notice of application was published in a newspaper with limited regional circulation, insufficient to inform the broader public in the eThekweni municipality – the geographical scope linked to the application.

Most critically, the IEC confirmed that it had received more than 200 objections, many of which challenged the party’s ideological stance. Objections raised concerns that ISA’s constitution, which proposes policies based on Sharia law, was fundamentally at odds with South Africa’s secular and inclusive constitutional framework.

The SAJBD’s objection laid out the constitutional incompatibilities of Sharia law, particularly its treatment of non-Muslims, women, and dissenters. The Board warned that enshrining such a legal system in any political

framework in South Africa would reverse decades of progress in human rights, equality, and democracy.

The imposition of Sharia law, which includes corporal punishment, death penalties, and restrictions of religious freedom, cannot coexist with the Bill of Rights, which guarantees dignity, equality, and freedom of expression to all South Africans, said Wendy Kahn, the national director of the SAJBD.

Hoomer, who continues to deny all allegations, was sanctioned by the United States Treasury in 2022 as a specially designated global terrorist. The designation was based on intelligence linking him to an ISIS cell in Durban; operational support for ISIS affiliates in Mozambique and the Democratic Republic of the Congo; and financial crimes including kidnapping for ransom and extortion.

His arrest in 2018 for allegedly masterminding the deadly attack on the Imam Hussain Mosque in Verulam, along with a string of attempted bombings in Durban, further entrenched his notoriety. Though



Farhad Hoomer

charges were later dropped due to procedural failings, his name remains associated with terror finance networks that have plagued southern Africa.

Adding to the controversy was the party’s chosen logo: an upward-pointing index finger, a gesture widely co-opted by ISIS as a symbol of its strict monotheism and ideological purity. While rooted in Islamic tradition, its use in this context served to cement perceptions that Hoomer’s party wasn’t just inspired by ISIS, but was directly aligning with its narrative.

The case has reignited debate over South Africa’s political vetting systems. While the IEC can block party registrations that breach constitutional thresholds, individuals facing serious allegations but without convictions remain legally able to contest elections.

Political analysts have called for clear legislative mechanisms to prevent actors with terrorism links from entering formal politics even when prosecutions have failed.

Though this may be seen as a mini victory in the fight against the spread of ISIS in South Africa, Solomon said it was “only the tip of the iceberg” and “much more needs to be done, especially when it comes to terrorist funding”.

Ramaphosa not neutral enough to oversee national unity project

>>Continued from page 1

any permission from anybody in the world to tell me what to do. I break the laws all the time,” Sooliman has stated publicly.

Sara Gon, a fellow of the South African Institute of Race Relations, said the concept of a National Dialogue was flawed. “The people of South Africa are the ones who create a dialogue. The government’s role is to help the people realise the society they would like to see through creating and implementing sound policies which provide for economic growth, safety, and education. The government knows what’s required of it, and it’s failing. It’s a costly distraction. The choice of Dr Sooliman is problematic because while he has been well known for his charitable work, the exposure of his views on Jews throws up the very schisms that a government-created ‘dialogue’ is intended to overcome.”

Advocate Mark Oppenheimer agreed that the dialogue was unlikely to yield meaningful solutions to South Africa’s predicament. “The SAJBD is right to question the roles of Sooliman and President Ramaphosa, particularly in light of their antagonism towards the Jewish community and the state of Israel,” he said.

However, he said it would be a serious misstep for the Constitutional Court to involve itself in this process as doing so risks

tarnishing its hard-won legitimacy. “It would be far preferable for civil society to convene an alternative dialogue, one that truthfully addresses the damaging policy choices of the current administration, rather than lend credibility to what appears to be a political charade,” he said.

The SAJBD argued that Ramaphosa, as patron of the National Dialogue, lacked the legitimacy to succeed in promoting national unity and fostering collaboration across sectors, as the project sets out to do. It maintained that the Constitutional Court, an apolitical institution with credibility, which is trusted by the vast majority of South Africans, would be better suited to the role of patron.

The Democratic Alliance has since withdrawn from the National Dialogue, saying it will be nothing more than a waste of time and money to distract from the African National Congress’s (ANC) failures, and calling it an electioneering ploy at taxpayer expense to gloss over the serious crises that the ANC has plunged South Africa into.

The Presidency hasn’t yet responded to the SAJBD’s demand. It remains to be seen whether the Constitutional Court will engage with the request, or whether civil society at large will rally around the call for an impartial guardian of the dialogue.

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Anti-Jewish bias evident in UCT leadership

TALI FEINBERG

Professor Adam Mendelsohn, who has taken the University of Cape Town (UCT) to court over its anti-Israel resolutions, has provided evidence that anti-Jewish bias was possibly at play when UCT adopted the resolutions.

He stated this in a replying affidavit submitted to the Western Cape High Court on 4 July.

Mendelsohn also claims that a member of the UCT executive committee (exco), Dianna Yach, who is Jewish, threatened him to get him to drop the case. He claims in the affidavit that “she said that my application was not going to be a healthy thing for me and my family, which she described as a warning”.

He also claims that UCT Council Chairperson Norman Arendse lied to the court multiple times in his answering affidavit on behalf of UCT, and that he put pressure on Council members not to share their perspectives with the court. However, some have done so.

Yach told the *SA Jewish Report* that she “categorically denies these baseless and defamatory allegations. At no stage have I threatened Professor Mendelsohn or any member of his family. These claims are false, and appear to be deliberately designed to mislead and to divert attention from the serious issues at hand.”

Mendelsohn, who is director of the Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies at UCT, is calling for the anti-Israel resolutions adopted by the university in June 2024 to be reviewed or set aside. He says the Council – the university’s highest decision-making body – didn’t follow its own processes when adopting them, and they have a negative impact on research, academic freedom, and fundraising.

He also said that the anti-Jewish bias at UCT starts at the top, as Arendse describes certain donors to UCT as “pro-Israel”, possibly because “some of their trustees happen to be Jewish”. Mendelsohn said Arendse also describes these donors as “hostage-takers”, implying that they are “seeking to use financial power to coerce UCT to adopt immoral positions and to further the political agenda of Israel over all other interests”.

He wrote in his affidavit that the entire exco appears to harbour these prejudices, “which seems to have informed their failure to disclose these donors’ concerns with the resolutions to Council”.

Mendelsohn said that this “bias” extended to the Council. For example, Council member Dr Shuaib Manjra described Jews as “a group of messianic lunatics, addicted to killing and destroying”. Council member Nazeema Mohamed considers “certain donors” to have “questionable backgrounds”, comparable to “criminal

syndicates”, apparently because these donors have Jewish trustees.

Mendelsohn said records and other affidavits show that some Council members believe that those opposing the resolutions are “part of a Zionist plot”, and that his litigation is “part of a Zionist agenda”, bemoaning that “we are being held ransom by the Zionists on our Council” and that “Zionists will stop at nothing.”

He said UCT officially stated that reports of antisemitism on campus were “fake news”, essentially implying that “Jews do not make good-faith claims of antisemitism and invoke antisemitism to silence critics of Israel and further political agendas”. He said this pattern of bias is only one reason to cast the resolutions aside.

Mendelsohn also states that Arendse’s affidavit “cost UCT R20 million”, because the Donald Gordon Foundation (DGF) demanded the return of R20 million it had already paid to UCT due to false allegations made by Arendse.

Other explanatory affidavits from Council members back Mendelsohn’s concerns that Arendse knowingly lied to the court. Mendelsohn said Arendse also lied about the events around the DGF’s donation of a hospital to UCT. Now, he said, “the DGF is donating a teaching hospital to Stellenbosch University” instead.

Arendse, Yach, and South African Jews for a Free Palestine, who all submitted affidavits, insist that “human rights” are the reason UCT must adopt the resolutions, even if it means giving up donations that benefit disadvantaged South Africans.

Arendse calls the resolutions the “Gaza Resolutions”, “but neither resolution limits its breadth nor focus to Gaza”, noted Mendelsohn. “This reveals the irrational nature of Council’s decision, [which] thought only of Gaza. It did not consider the severe implications for UCT.”

The UCT exco refused to tell the Council that the resolutions could lead to a loss of funding. Thus, “how could Council members decide that expressing indignation at Israel’s conduct outweighs the futures of hundreds of prospective students at UCT who have lost funding?” asked Mendelsohn.

“How could the Council decide that rejecting the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance [IHRA] definition of antisemitism was more important than

having a neuroscience institute funded to the tune of R200 million and receiving an entire hospital, without even knowing that such donations were at stake?” he asked.

Looking at a wide range of resolutions at universities in South Africa and internationally, Mendelsohn noted that “none ban individual academic relations or ‘reject’ the IHRA definition. This demonstrates the extraordinary nature of the impugned resolutions. No university in a democratic country has passed resolutions like them.”

If the ultimate purpose behind the two resolutions is “to prevent UCT academics from committing human rights violations and international crimes” as Arendse says they are, “then why not say so?” asked Mendelsohn. “Council could have passed a resolution banning UCT academics from committing international crimes and acting contrary to the Bill of Rights.”

In terms of the resolution prohibiting UCT academics from collaborating with anyone affiliated to the Israel Defense Forces “or the broader military establishment”, UCT academics “will simply avoid working with Israeli academics to

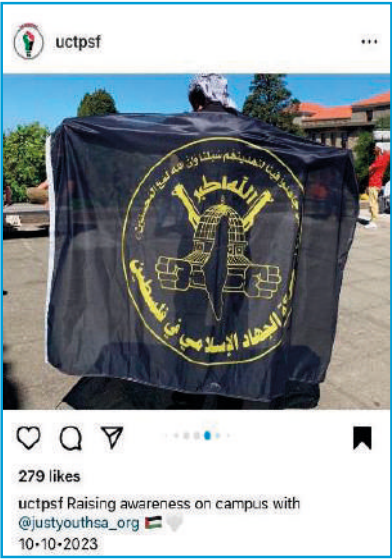
avoid censure and opprobrium”, said Mendelsohn. “It is a ban on working with Israelis *per se*.”

Mendelsohn emphasised, “In bringing this application, I did not purport to be acting on behalf of the Jewish community or any section of the Jewish community. I did not purport to represent the interests of Jews at UCT. I did not identify myself as Jewish. I acted as an academic at UCT who is concerned about the impact of the resolutions on UCT and its staff and students.”

He said the issue of antisemitism on campus was not raised in his application, but Arendse raised it. Therefore, Mendelsohn addressed it, saying, “Without question, the campus climate has deteriorated for Jews since 7 October 2023. I have been struck by a lack of sympathy from UCT toward staff and students who complain.”

Mendelsohn emphasised that there has been a “fundamental governance failure at UCT. The adoption of the resolutions has come at a tremendous cost to UCT as an institution and to its staff and students, but Council literally, expressly, does not care.”

UCT spokesperson Elijah Moholola said UCT noted the affidavits filed by various parties, saying, “This matter is currently before the courts. UCT is therefore not in a position to comment further on a pending legal matter.”



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Not just a *mazaltov* – a miracle

OPINION

SAUL JASSINOWSKY



When Sapir Cohen arrived in South Africa in May 2024, she carried with her the trauma of 55 days in Hamas captivity, along with a quiet determination to speak out.

As the first released hostage to visit South Africa as part of a pioneering project of The Base and Jewish National Fund South Africa (JNF-SA), she made the brave decision to come not just to recover, but to take a stand.

Despite the South African government’s anti-Israel stance, she chose to share her story here, believing that this community, more than most, needed to hear it.

Last week, her name appeared in headlines again, this time for a profoundly joyful reason: Cohen announced her engagement to fellow former hostage Sasha Troufanov. Their story of survival, connection, and now love has moved people around the world. But for many here in South Africa, it also feels deeply personal.

Cohen’s visit was the beginning of something unique. It marked the launch of a project, led by The Base and JNF-SA, that has become one of the most meaningful ways our community has responded to the horrors of 7 October 2023. Since her visit, this initiative has welcomed many survivors, released hostages, bereaved families, and heroes of that day. Each one has been met with warmth, compassion, and the space simply to breathe.

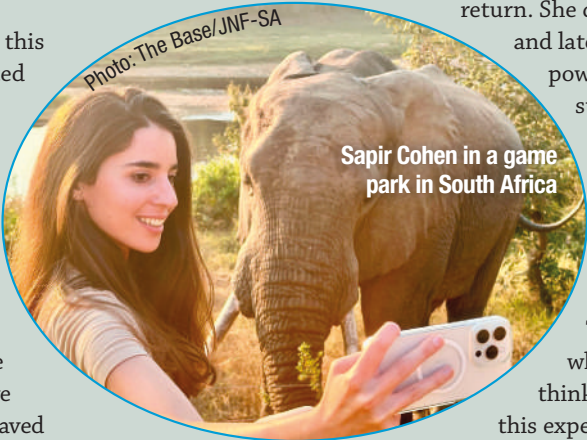
What sets this project apart is that it’s not just a speaking tour, it’s often the only chance these individuals get to step away from the weight of their pain. For a few days in the South African bush or along our coastlines, they are allowed to be human again. To rest, to laugh, to experience a holiday far from trauma. It’s a gift of healing that goes beyond any programme or platform.

The engagement of Cohen and Troufanov is a reminder of what is

possible when care is offered with sincerity. In the days after the announcement, many of us involved in the project received *mazaltov* messages from members of the South African community. These messages reflected the real, ongoing relationships that have formed between South Africans and those we’ve been privileged to host.

When Cohen joined a group of Johannesburg Jewish women for a challah bake during her visit, the room was filled with heartfelt prayer and spontaneous shouts of hope for Troufanov’s safe return. She captured the moment on video, and later showed it to him, creating a powerful bridge between a young man still in captivity and a community thousands of kilometres away who had never met him yet already cared deeply. We now look forward to welcoming them both back, this time together, for their honeymoon in the African bush. Troufanov will finally understand what Cohen meant when she said, “I think it was worth being captured for this experience.”

Cohen and Troufanov’s engagement is a moment of light. It reminds us that out of unimaginable darkness, connection and love are still possible. For many of us in the community that shared a part of that journey with her, it’s not just a *mazaltov*, it’s a blessing. And for our community, it’s a quiet affirmation that when we come together with compassion and in a spirit of unity, we can be part of something that truly matters. • Saul Jassinowsky is an executive committee member of JNF South Africa and a member of The Base.



‘Hashem protected me,’ says SA grenade-attack survivor

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

Heading home after a peaceful walk on the beach near his home in Herzliya Pituach on Sunday, 6 July, South African expat David*(38) heard a small explosion. Turning in that direction to investigate, he saw a larger explosion, and looked down to see himself bleeding out from various parts of his body.

“I remember everything,” says David, who was born in Pretoria and later lived in Johannesburg and Cape Town before making aliya three years ago. “I remember the explosion, the shrapnel coming for me, the sound, the smell, the pain, the feeling, every bit of the entire process up until now. It will always be very much a part of me. I will use the experience to gain strength and knowledge, and grow into a stronger man.”

Having celebrated his birthday just three days prior to the explosion, David says his 39th year started with a bang. “The initial explosion sounded like kids were throwing a firework or like a spark plug blowout,” he recalls. What he had heard, however, was the primary explosion of a grenade. The secondary, or main explosion, occurred within one to two metres of where he was walking.

“Time stood still,” he says. “My adrenaline kicked in, and I knew I needed to assess the situation. My ears were ringing at a high frequency from the explosion, and as I turned around, I noticed that the street was fairly empty.” Upon realising that he was bleeding profusely from his arm, his chest, and his stomach, David reached the middle of the road and began to call for help.

While people came out of their houses and cars began to stop, he called emergency services himself as he knew he needed immediate assistance. As he detailed his condition, a first responder who happened to be his neighbour and a former Israel Defense Forces (IDF) medic rushed to his aid. “He put pressure on the wounds on my chest, took my shirt off, and turned it into a tourniquet.”

After about five minutes, the paramedics arrived and



David surfing in Herzliya, Israel

remove shrapnel in two of his knuckles. Yet one of his main injuries is on his right forearm.

“About a 3mm-long piece of shrapnel went quite deep into my forearm, so it damaged nerves, arteries, and muscles there, which has left me with severe numbness and lack of mobility. I was also hit in my chest on the sixth rib, which

was fractured. Pieces of shrapnel are still lodged inside my chest, on the lower side of my stomach, and in my shoulders.”

The shrapnel in his chest and stomach will probably remain there forever, says David. “It’s fairly common, especially with IDF soldiers who have shrapnel damage, to leave most of the shrapnel inside because it’s more invasive to take it out.” His care is ongoing and over time, his orthopaedic surgeon and hand specialist will establish if his forearm requires surgery or whether the nerves will heal by themselves. He’s also working with a physiotherapist to regain mobility in his right arm and grip strength in his hand.

The head gardener on one of Israel’s largest private estates where he lives and works, David says his hands are the main tools in his professional arsenal. “I’m also a surfer and need my arm for that as well, so it’s affected my work, my lifestyle, and my happy space.” Naturally he’s also feeling a high level of anxiety brought on by post-traumatic stress, which he continues to navigate. Nevertheless, he’s feeling positive and motivated as

he begins his recovery journey. Despite the ongoing war and the difficulties it’s brought, David says he has found peace in Israel. “Even with my current situation, I’m still feeling strong, well, and happy to be here. My life here is happy, simple, and peaceful, and I’ve worked extremely hard to be in this position. I’m not going to let this change that. Either these things make you or break you, and I’m not ready to be broken.”

The events surrounding the grenade attack are part of a police investigation. “The area where it happened has many embassies, ambassadors, and very successful, wealthy, powerful people – politicians, businesspeople, even mafia,” he says. “It’s thought that the grenade was meant to be thrown into someone’s house. It hit the wall, and landed in front of me. I was just in the wrong place at the wrong time, but I also believe that I was put there by Hashem and protected there by Hashem.”

Aside from his faith, David also draws strength from his journey so far. Also a photographer, he’s been on multiple adventures, documenting his travels. He’s climbed large mountains – even living in the Himalayas for a year and reaching Everest Base Camp – swum in deep oceans and hiked through wild natural locations.

“It’s not always about the places, it’s about the person you are in those places,” he says.

“I’m also connected to people that have deep, dark stories. I’ve learned from people in Israel that have been in very difficult places during this war. I rely on the strength of being Jewish and being Israeli, the support of the community and people around me, and my family and friends in South Africa. They all show me that I’ve got a lot of reasons to get stronger. When things settle, I’ll visit South Africa for some love and healing.”

**David asked that his surname be withheld as the investigation surrounding the grenade explosion is ongoing.*

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Jewish Report

South Africans don’t hate Israel – far from it!

We have a majority party in South Africa that took Israel to the International Court of Justice on charges of genocide, so we can be certain that the African National Congress (ANC) doesn’t like Israel. It has done so much to make its animosity towards the Jewish state known to us and the world at large.

However, for so long, Jewish leaders – both Israeli and South African – have waxed lyrical about how real South Africans have a soft spot for Israel. I was never sure whether that was legitimate or just an attempt to try to make us all feel better.

However, during my very brief interview with visiting Israeli Ambassador David Saranga, he mentioned in passing that this was indeed the case, according to recent research. I asked for the research, only to find it was done by the prestigious Washington-based Pew Research Center. Over the years, I have trusted Pew for solid and strong research. I know it to be, as its value statement claims, a non-partisan fact tank that informs the public about the issues, attitudes, and trends shaping the world.

The survey was on attitudes towards Israel and its Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The research showed that across 24 countries, most have negative views of Israel and Netanyahu. As many as 28 333 adults were surveyed between January and April this year.

So, while most of those countries were opposed to Israel, South Africa was far from the worst. Though South Africa certainly had many who held unfavourable views on the Jewish state – as many as half surveyed – as a country, it had among the topmost favourable views of those surveyed.

The United States, Hungary, Kenya, and Nigeria were more favourable than us towards Israel, and we tied with India in our sentiments. This was the proof I needed to acknowledge that so many South Africans do indeed have good feelings about the Jewish state. Perhaps it’s due to the country being so strongly Christian, I can’t say, but it inspires me and gives me such a positive sense of why we are here.

South Africans like Israel far more than most European and Far Eastern countries, according to the research. Kenya, and Nigeria and South Africa were the only African countries surveyed. Considering these three countries were representative of Africa, our continent was by far the keenest one on Israel. More so that is, than North America or Europe. So much for our government’s views!

I guess that’s why the anti-Israel election campaign fell so flat in the past elections. Clearly, the ANC isn’t reading the country’s allegiances.

Looking at countries where there has recently been a huge uptick in violent antisemitism, like Australia, anti-Israel sentiment goes way up to 74%, while anti-Israel sentiment in Netherlands is 78%, and in Turkey 93%.

I respect that statistics can be skewed, and I’m not blind to the negative attitude many do have towards Israel, but this research has given me a boost, and helped me understand why South African Jews are generally allowed to live our lives as we choose and follow our religious path without any interference.

I reiterate that this doesn’t mean that there isn’t antisemitism here and that everyone loves Israel, but I’m saying that there are more people in this country who do like Israel than I believed was the case.

When it comes to supporting Netanyahu, South Africans’ favour drops quite a lot. But that, in my opinion, is totally acceptable. Everybody is entitled to their opinion of leaders. They may like some and not others. Some are more popular than others, but blanket dislike of a country – any country – is problematic.

So, when we turn our heads to the University of Cape Town (UCT), where we watch what I consider to be a lunatic fringe apparently destroying this proud establishment, it sickens me.

I do believe that it’s a few hateful individuals who are holding UCT to ransom to prove a point. Unfortunately, their point – which appears ultimately to be to get rid of Jews – will destroy the university. They are already chipping away at it.

Sadly, fewer of our youngsters want to go there, favouring other universities like Stellenbosch, Wits, University of Johannesburg, and Tuks. At those universities, Jews don’t feel threatened.

For many years, UCT was known for its large Jewish contingent. So much so that in the 1910s, UCT’s students, particularly the sports teams, were nicknamed “Ikeys” – an antisemitic epithet – by Stellenbosch students because of the large number of Jews there.

Unfortunately, if the Council and executive committee don’t do some serious backtracking, not only will the remaining Jewish students leave, but so will many others. Who wants to be at a university with such prejudice and hatefulness? (See page 4.) That’s hardly upholding academic freedom.

In the same breath, seeing that President Cyril Ramaphosa’s National Dialogue is apparently going to be led by Dr Imtiaz Sooliman, who has been so openly antisemitic, is horrendous. In what world is it okay to appoint a person so clearly biased and hateful to a certain element of the country to be in charge of an organisation encouraging all citizens to engage in dialogue? How does that enable Jews to participate? It doesn’t.

More and more, I question Ramaphosa’s sentiments towards us. Once he was a friend, an openminded potential great leader. However, unfortunately, there is so much water under the bridge to prove that he is not a friend – far from it. He has alienated us to such a degree, I hardly believe there’s room for discussion.

In his speech about the National Dialogue, Ramaphosa says, “We should not fear criticism. We should welcome it.” He is talking about encouraging people to be open about where they think they can help South Africa improve.

Well, Mr President, let’s start with finding people who are unbiased and not full of hatred for certain members of your population to lead this National Dialogue. There can be no genuine dialogue otherwise.

Having said that, it’s an inspirational idea, and one that we need in this country. So, make the necessary changes, and let’s get on with it.

At the *SA Jewish Report*, we liked the idea so much, we came up with our own National Jewish Dialogue, which is gaining traction. See the guidelines, and get participating in this project.

Shabbat shalom!
Peta Krost
Editor



ANC is in deep trouble: time to change things up!

OPINION

HOWARD SACKSTEIN



The African National Congress (ANC) is in deep trouble, embroiled in multiple crises of its own making, and since its founding in 1912, has never been weaker. The next few weeks will be crucial in determining its ability to cling desperately to power.

Battered by a devastating electoral defeat in 2024, plummeting in popular support from 57% to 40%, the ANC was forced into an uncomfortable alliance to retain power. President Cyril Ramaphosa understood that any coalition either with Julius Malema’s Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) or former President Jacob Zuma’s uMkhonto weSizwe Party (MK) would result in his inevitable ouster from power. His only choice was a coalition with his ideological nemesis, the Democratic Alliance (DA), and a host of minnow parties who barely registered on the electoral scoreboard.

The ANC never truly embraced the idea of a Government of National Unity (GNU), which would force it to co-govern the country. The party was willing to give up certain Cabinet posts in exchange for allowing Ramaphosa and his kleptocratic ANC ministers to continue to both rule and loot the nation.



Lieutenant General Nhlanhla Mkhwanazi, police commissioner of KwaZulu-Natal

Over the past few weeks, things have started to unwind. On 25 June 2025, Ramaphosa announced that he had unilaterally fired DA Deputy Minister of Trade, Industry and Competition, Andrew Whitfield, “because he undertook an international visit without the permission of the president”.

The Ministerial Handbook prescribes that “Deputy ministers may travel on official visits abroad if these are essential ... (and) should approach the president in writing to request approval for the intended visit.” Whitfield’s trip to the United States was, however, not an official visit and was for DA, not state, business. Many believed that the president used the excuse to show the DA “who was boss” and punish the party for wrecking his 2025/2026 Budget with its 2% VAT increase.

The DA, having been systematically undermined by the ANC, which has consistently ignored the provisions of the “statement of intent” signed between the parties as a prelude to establishing the GNU, finally decided to take a stand. Announcing its withdrawal from the National Dialogue was irrelevant, of much greater impact was its decision to vote against the budgets of governmental departments, whose ministers had been embroiled in allegations of corruption.

Regardless of whether the GNU survives, the ANC has never been more compromised or less appealing to voters.

While attending a BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates) summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, the president’s woes deepened. Lieutenant General Nhlanhla Mkhwanazi, police commissioner of KwaZulu-Natal, held a press conference accusing the minister of police, Senzo Mchunu, and senior police officials, the judiciary, intelligence, and metro police of corruption and complicity with murderers and gangsters.

Mchunu, who is the president’s first choice to succeed him, had fired national crime intelligence head, Dumisani Khumalo, whose budget is beyond the scrutiny of ordinary oversight, ostensibly for failing to follow his instruction to disband the political killings task team in KwaZulu-Natal. Political assassinations have become an almost daily occurrence in South Africa. Mkhwanazi indicated that Mchunu had removed 121 open cases of political killings from his department primarily to shut down the investigations and protect a criminal mafia that had infiltrated the state.

Ramaphosa decided to place the minister of police on leave, and set up yet another judicial commission of inquiry which would kick the can indefinitely down the road. Media have incorrectly reported that the commission of inquiry would have a six-month life span, the president said he would require interim reports in month three and month six, but gave no time-limit for a final report. It was a typical Ramaphosa move, avoiding any real decisions.

The country now heads into a crucial few weeks. The ANC’s National Executive Committee (NEC) meets to discuss both the fallout from the Mkhwanazi revelations and the DA’s decision to vote against departmental budgets. There are many in the NEC who want the DA fired from the GNU for showing unexpected insubordination to the ANC. If the DA leaves the GNU, it wants to be fired, exposing that the ANC would rather keep its corrupt Cabinet ministers than compromise with the DA. It’s a strong political message.

The president has also scheduled a Cabinet

meeting next week Tuesday, 22 July, hoping to bring the DA back into line and prevent an escalating crisis. The following day, Parliament is due to vote on the budgets of a number of governmental departments. If the ANC fails to bring the DA back from the brink, the GNU could well be over.

Regardless of whether the GNU survives, the ANC has never been more compromised or less appealing to voters. Membership of the one mighty liberation movement has dropped by more than 200 000 people in the past four years alone and today, ANC membership is held by only 0.8% of the population. The behemoth has fallen!

The ANC’s chances of a credible performance during next year’s municipal elections are slipping from its grasp. Local government elections provide alternatives for people to vote, independent candidates, civic organisations, local parties addressing local issues, and alternative national parties offering real choice that affords disgruntled ANC voters real choice.

The same doesn’t necessarily hold true for our next national election in 2029. Disaffected ANC voters have few options for a new political home.

Polling from the Social Research Foundation indicates that very few South Africans are attracted by the radical views of parties such as the EFF. MK, wracked by internal divisions and a strong ethnic Zulu bias, doesn’t appeal to many black voters; and the DA simply doesn’t physically look like its potential electorate. A white led and dominated party in a country still burdened and struggling with a history of racial injustice doesn’t appeal to African black voters. In the 2024 national election, only about 3% of black African voters voted for Helen Zille and John Steenhuisen’s party.

What we desperately need in South Africa is a well-funded, intelligent, centrist, anti-corrupt alternative to the ANC, led by a credible black leader. That’s the only thing that could change the trajectory of our politics and the country.

If we fail to assist in the creation of a credible alternative voice that has the best interests of South Africa at heart, we will continue to muddle down the trajectory of slow decline and economic degradation. Surely, as a nation, we deserve so much better. If we think it’s not our responsibility, if we do nothing to change the political landscape of South Africa, then we will ultimately get the government we deserve.

- Howard Sackstein is the chairperson of the SA Jewish Report, but writes in his personal capacity.

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AI is helpful, but it has no Jewish soul

OPINION

As Artificial Intelligence (AI) becomes increasingly embedded in myriad facets of daily life – from virtual assistants to automated systems – it prompts a profound question: what’s Judaism’s approach to AI, and what are the potential effects that this new reality can have on Jewish faith and religion?

Jewish history is one of creative innovation and adaption, while always preserving ancient tradition. From the codification of the Talmud to the invention of the printing press, Judaism has repeatedly harnessed new tools while safeguarding spiritual integrity. AI, however, poses a novel challenge. It’s not a mere tool, it emulates reasoning and discourse, insight and analysis, which raises questions about authority, authenticity, and the definition of absolute truth.



Though AI has already accomplished so much and is rapidly growing in capability, there’s one thing AI will never attain – a soul. Judaism asserts that humans possess

a *neshama* (soul) and are created in the image of G-d. Even animals possess divine energy, which gives them constant vitality and a sense of spiritual purpose. AI, in contrast, is ethically and spiritually neutral in nature. As such, it may serve as an aid, but never as a replacement for a soulful connection to G-d and Judaism, and their impact on our day-to-day lives. Since the COVID-19 pandemic distanced people from their synagogues and Jewish hubs, communities around the world have embraced digital Jewish life ways, from Zoom shiurim, to WhatsApp study circles,

and a variety of prayer apps. AI can enhance this shift. It can suggest Shabbos-friendly lunch menus; offer Torah texts for all lifecycle study; or provide gentle reminders for prayer times. For an individual seeking spiritual growth, such tools can be meaningful and enriching. However, Judaism privileges *kavanah* – intentionality – and a soulful experience. A digital assistant cannot feel a mourner’s agony or a congregant’s joy. True prayer is referred to by our sages as *avodah she-balev* (service of the heart) not recitation generated by an algorithm. If we delegate spiritual life to AI, we risk flattening richness into mere information.

AI-powered platforms can bolster communal cohesion. They can translate Hebrew texts; offer halachic guidance where rabbis are distant; and educate all ages and stages of Jewish life. Yet Judaism is fundamentally communal and interpersonal, embodied in the gathering of *minyanim*, synagogue acoustics, and ritual intimacy. AI cannot replicate the echo of *tefillah* in a sanctuary or the warmth of a yom tov dinner under a sukkah. Technology should scaffold – not supplant – our traditions.

As a rabbi in the community, it is my duty to give halachic rulings to help guide the community and its members with their personal questions and deliberations. Jewish law thrives on context, nuance, and human sensitivity. A rabbi doesn’t just *pasken*, but he has to properly connect with the individual and empathise with the situation before giving any guidance. AI algorithms without proper oversight could misapply sources, misunderstand personal circumstances, or privilege certain traditions to the exclusion of others. Despite the shortfalls of AI, there is substantial upside to AI when employed appropriately. Judaic educators and researchers are already benefiting immensely from the wide and diverse reach of the various AI platforms. AI can reveal inter-textual patterns across Talmudic, medieval, and modern sources. Educational AI platforms can assist in creating curriculum and student workbooks, from basic to advanced.

For the average user, AI tools can assist with the preparation of *parsha* insights for the Shabbos table or wedding speech. It can widen our understanding of any topic of Torah or Jewish thought. Nevertheless, we must remember that more important than artificial intelligence is authentic intelligence. It is authentic and truthful Judaism that will ensure the continuity of Jewish tradition. We must avoid bestowing AI with undue authority or moral standing it cannot possess. AI should be a bridge, not a replacement. If guided by thoughtful halachic oversight and ethical clarity, it may indeed be a holy tool. We must continue to innovate and create new techniques for the way we practice and study our tradition, with our strong values and spiritual selves as our moral compass. We are encouraged to embrace the gifts of modernity, but without losing the timeless heartbeat of our faith. Let’s use the tools of AI wisely, but always remember that no machine can ever replace the spark of a Jewish soul. • Rabbi Yehuda Stern is senior rabbi of Sydenham Shul.



RABBI YEHUDA STERN

All the ANC does is talk, talk, talk

OPINION

This expensive National Dialogue is another meaningless talk shop. There’s a popular Tsonga saying, “*Mintirho ya vulavula*”, which means that actions speak louder than words. For more than 30 years since the birth of our democracy, we have been accustomed to numerous and futile talk shops. The African National Congress (ANC)-led government has spent its time paying lip service rather than governing this country.

The recently announced National Dialogue is said to be costing taxpayers a staggering R700 million. At the end of this circus, communities will still be subjected to skyrocketing levels of unemployment; violent crime; a stagnant economy; the absence of quality service delivery; the scourge of drugs; abuse of alcohol among the youth; crowded and understaffed schools; the deterioration of state infrastructure; and lack of development in all aspects. What qualifies this performative event as a circus is the choice of the people taken to lead this national initiative, which is wrongfully thought of as addressing our socio-economic-political quagmires. President Cyril Ramaphosa, having been involved with the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) in the 1970s, should understand the role and relevance of infusing grassroots voices in a national project. BCM filled the void in black communities when political formations and activities were banned in the country by establishing grassroots organisations that tackled challenges faced by people in a more customised way. The people whom Ramaphosa has elected are out of touch with the reality on the ground. Besides its exorbitant price, this National Dialogue appears to be a divisive tool rather than a way to bring people together. It includes individuals such as Dr Imtiaz Sooliman, the founder of Gift of the Givers, a questionable character who has been able to infiltrate the ANC as well as the South African government, especially the Department of International Relations and Cooperation. Sooliman has been able to brand himself as a humanitarian champion, which in turn he has used to establish and maintain relationships between South Africa and Hamas, Qatar, Iran, and others through his work in Gaza and the Middle East region. It’s myopic to expect people who have held powerful positions in the past to

spearhead a new trajectory for those whose lives they have failed to change. Albert Einstein teaches us that insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. Ramaphosa should remember that the people who broke things cannot be the same ones to fix them. We need to go back to the basics by involving grassroots organisations and community activists to participate in diagnosing their problems and challenging them to recommend community-oriented solutions to those problems, rather than imposing some cosmetic, intellectually rhyming solutions which aren’t practical.

This National Dialogue takes a misleading posture, seemingly suggesting that communities around South Africa don’t know what they want. Let’s begin with Statistics South Africa, which is obliged by the Constitution to collect data to support policy-making, economic and social development, and research. It’s this government department that should guide legislators on the government’s priorities, rather than us immersing ourselves in futile, extravagant theatrics which won’t change anyone’s life besides the politicians who will get another opportunity to steal the same money meant to solve the country’s problems. We have had several talks in various forms and platforms, and what seems to be missing is action to support what has been said. There were talks recently on gender-based violence; corruption whistleblowers; there have been conferences on the transformation

“**IT’S MYOPIC TO EXPECT PEOPLE WHO HAVE HELD POWERFUL POSITIONS IN THE PAST TO SPEARHEAD A NEW TRAJECTORY FOR THOSE WHOSE LIVES THEY HAVE FAILED TO CHANGE.**”

of higher education, on crime, and other subjects. The timing of this National Dialogue also raises concern as we are fast approaching the next highly contested local government elections in 2026, where the ANC is expected to lose many wards and municipalities throughout the country.

• Kenneth Mokgatlhe is a political analyst and journalist. He holds a Master of Arts degree from the Israeli-based Ben Gurion University.



KENNETH MOKGATLHE

Zohran Mamdani reportedly tells business leaders he will ‘discourage’ the phrase ‘globalise the intifada’

New York City’s Democratic mayoral candidate told business leaders that he would seek to discourage the use of the phrase “globalise the intifada”, but continued not to denounce it outright, *The New York Times* reported late on Tuesday, 15 July. Zohran Mamdani made the comments during a closed-door meeting with the Partnership for New York City, an influential business consortium, the newspaper reported. Mamdani’s positions on Israel were a central topic of the meeting, according to the report, which noted that the Jewish Pfizer chief executive, Albert Bourla, was among those challenging Mamdani on issues related to Israel. Signalling that he would discourage the phrase, which many Jews and others interpret as a call to violence against Jews, would represent a shift for the candidate. Mamdani declined to condemn the phrase on a podcast shortly before the primary last month. Facing sharp criticism, he later said it was “not the language I use”, but has consistently said he believed the mayor shouldn’t police language. Mamdani’s opponents in November’s general election – three independents and a Republican – are citing his comments as they paint him as antisemitic, and several leading Democrats have called on him to denounce the phrase unequivocally. A recent poll found that one in three New York voters viewed Mamdani’s



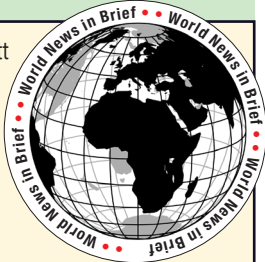
Zohran Mamdani

Photo: Spencer Platt/Getty Images

position on the phrase and on the movement to boycott Israel positively, but more than half say they are less likely to vote for him because of them.

Mike Huckabee denounces killing of Palestinian-American in the West Bank as a ‘terrorist act’

United States Ambassador to Israel Mike Huckabee is calling on Israel to “investigate the murder of Saif Mussallet” aggressively. Mussallet was a Palestinian American beaten to death in the West Bank on Friday, 11 July. Huckabee’s call, issued on X, marked the first denunciation of Mussallet’s murder by a US official. White House officials previously referred questions about the incident to Israel. “Saif Mussallet, an American citizen, was visiting family in Sinjil when he was beaten to death,” Huckabee wrote. “There must be accountability for this criminal and terrorist act. Saif was just 20 years old.” Huckabee’s call is especially notable because he is a vocal advocate of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, which he has said he would support Israel annexing. Mussallet’s family and Palestinian officials say Jewish settlers beat Mussallet severely, and then prevented paramedics from reaching him for hours. He was visiting the region from his home in Florida, and came in contact with settlers while seeking to protect his family’s land, the family said. Huckabee didn’t mention settler violence against Palestinians, which watchdogs say has risen sharply in recent months, accelerating a years-long trend. The US sanctioned several settler groups last year in an attempt to quell the violence. United States President Donald Trump lifted those sanctions within 24 hours of taking office in January. • All briefs supplied by JTA



Watch the SA Jewish Report webinar on ‘AI for Beginners - A practical Guide to artificial intelligence’ on Thursday 17 July at 20:00. To register: bit.ly/jrlive184

Diplomat’s SA-Israel campaign starts in Soweto

PETA KROST

Israeli Ambassador David Saranga’s visit to Soweto last week, where he met the sister of Hector Pieterse – the little boy shot and killed during the 1976 Soweto Uprising – left him feeling inspired about being in South Africa.

Saranga is in South Africa for a few weeks to meet and find ways to support Israeli embassy staff and the Jewish community here. He also hopes to bolster the South Africa-Israel connection, and is working around the clock to absorb as much as he can about the situation so he can offer wisdom and guidance.

Although aware of the South African government’s negative stance on Israel, he said he wasn’t surprised by the warm welcome he got in this country.



Ambassador David Saranga in Soweto

South Africans, he said, were far more favourably inclined towards Israel than most other countries, citing the latest Pew Research Center Report on this issue.

“The research, which came out a few weeks ago, showed that South Africans are among the top 10 countries with a positive attitude towards Israel,” he told the *SA Jewish Report*.

That, he said, was despite the government’s attitude and the fact that internationally, views of Israel were far more negative than positive, according to the survey of 24 countries conducted earlier this year.

“We always knew that public opinion in South Africa was pro-Israel, but we want to strengthen the people-to-people relationships and leverage this support to build bridges,” Saranga said.

Saranga, who has been here for two weeks so far, is the director of the digital diplomacy bureau in the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs and a seasoned diplomat with three decades of experience in the foreign service. He has served as ambassador to Romania, and was senior foreign policy advisor to former Israeli President Reuven Rivlin. He has held the positions of media and public affairs consul in the Israeli consulate in New York; director of the European Parliament liaison department for the Israel delegation to the European Union (EU) in Brussels; and director of public affairs in the Israeli embassy in Madrid.

“The challenge for us here is huge, especially with the government’s stance and the consequences of its International Court of Justice appeal,” he said. “However, we are diplomats and as such, we are always open to dialogue. We want to resolve the misunderstandings in this country through dialogue.”

Saranga said he was unafraid of challenges. Looking back on his work in Spain, he said, “I arrived in Madrid one week before the Second Intifada began in Israel while public opinion in Spain was hostile toward Israel for many reasons. Interestingly while the left and right wing in Spain had little common ground, they agreed on the topic of Israel. So, while buses were exploding back home and I was worried about my family and my people, I still had to put Israel’s message across in Spain.”

While working in the EU in Brussels, he had to deal with “so many in the EU criticising Israel because

their constituencies were formed mainly of Muslim immigrants in Europe”, Saranga said. “No matter what they believed, if they bashed Israel, they got points with their constituencies.”

Though he said it might seem like Israeli diplomats have a rough ride wherever they go, it wasn’t all like that.

“Even in the most hostile of environments, we find so many friends and supporters. As diplomats, we have open doors to us everywhere. It doesn’t mean that everyone agrees with our political stand, but they see the work we do in security, agriculture, water management, technology, and science and recognise that it’s in their interest to have a good relationship with us.”

Saranga said he recognised that most of the media focused on negative coverage of Israel, but behind

the scenes, there was always good diplomatic relations and dialogue. Because of this, he said, he tended to focus on social media platforms as there, “you don’t need intermediation, you can have direct communication. You can communicate with different communities and find ways of making them see Israel’s relevance to them.”

As someone who has dealt with Israel’s digital

presence at the coalface, Saranga admits that “there’s hostility towards Israel all over the world. You can’t be surprised at that, with just 15 million Jews in the world, and 1.9 billion Muslims.

“The way to deal with it isn’t to try and convince the whole world, there’s no point. I wish we could, but we can’t. We need to bring our message to the people who shape the messages and who haven’t bought into the anti-Israel bias.

“If someone is already against Israel, no message of mine will change that, but if someone wants to know more about the country, then we can make sure they have access to more information.

“I know people might not understand why or agree with me about ignoring hate media, but how many fights like this have you won? None. Exactly, so let it go. Don’t fight it. Concentrate on things that we can change or have an impact on rather than something we have no chance of changing.”

Saranga said Israel’s platforms in Persian and Arabic were very strong. “More than 90% of the followers of our Persian language – the language spoken in Iran – Instagram come from Iran, and they have positive sentiments towards Israel,” he said. “This amounts to millions of Iranians who are following us because they want to hear our message.”

Since his arrival, Saranga has had back-to-back meetings in Cape Town and Johannesburg, and said it would take him a while to come up with different ways to do things and build bridges in South Africa. “I’m still in the process of learning the landscape. How serious would you take what I have to say now after just two weeks?”

But he has been learning since he arrived. “If you want to understand a society and country, you must learn the different aspects of it, its past and culture,” he said. “For me, a first-time visitor to South Africa, it felt important to go to Soweto.

“It wasn’t easy being at the Hector Pieterse Museum and to hear to the stories, but after meeting Hector’s sister, Antoinette, I felt so optimistic.

She spoke about reconciliation with no anger in her voice. It was an eye opener also learning about the many Jews who fought against apartheid.”

Saranga said it showed how barriers could be broken and bridges built or mended, which gave him hope for relations between South Africa and Israel.

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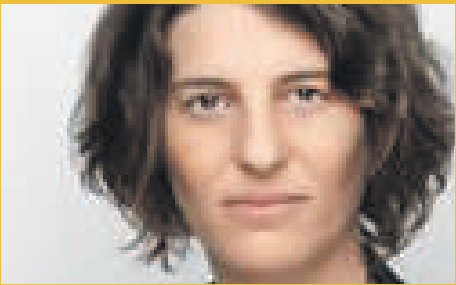
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CAPE TOWN

Dreyfus honoured, but great-granddaughter ponders what’s changed

PAULA SLIER

Nearly 120 years after Alfred Dreyfus was exonerated by France’s highest court, the French government has officially etched his vindication into national memory. This past weekend, French President Emmanuel Macron declared 12 July, the day in 1906 when Dreyfus’s name was finally cleared, a National Day of Commemoration. It’s intended, Macron said, to honour “the victory of justice and truth over antisemitism”.

It’s a significant move in a country where Dreyfus’s story still runs deep. In 1894, the young Jewish army captain was falsely accused of treason and sentenced to life on Devil’s Island. His conviction was built on forged evidence, and driven by antisemitic hysteria. It shattered his life, and tore France in two.

To understand what this moment means on a personal level, I spoke to Yaël Perl Ruiz, Dreyfus’s great-granddaughter who, like much of the family, still lives in France.

“My mother gave me Dreyfus’s diary to read when I was around 11,” she told me. “It’s called *Five*

Years of My Life. I was shocked by what could be done to someone purely because of their religion. When I finished it, she said, “That was your great-grandfather.”

Dreyfus and his wife, Lucie, had two children – Pierre and Jeanne. Jeanne was Yaël’s grandmother, and her daughter, Simone, Yaël’s mother, knew Dreyfus well. “She was 18 when he died in 1935,” Yaël recalls. “She loved him very much.



She said he didn’t talk much, but he was always affectionate with his grandchildren.”

There were other memories too. “He had nightmares. He would

scream in the night. He was always in his thoughts because he suffered a lot and his career was broken. He spent years proving his innocence. We were raised with that weight. My mother would always say, ‘After what he endured, we have no right to complain about small things.’ We had to be strong.”

Yaël admits that she knew about the planned commemoration in advance. “I met the president’s advisor at the Élysée Palace, but I had to keep it secret until Macron made the announcement himself.”

This year, the date 12 July also marks the 90th anniversary of Dreyfus’s death. Yaël hopes the new national day will become more than just a gesture. “It should honour his fight for truth – the stoicism, the dignity he maintained in the face of humiliation. And it should remember those who stood by him, especially the writer, Émile

Zola. I believe Zola paid with his life.”

Zola openly accused the French military and government of knowingly convicting an innocent man because of antisemitism. He named high-ranking officials, and exposed the fabrication of evidence on the front page of the newspaper, *L’Aurore*, a move that caused a national uproar and made him both a hero and a target.

Yaël isn’t blind to the political motives of the move. “The Dreyfus Affair has always been sensitive in France. The timing isn’t random. Antisemitism is rising. The Jewish community here – myself included – feel let down by Macron’s statements after 7 October 2023. Many of us find them incomprehensible. This commemoration is his way of trying to repair some of that damage.”

Yaël doesn’t pretend that the nature of hatred is the same. “Today’s antisemitism doesn’t look like it did back then. Now it comes from the far-left, dressed up as anti-Zionism. And from radical Islamists, who have made their way into schools, universities, even Parliament. And with social media, hate speech spreads in seconds.”

But though she may not carry the Dreyfus surname – her father was from Transylvania – the legacy has shaped her all the same. “Being his descendant meant having responsibilities. I’ve always felt I had to be worthy of him. Courageous. And I’ve worked hard to pass on the story. I’m not an educator, but I’ve run programmes for years, especially for students. I’ve always felt that was part of my duty.”

Yaël’s proud of that, but also protective. “These days, you hear people comparing themselves to Dreyfus – people accused of corruption, of rape – and it makes me furious. It’s not the same. Dreyfus was innocent. What happened to him was a deliberate, institutional, nationalist injustice. The comparison is insulting.”

Has the world learned from the Dreyfus Affair?

She pauses. “I don’t know. Antisemitism and racism are still alive, just wearing different masks. Truth is still manipulated. Governments still hide behind lies to protect themselves. So yes, we remember Dreyfus. But have we truly learned from what was done to him? I’m not sure we have.”

Athlete brings hostages to the fore in CT

GILANA LAB

South African-Israeli triathlete Susan Shaff refused to be dissuaded from running the Cape Town Festival of Running on 13 July while wearing a T-shirt bearing “Bring Them Home” and a photo of her friend’s son killed on 7 October 2023.

Shaff always competes with this T-shirt, which also features a yellow ribbon on the back, and she was clear this race would be no different.

“People told me not to wear my usual Magen David with his photo [Shoam Ben Harush] on my T-shirt,” Shaff told the *SA Jewish Report*. “They said it might cause problems, but I wasn’t going to hide who I am. I wore his face on the front with, ‘Your smile will live on forever’ written across the T-shirt, and added a ribbon on the back saying, ‘Bring Them Home’ to raise awareness of the hostages still being held.”

Shaff grew up in Cape Town, and comes back often with her friend, Martine Ben Harush, to visit Ben Harush’s mother. She noticed that things had changed in Cape Town since the start of the Israel-Gaza war, with more anti-Israel sentiment expressed publicly. Her loved ones were worried for her safety, and suggested against making a scene about Israel.

“I’m not someone who hides my identity,” Shaff said. “I also wanted to prove to those who told me not to do it that fear doesn’t always lead to backlash, and sometimes it’s worth standing up. I wasn’t trying to provoke anyone. What I did felt deeply humanitarian.

“At the start, I felt exposed,” Shaff said, “like I was the only one not hiding. People stared. One man glared. But I was determined. This is how I always run. I got a few sniggers, but also many thumbs up. Near the end, I passed a man with a Palestinian flag, made sure he saw the ribbon, and kept running, it gave me an extra push. I finished proud, hopeful, and surrounded by friends. It was an incredible experience.”

Shaff said she has had a passion for running since the age of 12. “It has always been part of my life. I always wanted to expand it and cycle and do triathlons and things like that. But I never felt that I was good enough or that I could do it.”

However, when her best friend’s son, Shoam, was murdered along with 1 200 other Israelis on 7 October, she said the course of her life, like many others in Israel, changed.

Shoam was shot in the jaw following the unprovoked attack by Hamas terrorists, who infiltrated Kibbutz Kerem Shalom near the Gaza Strip where he was stationed. He died three weeks later



from a fatal head wound after putting up a mammoth battle in the Hadassah Ein Kerem Hospital in Jerusalem.

“At first, I just stayed home. I was helping my friend and was in a really bad space. One day, I decided to channel all that sorrow into something healthier. I realised that if we don’t go after our dreams, then what’s the point? So, I went for it. I started triathlons. I could barely swim. But once I made up my mind, I joined a serious training group. We train hard, sometimes twice a day. Since then, I’ve completed two sprint triathlons and run three half marathons, things I never thought I could do. Now I’m training for the Ironman in Israel this January. It’s intense, and something I never imagined I’d attempt.”

For Shaff, running offers a sense of relief and empowerment after everything she has dealt with as an Israeli citizen over the past few years.

“A lot of people I know have channelled things in positive ways. For me, training helps release the frustration and sorrow. It’s a way to cope and feel in control of your pain and your strength. Sometimes you don’t feel strong. When you’re sitting in the *mamad* [bomb shelter] and hearing bombs around you, you feel vulnerable. But then you get on your bike, ride 80km or 90km, or swim, and it gives you back your power. It’s been deeply therapeutic.

“Whenever I run, especially something big like a half marathon, which is a challenge for me with my knees, I do it in Shoam’s name. He was my best friend’s son, an inspiring, beautiful young man with so much to give. He was deeply loved, and we’re part of a group that keeps his memory alive. Thinking of him while I run gives me strength.”

Shaff believes that having him in her thoughts helps her to run faster and gives her passion for running a whole new purpose. “We must never let those who want to hurt us bring us down. We are stronger and prouder than that,” she said.

“People need to understand that we can’t stay silent or hide who we are. We have to stand up for what’s right. You can’t keep civilians in cages and take hostages, and expect the world to be okay with it. If others accept it, we have to be the ones who say that it’s not okay. I felt like I was running for the hostages, giving them a voice, showing their plight. I believe in that deeply.”

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Uncovering our story in the SAJBD archives

The South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) is on a journey to rehouse, revitalise, and reimagine

ABOVE BOARD
Karen Milner



our archives. An often unknown and overlooked entity, the archive is a treasure trove that holds more than 180 years of our community’s vibrant history. Internationally renowned, it’s frequented by researchers from institutions like Yad Vashem, universities, and think tanks, who visit regularly and have even described it as among the most accessible in the world.

The task of relocating our archives has become a journey of rediscovery. As we carefully comb through the collection, we uncover gems that speak to the soul of our community. Each file, each photograph, each meticulous minute book or poster pulls us into a story, sometimes personal, always communal. For me, the Yiddish Theatre documents resonate, echoing the passion of my grandparents, who found joy and identity in its vibrant performances.

The stories within these archives are as diverse as our community itself. Among the treasures is a certificate of gratitude from the Russian Massacre Orphans Fund of the early 1910s, a priceless document that tells not only of our community, but the situation of our people at that moment in time.

There are also so many examples of organisations of various purposes and constructs that formed the backbone of Jewish life throughout the country. A clear trend is in women’s and Zionist organisations, which were ubiquitous throughout the country and are thus so well represented in our archives.

A particularly delightful find is a certificate issued by the Hebrew Order of David to “The Devoted Women of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies”. It turns out that even in the 1970s, there was a club of what our National Director Wendy Kahn calls the “broad’s at the Board!” Photographs detail just how few women were active at the Board at the turn of the past century, and while our national chairperson, the chairpersons of the three national regions, and our national director are all now women, so many of the issues they dealt with in the past are echoed

today.

As an example, there is a 1951 letter from the Department of Interior of the Union of South Africa designating the Reverend Mordecai Berdin as a “Marriage officer to solemnise marriages according to Christian rites within the Union of South Africa!” In fact, we also house some of the very first marriage licences granted to Jews in the country from 1893.

Yet, not all discoveries are heartwarming. Among the papers are stark reminders of the hostility our community once faced: a 1940s press release warning of “thousands of Jews pouring into our country”, and right-wing newspapers brimming with antisemitic vitriol. These documents jolt us, but they also provide context for our progress.

Our archives are a living entity, continuously growing with contemporary clippings, stories, and Jewish newspapers. But the digital age poses new challenges. Where once we recorded meetings on vinyl, tape, or microfilm – all of which we find in abundance – today’s debates unfold on social media and WhatsApp. How do we capture these fleeting digital footprints for future generations? This is a question we are actively exploring, ensuring that the stories of today are as accessible to our descendants as the records of 180 years ago are to us.

In coming weeks, we will be putting out a call for volunteers to assist with this meaningful endeavour. This is more than a project, it’s an opportunity to connect with our past, to touch the documents that shaped our identity, and to ensure that our legacy endures. I invite our community to step into this journey with us, to uncover the stories that define us, and to help us tell them anew. Together, we will ensure that the SAJBD archives remain a beacon of memory, resilience, and hope for generations to come.

• 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



THE FUTURE IS US

Celebrating Talent, Legacy and Leadership

On Saturday, 26 July 2025, Afrika Tikkun will host its 19th Annual Talent Day at the Wanderers Stadium in Johannesburg, an electrifying celebration of youth empowerment, creativity and the enduring power of legacy. More than 3,500 young people, from across our Centres of Excellence in underserved townships, will take centre stage to express their hopes and dreams through performance, sport, poetry, visual arts and innovation.

This year's theme, ***"The Future Is Us: Imagining Tomorrow, Creating Today"***, is more than a slogan – it is a call to action. It speaks to the belief long championed by Afrika Tikkun's late Chief Patron, President Nelson Mandela, that the holistic development of young people is the cornerstone of a thriving society.

"What counts in life is not the mere fact that we have lived. It is what difference we have made to the lives of others." – Nelson Mandela

The powerful partnership between Nelson Mandela and the late Bertie Lubner, a giant in both business and philanthropy, laid the foundation for what Afrika Tikkun has become today: a beacon of hope, opportunity and social change. Bertie Lubner, a proud member of the South African Jewish community, was not only a close friend and confidante of Madiba, but also a passionate humanitarian who co-founded Afrika Tikkun in response to the call for national healing and youth upliftment in post-apartheid South Africa.

Their shared dream was clear: to ensure every child, regardless of background, is given the tools and support to journey from "Cradle to Career."

Today, Afrika Tikkun continues to carry that vision forward through its wraparound child and youth development model. From early childhood development to job placement and entrepreneurship, the organisation works tirelessly in communities like Orange Farm, Diepsloot, Alexandra and Cape Town to break the cycle of poverty and unemployment. Talent Day is more than a showcase. It's an affirmation that talent, when nurtured, becomes power. When young people are seen, heard, and given a stage, they respond with brilliance.

As we gather at Wanderers Stadium, we honour the legacy of those who believed in the possibility of a better South Africa. We honour a friendship between two great leaders – Mandela and Lubner – whose vision for the country was rooted in compassion, equity and action.

Support our mission: Help us empower the next generation and donate today.

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Don't worry, be happy

I apologise for stating the obvious, but I'll say it anyway: it's okay to be happy. In fact, I'll go one step further; being miserable doesn't make you a better person.

Last weekend, United States Vice-President JD Vance took his family to Disneyland. By all accounts, they had a lovely time. The sun was shining, the lines were long, and the churros overpriced, exactly as they should be.

But when California Governor Gavin Newsom caught wind of it, he jumped onto X – Twitter, for those still pretending it isn't – and posted this gem: "Hope you enjoy your family time, @JDVance. The families you're tearing apart certainly won't."

According to Newsom, Vance, his wife, and his children had no right to enjoy themselves. Not while there were policy disagreements. Not while injustice existed. Not while anything, anywhere, was less than perfect.

Apparently, happiness is now a moral crime. A selfish indulgence. A political offence.

Sadness and tragedy are all around us, that's true. But we are complex,

magnificent creatures. Capable of holding sorrow in one hand and joy in the other. We can care deeply about suffering while still laughing, dancing, and booking that weekend away.

And yet, somehow, we've arrived at a place where happiness is treated like a betrayal. A luxury item. A weakness.



On 4 July, I interviewed two Americans, one a Republican, one a Democrat. The Republican spoke of freedom and pride. The Democrat spoke of raids by United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement,

and the collapse of democracy. One saw the day as a celebration. The other saw it as a national funeral with fireworks.

I imagine the Republican had a decent barbecue. The Democrat ... probably journalled sadly near a compost bin.

This isn't about America. I use their example because it's far enough away to observe with a little distance, but let's be honest, we do the same thing here.

We've developed a strange tendency to wear guilt like a badge of honour. We've become addicted to outrage, to doom, to our own grim sense of virtue. If something terrible is happening anywhere in the world, we dim our own lights and cancel our joy, all while basking in the glow of our self-righteous gloom.

But here's the thing: joy isn't a betrayal. It's an act of resistance. And it's necessary. It doesn't mean you're ignoring suffering, it means you're refusing to be swallowed by it.

If you want a masterclass in this, look to the Israelis. We saw them singing in bomb shelters while Iranian missiles flew overhead. Anyone who's ever been to a

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



wedding in Israel knows that there's an unspoken agreement: "We will celebrate the hell out of today." After 7 October 2023, when everything changed and grief flooded the country, they said, "We will dance again."

And they have. We are capable of outrage and empathy, and still enjoying a braai. We can grieve and still laugh. We can be glued to the news, and still go to the theatre. We can hold multiple truths at once. That's the beauty of being human.

Joy doesn't mean indifference. It means we're still alive.

So take the photo. Laugh at the African National Congress and the Republicans and Democrats. Laugh with them. Eat the dessert. Book the holiday. Say yes to the concert. And if anyone wants to shame you for smiling, offer them a churro, and move along.

Because guilt has never healed a broken world. But joy? Joy just might.

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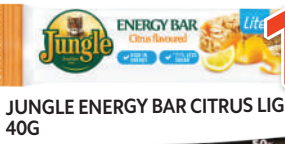
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