



south african

# Jewish Report

■ Volume 28 - Number 33 ■ 11 September 2025 ■ 18 Elul 5785

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# Message from the Chev Group CEO



## Dear Friends

At this time of year, I am reminded of a beautiful lesson about the difference between a mirror and a window.

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In an age where our attention so often rests on glowing screens, we need only lift our eyes to the window to notice the humanity of those around us.

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This Rosh Hashana, we ask Hashem for His blessings, both material and spiritual. We pray for peace in our Holy Land, and for health, prosperity, and joy - for those in the mirror, and for those beyond it.

Wishing you and your families a Shana Tova u'Metuka,

### **Saul Tomson**

Chief Executive Officer

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# south african Jewish Report

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## SA olah narrowly escapes bus attack

NICOLA MILTZ

**F**ormer King David Primary School Linksfield teacher, Dina Barnett, found herself at the centre of the horror at Jerusalem's Ramot Junction on Monday, 8 September, when two terrorists opened fire from a bus shortly after 10:00, killing six and wounding many.

A snap decision saved Barnett's life at this fateful junction on the northern outskirts of Jerusalem which intersects a major road that leads to the city centre and Tel Aviv as well as local neighbourhoods. It's a busy thoroughfare, filled with ordinary Israelis going about their daily business.

That morning, Barnett left home in Ramot, taking a bus to the Ramot Junction, where she boarded Bus 62, not her usual bus. Her regular bus hadn't arrived on time, and she needed to reach Jerusalem for a *shiur*. Though she normally avoids the crowded junction and packed buses, mindful of past terrorist attacks on both sides of the road, she braved the trip.

She took her seat on the bus, which was still stationary. The driver, she understood,

had stepped out for a bit. Speaking to a group of seminary girls on board, she realised the driver wasn't coming back soon enough. So she decided to get off and try another bus.

Seconds later, reports suggest that two Palestinian gunmen in their early 20s, later identified as Mohammed Bassam Taha, 21, from Qatanna, and Mutuanna Naji Omar,

pressing her face to the rough stone as a barrage of bullets cracked through the air above and around her. People screamed, scattering in panic. Some dived behind barriers and stationary cars. Others ran blindly into traffic, desperate to escape.

"It's an open miracle I wasn't hit," she told the *SA Jewish Report* on Tuesday, 9 September, still trembling as she recalled



Dina Barnett



Photo: Screenshot

At Jerusalem's Ramot Junction shortly after one of the deadliest terrorist attack in the past few years

20, from al-Qoubeiba, climbed aboard the same bus Dina had just left. Armed with makeshift Carlo-style submachine guns, they opened fire at close range.

The ordinary Monday morning post rush hour dissolved into mayhem and terror.

Dina dropped flat on the pavement,

what happened. "The bullets must have flown right over my head.

"My first instinct was to call my husband, but my hands were shaking so much, I couldn't even find his number. Then I thought, why would I tell him? He would get such a fright. What could he do? I just

## &gt;&gt; Continued from 1a

lay there, face down, frozen, waiting for it to end. I didn't dare look up."

When the gunfire finally stopped, the devastation at this junction was laid bare.

Injured victims lay sprawled across the street. To her left, a victim lay in pain. To her right, another lay bleeding. Behind her, two more wounded. One woman lay motionless. Another, inconsolable, ran across the street in hysteria, and was nearly run down by traffic.

Barnett, a mother of six whose husband, Rafi, also once taught at King David Linksfield, instinctively moved to help. "One woman told me she'd been shot. I said, 'Let me check.' When she lifted her skirt, I could see she had been shot in the thigh. By then paramedics were arriving. Together with a medic, we lifted her into an ambulance."

Among the six killed were Rabbi Levi Yitzhak Pash, 57; Rabbi Yosef David, 43; Yisrael Matzner, 28; Rabbi Mordechai Steintzeg, 79; and 25-year-old Yaakov Pinto, a new immigrant from Spain. Sixty-year-old Sarah Mendelsohn was also killed. More than 20 others were wounded, some critically. First responders described desperate scenes of shattered glass, pools of blood, and panicked cries.

The attack ended when an off-duty squad commander from the Israel Defense Forces' new Hasmonean Brigade, an ultra-Orthodox unit, together with a nearby armed civilian, shot and killed both attackers before they could inflict more carnage. Israeli forces later arrested a suspected accomplice in East Jerusalem, and carried out raids in the terrorists' home villages.

Hamas praised the deadly attack, calling it a "heroic operation".

For Barnett, the images remain seared into her memory: the shouts, the bullets,

the stillness of the wounded. Yet she cannot shake her sense of divine providence.

"Afterwards you realise how easily you could have been among the dead. It's an open miracle."

For the residents of Ramot, the attack cut way too close.

Roy Scher, the chairperson of Telfed Jerusalem's regional committee, has lived in Ramot for more than three decades.

He made aliya from South Africa in 1979, and raised his family in the sprawling neighbourhood. On Monday, Scher knew it could just as easily have been him or his loved ones on that bus.

"My 93-year-old mother uses that bus to go to the *shuk*. My son was supposed to be on it that morning, but turned back because the traffic was too heavy and decided to work from home instead. It could have been any of us. The people killed could easily have been people I daven next to in *shul*."

Ramot is Jerusalem's largest neighbourhood, home to about 60 000 residents. Its population is predominantly religious, with a majority Haredi community, and its families come from across the globe – South Africa, France, the United States, the United Kingdom, Russia, and dozens of other countries.

"Everyone here uses Bus 62. At peak hour, the junction is packed – schoolchildren, the elderly, people running errands," Scher said. "It could have been anyone."

Yet even in grief, he points out Israel's resilience.

"The past two years have been tough, but Israelis get on with life. Restaurants are full, businesses are open, innovation continues, and the economy is strong. Incidents like this shock us, we do not forget, but we move on. And in heart breaking moments like this, all divisions fade away. There's unity, solidarity, and a real sense of caring for one another. That's what's so special about Israel."

In the immediate aftermath of the attack, messages of concern poured in from around the world. Scher recalls being at his desk when the first call came from a friend in Ra'anana, asking if he and his family were safe. Within minutes, WhatsApp messages began streaming in. "News travels fast, but so does the care. Israelis pull together. That's our strength," he said.

Israeli leaders condemned the attack in the strongest terms. Emergency services described the attack as one

of the most devastating incidents since 7 October 2023.

"Tomorrow, buses will once again stop at Ramot Junction. Children will climb aboard with schoolbags, pensioners will head to the market, workers will squeeze into crowded seats. Life will continue, as it always does in Jerusalem. The grief of loss won't disappear, but alongside it runs an unyielding determination: to live, endure, and to hope," Scher said.



Roy Scher, chairperson of Telfed Jerusalem, who also lives in Ramot

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# Terror attack goes to head and heart

Torah Thought



**Rabbi Dovid Wineberg**  
- chairperson of  
**Jewish International  
School Cape Town**

"I proclaim before G-d that I have arrived in the land which G-d swore to our ancestors to give it to us." Parshat Ki Tavo

Last week, my daughter went to Israel for a gap year of Torah study. Today, she was minutes from a terror attack.

"Dearest, I felt unprepared to speak to you when you called about today's attack, and I wasn't very helpful in easing your anxiety. I'm sorry.

"I hesitated because there are two approaches – head and heart. I wasn't sure which was the right response when you called. Now I can share them both.

"Israel is a safe country. Children walk to school or take the bus alone. They play in the streets late into the night. Women can walk freely in Jerusalem at night.

No-one has electric fences or anything much more than a lock on their front door.

"Every country has its disasters, some natural, other man made; some have both. Israel doesn't have tornadoes or hurricanes. Its crime rate is relatively low. What it does have are too many car accidents and – not comparing them – anti Jews who want to hurt and terrorise us. While these painful attacks are shocking and often feel personal, they are extremely rare and statistically don't change Israel's safety record much.

"I want to repeat, terror attacks are extremely rare, *boruch Hashem*. They hurt us deeply, and the whole of Israel will cry for the loss of these holy people who were just murdered *al kiddush Hashem* (only because

they were Jewish).

"Israelis are sadly used to this fact of life, and have developed their own coping systems. They return to normal life as soon as possible. The attack area is cleared asap, and returns to a normal bus stop. People insist on going about their planned day and not letting this hate affect them more than necessary. Seventeen years ago, I walked into an attack scene about a minute after it happened, on King David Street in Yerushalayim. It takes unusual strength to clean the streets and move forward, but we Jews are truly resilient.

"That's the head answer. My heart is screaming that this is our land, promised to us by Hashem. We will thrive in it as *yidden*, finding Hashem there in day to day living; feeling the kedusha of its land; seeing Hashem in its divine providence.

"The Gemoro (Brochos 5) comments that *eretz Yisrael* is acquired through suffering; nothing good comes easy, and Israel has a lot of harsh realities, including weather, drought, and neighbours. To live in *eretz Yisrael* is a privilege, but one that is earned. We have to remember, as the Rebbe often reminded us, that Hashem has His "eyes upon the land constantly" (Devarim 11:12); leading the Rebbe to assure us regularly that *eretz Yisrael* is "one of the safest places in the world" and that "Hashem is our guardian who neither slumbers nor sleeps." (Tehillim 121).

"Ain't no depraved, inhumane terrorist going to tell us where to be and besides, we place our trust in Hashem, while of course acting responsibly and listening to safety instructions, and live our life in Israel joyfully.

"Holy souls have left this world today, and left a terrible void in so many hearts. Spend an extra five minutes today learning Torah and being extra kind, honouring their *neshomas*, then do 'like in Rome', and go about your day resolutely. Until very soon, we'll merit Hashem's promise that 'you will live securely in your land.'

With so much love, Tatty

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# Jewish Achiever Awards a springboard for action

OPINION

MICHAEL KRANSORFF



When the Jewish National Fund South Africa (JNF SA) was announced as the winner of the Mann Made Community Service Award at last year's Jewish Achiever Awards, I felt a surge of pride. It wasn't just pride in a personal accomplishment, but in what the award represented: recognition of the commitment of our team, our donors, our partners, and in fact our whole community to stand with Israel during one of the most difficult periods in recent memory.

For JNF SA, the award came at a critical juncture. In the wake of 7 October 2023, we had to confront the question of how South African Jewry, geographically distant yet emotionally bound to Israel, could respond in a way that was meaningful.

We mobilised quickly, relocating traumatised children from southern Israel to our field centre in the South African Forest in the Galilee; organising solidarity missions to Israel; and, in a remarkable partnership with The Base community, bringing those most affected by the horrors

of 7 October to South Africa for respite and healing. These efforts allowed us to transform paralysing despair into collective action. I'll never forget the tears of returned hostage Sapir Cohen as she drove from OR Tambo International Airport into Glenhazel past hundreds of yellow ribbons tied to trees by our community, a small gesture that told her she and the remaining hostages weren't alone.

The real power of receiving this award became clear in the months that followed. Winning the award provided more than validation for this work. It became a springboard for expanded impact. The recognition opened doors, created visibility, and gave the JNF the momentum to do more. Since then, we have been able to raise funds to upgrade numerous public bomb shelters in Israel during the recent war with Iran; host additional trips for former hostages as part of the JNF/Base Hostage Healing Programme; and launch our young adults JNFutures division with its first volunteering mission currently in Israel. Each of these initiatives was motivated, in

part, by the confidence and support that the award generated.

The Jewish Achiever Awards plays a vital role in the life of our community. It celebrates excellence, and shines a spotlight on Jewish contributions across business, the professions, the arts, and community service. At a time when negativity dominates the headlines, these awards remind us that Jewish life in South Africa is vibrant, creative, and engaged.

The awards also inspire. For the next generation especially, the awards offer role models who demonstrate that Jewish values and professional success aren't just compatible, but mutually reinforcing.

And most importantly, at this moment, they unify. Sitting in that room with more than a thousand members of our community, I felt a profound sense of belonging.

We may differ in age, religious observance, and professional backgrounds, but we are bound by a shared heritage and a common responsibility to contribute to Jewish and South African society.

The Jewish Achiever Awards reminds us that even in our darkest hours, the South African Jewish community's capacity for innovation, renewal, and impact remains unstoppable, and that recognition can itself be a catalyst for even greater action.

• Michael Kransdorff is the chairperson of JNF South Africa.



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\*Please note that Israel time is 1 hour ahead

# Comedian under attack ‘purely for being Jewish’

LEE TANKLE

Jewish stand-up comedian Nik Rabinowitz was shocked to see himself on the front page of his weekend newspaper, lambasted for views he has never expressed, under the headline, “Parents blast ‘pro-Zionist’ comedian.”

“It’s crude and unfair to ascribe a political view to someone who happens to be Jewish,” said Milton Shain, emeritus professor of historical studies at the University of Cape Town and an expert on antisemitism.

Daniel Bloch, the executive director of the Cape South African Jewish Board of Deputies (Cape SAJBD), said, “Yet again, we see how

cannot be tolerated.”

Rabinowitz was targeted in a front-page article in the *Weekend Argus*, which told of a small group of parents who protested his performance at a Rondebosch Boys’ High School fundraiser because he was “pro-Zionist”, even though Rabinowitz has never said anything about his views on Israel.

A small group of parents approached the headmaster of Rondebosch Boys’ High and objected to his presence at the comedy evening fundraiser hosted by the school’s rowing club because of what they insisted was a Zionist stance, even though the closest Rabinowitz has come to any views on Israel is simply being Jewish.

The parents pointed to the fact that Rabinowitz appeared on

the Facebook page of the South African Zionist Federation (SAZF). However, in the video reposted by the SAZF Cape Council in October 2022, Rabinowitz is talking about “semigration”, and why people should visit the Move Down to Cape Town expo. The parents also objected to his performance because they claimed he had once performed in Israel.

Rondebosch Boys’ High said that after the parents came to them with their



Protesters outside Rondebosch Boys’ High School

anti-Israel activists are targeting a member of the Jewish community for failing to conform to their agenda.

“Mr Rabinowitz is being singled out for his alleged ‘silence’ on the war between Israel and Hamas – a clear demonstration that, in the eyes of these activists, unless you endorse their narrative, you are cast as the enemy,” said Bloch “This isn’t new. We have repeatedly seen organisations scrutinise Jews to determine whether they are ‘pro-Israel’ or ‘Zionists’. Such behaviour is antisemitic, discriminatory, and

complaints, the school did its own research into these claims, and found no evidence for Rabinowitz supporting genocide or Israel as he has never publicly supported the Israel Defense Forces or the government of Israel.

So, despite the parents’ protest, the event went ahead as planned on 30 August. Parents and the organisation Mothers4Gaza, associated with Gift of the Givers, staged a demonstration outside the school during the show.

Continued on 3b>>

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>> Continued from 3a

Protesters held posters showing starving children stating, “Israel is doing this,” with many others holding signs stating, “Stop the Genocide!” Other signs read, “No haha for a Holocaust”; “While U laugh children starve”; and “Genocide is no joke ... Old Clown.”

An Instagram post covering the protest claimed that the demonstrators were concerned about Rabinowitz’s previous performances in Israel and his silence on the matter, which they interpreted as a form of support.

The caption said, “Today, as Israel carries out mass killings, starvation, and displacement of Palestinians, his silence on these war crimes is deafening. We ask directly: does he condemn Israel’s genocide, or does his silence mean consent? Artists have a platform and a responsibility. You cannot profit from our stages and audiences while ignoring the cries of children buried under rubble.”

Said independent political commentator Sara Gon, “By protesting Rabinowitz, the protesters are essentially saying that being Jewish and part of the Jewish community makes Rabinowitz complicit in whatever they allege. It’s a fundamentally racist thing to do.

“Rabinowitz isn’t responsible for what’s happening in the conflict. What if one were to hold a member of the Chinese community responsible for the oppression of the Uyghurs by China; or the dreadful civil war in the Sudan, where an Arab militia is possibly committing a genocide on black Sudanese. It would be considered untenable. Rabinowitz’s appearance doesn’t justify applying a different set of principles,” she said.

Although Rabinowitz isn’t pursuing legal action at this point, Bloch said, “Our Constitution guarantees every South African, including Mr Rabinowitz, the right to practice their religion freely, without hatred, harassment, or discrimination. He should not have to “prove” or justify his Jewish identity to be respected. Nor should his ability to work in the profession he loves be undermined by ideological bullying.

“Nik Rabinowitz is being told to take a political stance or disassociate himself from a particular ideology,” said Shain. “Was any Muslim comedian held accountable for the actions of Bin Laden after 9/11? Are Chinese performers asked to state their position on the persecution of the Uyghurs? Such inconsistency can be explained only by simple Jew-hatred. In the actions of the Rondebosch anti-Rabinowitz lobby – seemingly a tiny minority – one is reminded of the McCarthyist era. It’s awful. My fear is



that it won’t go away in a hurry. Rabinowitz is being held responsible for something totally beyond his reach.”

Said Gon, “The protests were against Nik Rabinowitz simply because he is Jewish. The claim that the protest was for humanitarian reasons makes no sense. None of the broader issues have been proven. The provision of vast amounts of humanitarian aid into Gaza alone disproves the claims. It’s a war that everyone wants ended, except Hamas. Hamas holds the fate of the Gazan people in its hands.”

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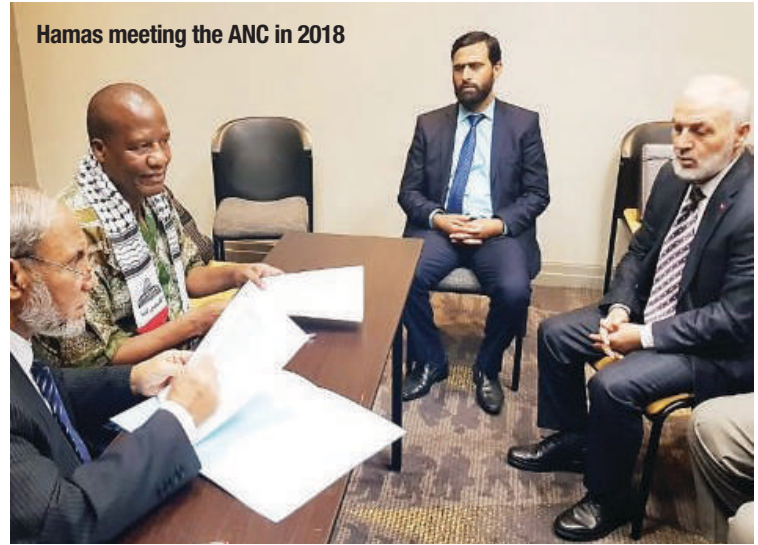
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# Will pro-Hamas-linked South Africans face US sanctions?

STEVEN GRUZD

If anyone thinks relations between Pretoria and Washington are at rock bottom, there may be new depths to plumb yet. On top of the withdrawal of aid; 30% tariffs; and the United States' dissatisfaction with South Africa's closeness to Russia, China, Iran, and Hamas, more scrutiny and possible punishment of South Africa is looming.

A conservative American think tank, the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD), has just published a report titled *Hiding in Plain Sight: A Playbook for Combating Hamas in South Africa*. It details the extensive ties of the African National Congress (ANC) to Iran and purported links to Hamas against several South Africans. It calls for sanctions against Emad Saber, Hamas's representative in South Africa; the Al-Quds Foundation of South Africa; and activist cleric Ebrahim Gabriels. The FDD also calls for further investigation into the director of Gift of the Givers, Dr Imtiaz Sooliman; Mandla Mandela; and the Media Review Network. The FDD report calls for South Africa to designate Hamas a terrorist group, and



publicly distance itself from Tehran. But how credible is this report, and what influence does the FDD have on United States President Donald Trump's White House?

One of the report's coauthors, David May, told the *SA Jewish Report* that South Africa is trying to get off the greylist of the Financial Action Task Force, which has raised serious questions about money laundering and terrorist financing in the country. South Africa has been dubbed a "risky jurisdiction" for financial institutions. Said May, "The government's decision effectively to act as Hamas's lawyer on an international stage raised the country's profile. By not recognising Hamas as a terrorist group, Pretoria has allowed Hamas to operate freely, spreading propaganda and developing networks in South Africa.

"Ultimately, pressuring Pretoria to combat terrorist financing will benefit South Africa as a whole, including its Jewish community," May said. "And restricting the ability of the Hamas network in South Africa to operate will make South Africa's Jews safer" from growing Israel hatred, especially since 7 October 2023 and the ensuing war in Gaza.

"As the ANC leadership grows more unpopular, and as its rampant corruption sets back the country further, it will continue to lean on its pro-Palestinian advocacy as a distraction, and continue to grow closer to despotic, anti-Western powers," he said. "Unless there's a dramatic change in leadership in South Africa – or consequences for failed policies and failed leadership – expect US-South African relations to decline further. The deterioration in relations is a completely unforced error on the part of Pretoria." He said President Cyril Ramaphosa's visit to the White House had negligible impact.

"Pretoria has long hidden behind its excuse that it follows United Nations Security Council sanctions, which don't include Hamas. This paper-thin defence does nothing to address the various Hamas-linked groups

Continued on 4b>>

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## &gt;&gt; Continued from 4a

and individuals operating in South Africa,” May said. “Its actions in defence of Hamas encourage the terrorist group to immiserate Israelis and Palestinians alike.”

Former US diplomat and writer J Brooks Spector called the FDD report “sharply worded”. He noted that the FDD, founded nearly 25 years ago, has a record of strongly pro-Israel and anti-Iran positions, ardently opposing the nuclear deal negotiated with Iran during the Obama presidency.

How much clout does the FDD wield in Trump’s Washington? “As a group historically aligned to the neo-conservative wing – as opposed to the ‘Make America Great Again’ [MAGA] or America First parts of Republican thinking – it’s not entirely clear how closely the FDD is connected to the Trump presidency,” even with the administration’s backing of Israel’s government [for now],” Spector said.

In this new report, he said, “Hamas, and its connections to various South African figures, comes in for particularly harsh criticism. The report focuses on the way the South African government and various non-government individuals have allegedly become close to Hamas and allied bodies.” But he asks, “Should any level of engagement with Hamas serve as the only litmus test for improving relations with the US?”

While countries can choose their own friends, this may have a price tag. The FDD is proposing sanctions on individuals and the government as consequences of Pretoria’s closeness to Hamas, and hoping that South Africa will change its ways.

Other analysts were entirely dismissive of the FDD. John Stremblau, honorary professor of international relations at the University of the Witwatersrand, said, “In my harried opinion, taking the FDD report at face value is a ‘fool’s errand’. It’s pro-Zionist propaganda masquerading as a serious critique of Hamas. I wouldn’t [even] waste [my] time criticising the FDD report.”

Michael Walsh, a senior research consultant at the US-based Foreign Policy Research Institute, expressed concern that some claims made in the FDD report hadn’t been scrutinised enough. He noted that the claims against these individuals “have been circulating around Washington for some time” but are hard to verify solely based on open sources. Walsh took a different tack, recommending that the US government “be tasked with comprehensively determining whether those sorts of individuals and entities meet the criteria for US sanctions. The logic was that US agencies would almost

certainly have to verify all the truth claims made in the report in the process.

“To be clear,” Walsh said, “I’m not suggesting that the specific truth claims that are made in this report cannot be substantiated through empirical means. I’m simply saying that I believe that they need to be proven beyond a reasonable doubt before a think tank scholar recommends the imposition of US sanctions on particular individuals and entities. In some cases, I’m not sure that burden can be met solely on the basis of public knowledge. That warrants caution.”

Walsh notes that there have been several

problematic claims made recently about the ANC, South African government, and corporate links to Iran and the militias it backs. There have been instances of jumping to conclusions based on unproven allegations and half-truths.

“At this point,” Walsh said, “It’s incumbent on the independent media to invest the time and effort to analyse critically any new claims that are made about the nexus between the ANC, the South African government, and Hamas. Otherwise, it risks becoming nothing more than a loudspeaker amplifying dubious claims made by critics of the ANC and South African government.”

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# Random abuse exposes the racism Down Under



OPINION

VIC ALHADEFF

I was in Bondi – Sydney’s famous beachside suburb – waiting to drive into a parking-lot. A car was blocking the entrance. It was stationary, and the driver had abundant space in front of him. I rolled down my window and politely asked, “Could you move forward please?”

I could never have anticipated the reaction. “F-g South African Jew!” barked the driver. “You think you can come here and take over.” And again: “F-g South African Jew!”

I was taken aback, my mental equilibrium suddenly out of kilter. I found myself wondering, “Did that really happen?”

I have been on the frontline of human rights work in Australia for four decades, advocating for issues ranging from gay rights and reconciliation with the indigenous

Australians; to speaking out against Islamophobia; opposing all manner of bigotry as chairperson of Multicultural NSW; and combating anti-Jewish racism as chief executive of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies.

The latter expression of hate manifested in multiple ways, all insidious, yet invariably occurring within a context. A bizarre context, to be sure, mostly bound up with some conspiracy theory,

but context nevertheless. What shook me about the Bondi incident was that there was no context whatsoever. None. No road rage. No fiery exchange. Simply a random explosion of racist abuse.

I was about to say it came out of nowhere, but how accurate would that be? Did it come out of nowhere? Or has the climate in this country and indeed globally, changed?

I recently attended the Sydney Writers’ Festival, conducive to articulate presentations and respectful debate. And supposedly a



Anti-Israel protest on Bondi Beach, Sydney, this week

safe space. The session featured British barrister Philippe Sands, best known for *East West Street, on the origins of genocide and crimes against humanity*, and Michael Gawenda, a former editor of *The Age* whose book *My Life As A Jew* was published two years ago. Thoughtful discussion followed, after which a member of the audience brazenly informed the 400 people present that they and the speakers were missing “the elephant in the room” – the

Continued on 5b>>

## Visiting Jewish Cemeteries

It is customary to visit the graves of family before Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur

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>> Continued from 5a

“tentacles” of Australia’s Jewish lobby, which she asserted controls our society.

Such allegations are pernicious, and ignore the fact that lobbying is an integral facet of democracy. What shocked members of the audience was the extraordinary confidence with which she tossed out as fact the trope that Jewish Australians have tentacles and use them to nefariously shape society to their will.

And last weekend, we saw neo-Nazis marching on Australian streets.

So how did we get here? How did our country get to a place in which law-abiding Jewish Australians peacefully going about their lives encounter antisemitic abuse? Every single day. Where Jewish artists are cancelled, no plausible explanation offered. Invitations to perform withdrawn. Necklaces featuring the Star of David left in the drawer. Online harassment a constant. Casual conversations default to this or that untoward incident. Feelings of abandonment by long-time colleagues. Jewish identity frequently concealed in public places.

To be clear: the issue isn’t the conflict thousands of kilometres away, even though some brush the racism aside by pointing to the humanitarian crisis in Gaza; the issue is who we are as a nation – respect for diversity, denigration of minorities. It’s about the conduct that each of us is willing – or refuses – to accept. Most pertinently, it’s about the bizarre notion which holds Jewish Australians responsible for the tragic situation on the other side of the world.

Australian Human Rights Commissioner Lorraine Finlay drew attention in a compelling article to “quieter forms of antisemitism ... Jewish university students who no longer feel safe on campus; Jewish parents who have told their children not to say they are Jewish; Jewish school students advised not to wear their uniforms on public transport. How could this be happening in Australia? It is easy for these examples to go unnoticed. Yet for the Jewish community, it has an impact on every aspect of their lives. This isn’t something the Jewish community should be left to face alone.”

We have endured the most far-reaching outbreak of anti-Jewish racism in the history of this nation. While the recent focus has been on Iranian involvement in the attacks on a Sydney kosher outlet and Melbourne synagogue, the number of

antisemitic incidents in the past two years exceeds 2 000, according to the Executive Council of Australian Jewry.

We are at a defining moment in this country. Social cohesion is being tested like never before. Where is the nation which championed multiculturalism? When does the damage to civil liberties and the assault on human rights become so normalised as to be irreversible? Where are the voices of civil society demonstrating

courage and leadership and calling out anti-Jewish racism? The looming alternative, which confronts us all with unforeseen consequences, is a frightening new normal.

• *Vic Alhadeff OAM is the former chairperson of Multicultural NSW, and former chief executive of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies in Sydney, Australia.*

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# South African Jewish Report

## Jewish lives matter

Six people were brutally slaughtered by terrorists in Jerusalem this week, and more than 20 were wounded. I'm pointing this out here though the story is on our front page because, somehow, South African media missed this news.

It was simply ignored by most local media. I have no doubt ours is the only media house where this made the front page.

Two terrorists opened fire into a crowded passenger bus. And those passengers who survived were shocked beyond belief and are likely to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder for a long time. Most of us cannot imagine the horror of being on a bus when something so horrifying happens. It's fortunately beyond where our minds can naturally stretch.

But somehow, because this happened in Israel to Jews, it's ignored by most people. Somehow, for many, this is acceptable behaviour because it was Jews who were targeted, and in Israel. And Jews are said to be behind what many insist is a genocide in Gaza. So, according to the warped thinking, that means we deserve this. How sickening! What has happened to people's humanity?

It has become the status quo that if Jewish lives are harmed, nobody but Jews seem to care. Only, terrorism is not acceptable for anyone, anywhere. Murdering anyone is not acceptable, again, for anyone anywhere. It doesn't matter who they are. Every innocent life matters – here, in Israel, and in Gaza.

It just so happens that this edition of the *SA Jewish Report* is dated 11 September. Does that date bring back memories? On this day, 24 years ago, terrorists forced planes to fly into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York City, and another to fly into the Pentagon in Washington DC. Almost 3 000 innocent people were killed in these terrorist suicide attacks by Al-Qaeda.

Al-Qaeda and Hamas are both recognised as terrorist organisations, and while they may despise each other and have different strategies, they both want to obliterate Israel first before continuing their holy war. So, anyone who thinks that terrorist organisations like Hamas are for defending and helping Palestinians, have not only missed the point, they are simply wrong.

However, this attitude towards Jews and attacks on Jews fits into the worldwide growing antisemitism that our haters love to deny. And that means seeing Hamas as a legitimate Palestinian freedom fighting organisation, which is the furthest thing from the truth.

A perfect example of this type of antisemitism was used against outstanding stand-up comedian Nik Rabinowitz.

Rabinowitz doesn't get involved in politics, not here or anywhere. That's not his *shtick!* He is a comedian and happens to be Jewish. I make a point of going to watch him whenever I can because I think he is hilarious. He has no holy cows! However, I have never heard him even mention Israel, or any views about it.

But a group of parents at Rondebosch Boys' High School complained that they didn't want this "pro-Zionist" to perform at their school and then held a protest outside the school when the school went ahead with his show.

Bizarrely, these protesters couldn't find anything he might have said, written, or joked about that was "Zionist", so they picked on a video he made on "semigration" from Johannesburg to Cape Town, that happened to be shared by the South African Zionist Federation, as proof that he was tainted with Zionism. Really? So if someone who holds views I haven't even considered shares my posts, that makes me one of them? Really? How does that work? And they claimed that once upon a time, he had performed in Israel.

Well, blow me down, if we had to rule out every single comedian, actor, or muso who may have performed in Israel at some time in their lives, we would be ruling out a helluva lot of people. Does performing in Israel mean you are a Zionist? I wouldn't think so, but then these protesters looked really hard to find something against Rabinowitz. They were damn well determined to paint him not as a Zionist exactly, but as being "pro-Zionist", whatever that means.

Truth be told, it doesn't take a rocket scientist to see that this has nothing to do with Zionism, Israel, Gaza, or even genocide, and everything to do with out-and-out antisemitism.

Amazingly, though, being a Zionist, which most of us in this community are, has recently become a crime in the eyes of way too many people.

I know I have written about this time and again, but being a Zionist means simply the belief in the Jewish state and Jews' right to self-determination in their historic homeland. It does not mean that they necessarily support Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. It does not mean they support what the government of the day does. Much like any people, some may support them, and others may be vehemently against them. In Israel today, there is a large percentage of the population that certainly doesn't support Netanyahu and co, but they are still Zionists. While they may not approve of what the government does and are openly critical of it, they still want Israel to survive.

However, those who hate us Jews because we are Zionists don't ask how we feel about the government or what is happening in Gaza. Nope, we are all tarred with their antisemitic brush that intersperses the word "Zionist" with "Jew". Same, same in their heads! Same, same also in the heads of those who wanted to stop Rabinowitz.

The only Jewish people who are apparently acceptable to our haters are those who condemn Israel and us for supporting the Jewish state. They, for now, are lauded and put on a pedestal because they have turned against their brethren. Now, I understand that it may well be better for careers to lambast Israel and fellow Jews, but it's so shortsighted.

I have heard it often now that if you keep quiet as a Jew and don't proclaim your absolute fury about Israel, you, too, are seen as a Zionist – or simply a Jew – and will face the wrath of our haters.

It doesn't take much to look around the world and see that when it comes to antisemitism, those who turn on their own are still seen as Jews when push comes to shove. Only, by the time that happens, they will already have alienated their own families and community, and there will be no-one standing next to them when those they stood with turn against them.

This is a tough world we Jews are living in, but there's no doubt that we need to stand together and support one another at this time.

**Shabbat shalom!**

**Peta Krost**  
Editor



# The ICC ethics crisis behind Bibi's arrest warrant



OPINION

ANNE HERZBERG

On 5 September, Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu issued a video excoriating International Criminal Court (ICC) Prosecutor Karim Khan, claiming that Khan sought arrest warrants against him and former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant specifically in order to deflect from a sexual harassment scandal.

The astounding developments at the ICC leading up to Khan's application for the warrants certainly support Bibi's interpretation of events. In early May 2024, Khan and his staff engaged in intensive efforts with United States (US) and Israeli officials to arrange a delegation of ICC officials to travel to Israel to discuss the Gaza conflict, humanitarian aid, and what steps Israel was undertaking to investigate allegations of wrongdoing by its troops.

Despite grave US scepticism towards the court, the Biden administration, which was in power at the time, wanted to act as intermediary between Israel and the court. It feared that any rash moves by the prosecutor targeting Israel was not only dangerous, it could also jeopardise US assistance to the court in its proceedings against Putin and other Russian officials for the war in Ukraine.

The US has long opposed ICC proceedings against Israel on principle. First, Israel, like the US, is not a member of the court and therefore the ICC has no jurisdiction over either country short of a Security Council resolution authorising it. Second, the ICC improperly decided to characterise the Palestinian Authority as a "state", even though it isn't, in order to extend its jurisdiction over Israeli officials in clear violation of the ICC's governing Rome Statute. Third, potential ICC interference in the Gaza War could not only directly undermine US efforts to obtain the release of the hostages and a ceasefire with Hamas, but also irreparably damage the US-led Middle East peace process.

Khan, however, chose to flout these concerns. Going behind the backs of American and Israeli officials, Khan ordered his staff to cancel their planned trip to Israel. At the same time, he appeared on CNN announcing to Christiane Amanpour that he had applied for arrest warrants against Bibi and Gallant. The move was a complete shock that not only angered Israeli officials, but also then-US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, and many US senators who publicly stated that they felt betrayed by Khan.

It doesn't make sense that Khan, normally thought to be extremely shrewd and highly politically savvy, would have blatantly deceived the US and jeopardised the future and credibility of the court in order to seek arrest warrants prematurely. A personal sex scandal, one that could destroy the prosecutor's career, marriage, and future ambitions, however, would appear to be the very sort of thing that could cause Khan to act in highly reckless ways.

In October 2024, reports began surfacing that in early May, at the same time he was negotiating with the Americans and the Israelis but unknown to the wider public, Khan was being investigated internally by the court. He had been accused of engaging in egregious sexual harassment against a colleague – later details appeared to describe conduct akin to rape. As details of the allegations emerged, rising outcry forced the president of the assembly of ICC member states to seek an external investigation.

Strangely, the president selected the United Nations' Office of Internal Oversight Service (OIOS) to carry out the inquiry. This choice raised significant concerns as to whether the investigation was genuine. Khan's wife worked for the OIOS as a senior investigator for several years, and another senior OIOS official had worked directly for Khan in his previous position at the UN.

Moreover, instead of immediately taking a leave of absence while the investigation was pending or stepping down altogether, Khan obstinately remained in his position and offensively blamed the events as being orchestrated by the Mossad. Yet, the emerging details in the case showed that Khan's accuser was herself a Muslim, and had hesitated to step forward specifically because she didn't want to jeopardise the Gaza investigation. Only in May 2025, shortly

after the *Wall Street Journal* published an in-depth article regarding the May 2024 events, including extensive and graphic details about the nature of the harassment, the internal turmoil at the court, and how Khan placed enormous pressure on his deputies to rush through the warrants, did Khan finally decide to take leave.



It's notable that events related to the ICC's Venezuela investigation have further called Khan's ethics into question. In late April 2024, Khan issued a glowing press release complete with happy photos following an official visit to Venezuela, where he concluded a co-operation agreement with the country's ruling dictator, Nicolás Maduro. The visit and amicable tone stood in stark contrast to Khan's treatment of Israel during that same time. It turns out that Khan's sister-in-law was a member of Venezuela's legal team at the ICC. Noting this blatant conflict of interest, in November 2024, a non-governmental organisation (NGO) filed a petition demanding that Khan recuse himself from the case, but he refused. In August 2025, an appellate chamber, agreeing with the NGO, ordered Khan to step down, and on 18 August, Khan tendered his withdrawal. Khan, however, rather than accepting the decision graciously, used these events to cast aspersions on the NGO which sought his recusal, and to imply a link to Israel.

Given that the connection between the warrants and the sexual harassment charges have been apparent for many months, one wonders why Bibi issued this video now. Life at the ICC has become increasingly difficult. The court's moves against Israel have caused division among its member states, with several openly refusing to co-operate in any moves against Israeli officials. Trump is a vociferous opponent of the court, and sees its efforts against Israel to signal similar moves against US officials and service personnel. Accordingly, he has placed sanctions on Khan and his deputy prosecutor as well as several ICC judges. He has also sanctioned certain NGOs that have been active in the case targeting Israel. In April 2025, an appellate chamber sided with Israel, saying the lower chamber was wrong to have refused to consider the question of jurisdiction prior to confirming the arrest warrants, and has thrown back the case for further deliberation. The sexual harassment investigation continues, and the Venezuelan proceedings cast a further shadow on Khan.

Whatever the answer, it's clear that the intrigue about Khan and the ICC is far from over.

- Anne Herzberg is legal advisor to NGO Monitor, a Jerusalem-based research organisation.



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# WhatsApp, wallets, and weird dresses – a bridesmaid's dilemma

LEE TANKLE

In Jewish weddings, being asked to stand under the chuppah isn't just about matching dresses or holding flowers, it's about being part of a sacred circle of friends and family. But along with the honour comes the stress: the endless WhatsApp groups, the fittings squeezed between Shabbat preparation, and the delicate dance of balancing *simcha* with the pressure to keep up appearances.

Every Jewish wedding is built on the idea of community, and being a bridesmaid means you're not just a bystander, you're part of the engine that keeps the *simcha* running. From organising the *sheva brachot* to making sure the bride eats something between the *badeken* and the dancing, there's a lot more responsibility than people imagine. Add to that the financial strain of gowns, gifts, and travel, and suddenly, the honour of standing under the chuppah starts to feel like a marathon of logistics and emotional labour.

For a 20-something in Johannesburg who has been in seven retinues, the biggest stressor is the financial aspect. "Sometimes huge budgets are expected, and not everyone can afford to contribute what is being asked, but are too embarrassed to say anything," she said.

This financial stress extends to getting the right dress, organising the bachelorette and kitchen tea, as well as makeup artists and hairstylists.

Johannesburg dressmaker Marion Pohl says that while it's exciting for those who are in the retinue, it's often financially taxing.

"It's not only the burden of the dresses, there's also the financial strain of the bachelorette, the challah bake, the kitchen tea, and then there's a new thing where bridesmaids buy the bride presents every month for three months before the wedding."

Pohl says that when a bridesmaid is in many retinues and has to buy a new dress every time, it becomes even more of a financial burden.

"Besides the fact that it's a financial burden, often the bride chooses a colour that the bridesmaids will never wear again, and quite a lot of bridesmaids tend to feel resentful that they have to pay for a dress that they're going to wear once, that they hate the colour of, and that they'll never wear again."

Lynn Hoff, who has been in many weddings both as a bridesmaid and as a makeup artist, says that the choice of colour and style of the dress can be the most stressful for a bridesmaid. For

many bridesmaids, if they don't like the style or colour of the dress, they have to wear it anyway. "I once had to wear a dress I hated. I wore it, and changed after the ceremony was over," she says.

Dressmaker Susan Jaff says that some of her clients who come in looking for bridesmaid dresses see it almost as a grudge purchase because they have to get the dress made, and chances are it will be in a colour that won't be their first pick.

"The bride has usually chosen a colour. And they've got to comply with that colour. And you know, girls don't really want to be spending a huge amount of money on a dress that they haven't designed and in a colour that they've been dictated to wear. Sometimes brides are very prescriptive about what they want them to wear," says Jaff.

Hoff says every wedding she has encountered has handled the finances of the dresses a different way. In some scenarios, the bride will buy the fabric and the bridesmaids will get their dresses made in the style they want. In other scenarios, the bride will buy her bridesmaids their dresses as a gift.

"When I was a bridesmaid for a cousin, she bought the fabric, and I paid for the seamstress," she says.

"My best friend paid for my dress and told me to wear any style I liked, she just chose the colours and I had it made. At my sister's wedding back in 1993, we all wore white, and she paid for everyone's dresses."

Ariel Snoyman, who has been in six retinues so far, says that the hardest part about being a bridesmaid is keeping up with numerous WhatsApp groups. "There are always a lot of groups with a lot of information, and keeping track and contributing to everything is difficult," she says.

Snoyman says that for every retinue she has been in, she has had to buy a new dress. "I have always had to get a different dress.

The process varies," she says.

"Sometimes we have to make the dresses from material the bride has bought, and some of the

time we are asked to buy a certain dress, mainly from Shein. One wedding was black, so

we could wear any black dress."

Danit Gordon, who has been both a bridesmaid and a makeup artist for numerous weddings, says that despite all the stress the wedding party goes through, she's always astounded at the extent of the joy people feel.

"I'm always struck by how much thought and care goes into it," she says. "Beyond the dresses, hair, and makeup, it's the way bridesmaids pour themselves into the planning and the support, and somehow, even with all the stress and money that goes into it, they carry it with such joy."



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# Lions Shul still roars after donors step in

GILANA LAB

**A** synagogue rumoured to be closing its doors for good has been given a new lease on life after overseas donors stepped in to save the Doornfontein Lions Shul from auction.

For more than a century, the Lions Shul, formally known as the Doornfontein Hebrew Congregation, stood as a landmark of Jewish life in Johannesburg. Once one of seven synagogues in Doornfontein, the heart of Jewish Johannesburg in the early 20th century, today, it's the only one in continuous operation. But just a year ago, its future looked uncertain.



When long-time caretaker and benefactor Stan Rothbart passed away in 2022, the shul was left in crisis. “He single-handedly ran the shul for the past couple of years,” said the current chairperson, Aron Ziegler. “When he passed away, no-one knew exactly how things worked. We discovered debts, unpaid municipal bills, and no funds in the account to keep the shul going.”

With dwindling attendance – from more than 40 worshippers on Shabbat mornings in years past to barely a *minyan* today – the committee reluctantly began preparing to sell the building. Rumours of an impending auction quickly spread through the community.

That’s when former members, now living abroad, stepped in.

“Some of the older members overseas said they didn’t want the shul sold to non-Jews,” said Ziegler. “They offered to cover the running costs and settle outstanding debts. Thanks to them, the shul can carry on, at least for the next few years.”

These benefactors, who have asked to remain anonymous, contributed enough to cancel the auction, pay municipal arrears, and keep the doors open. For now, they are funding the synagogue’s basic operations.

Today, the Lions Shul holds Shabbat services every Saturday at 06:30, with festive prayers planned when holidays coincide with Shabbat. The shul’s unique rooftop sukkah, a permanent structure with a retractable roof, will once again host celebrations this year.

Weekday services and high holy day *minyanim* are no longer held, reflecting the shrinking numbers in the area as many Jewish families have either emigrated or moved away from the city centre. “There hasn’t been a Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur service here for about six years,” the chairperson said. “Now it’s just Shabbat mornings and *yom tov* if it falls on a Saturday.”

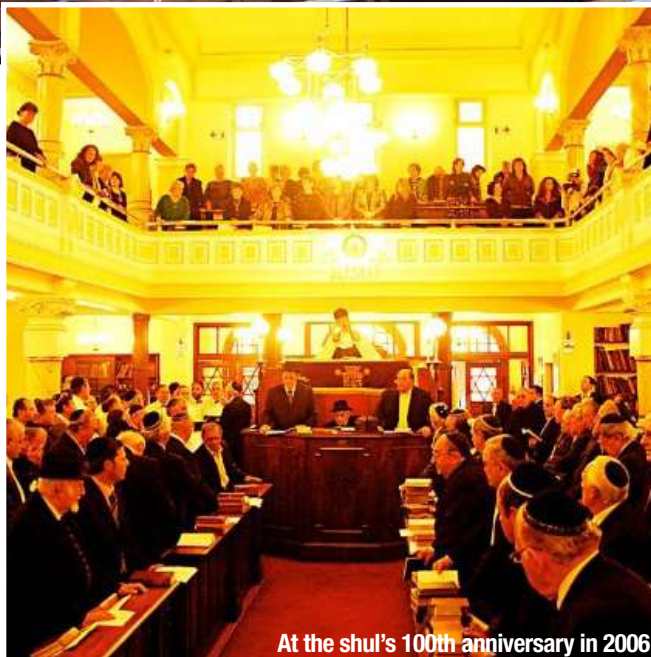
Attendance is modest, usually between 10 and 12 people, though occasionally the congregation falls short of a *minyan*. “It used to be different,” said Ziegler. “Thirty years ago, the crowd was younger, with more energy to get up

early. Today most are retired, and it’s harder in winter. Still, we keep going.”

Ziegler, who first began helping at the shul soon after his Barmitzva in the 1990s, now oversees the services and day-to-day needs. “I was unanimously appointed as chairperson because nobody else wanted the role,” he said with a laugh. “But I’m just here to make sure that the shul continues.”

Though smaller in number, the Lions Shul remains rich in symbolism. Known affectionately for the gold-painted cast iron lions flanking its entrance, it’s a visible reminder of the once-thriving Jewish community of Doornfontein and the determination of those who refuse to let that legacy fade.

“People still walk past and assume it’s closed,” he said. “But it’s alive. Thanks to support from overseas, the doors are still open, the lights are still on, and we are still davening.”



At the shul's 100th anniversary in 2006

# No more dirty looks: how to survive school antisemitism

GILANA LAB

**A**ntisemitism at school is a global phenomenon, and it's important for pupils to develop resilience and a strong Jewish identity to deal with it, experts say.

From subtle microaggressions to overt hostility, students face challenges that can have a deep impact on their sense of safety, identity, and belonging, experts told an international panel discussion on the subject.

These experts, who work with young Jewish people, emphasise the importance of proactive strategies to build safe learning environments and support Jewish identity.

Mina Rush, the national director of classroom education for StandWithUs, says fostering a strong sense of Jewish identity starts at home and in the classroom. "Many parents outsource their children's Jewish identity building to schools," she says, "but it's critical for families to articulate their 'why' – why their Jewish identity matters, why Israel matters – and share that with their children." By giving students this foundational knowledge,



parents can prepare them to respond thoughtfully when confronted with antisemitism.

Rush's team has developed Israel Link, an online, learner-centred platform used in more than

500 Jewish educational institutions worldwide. It provides content and professional development for educators while reaching tens of thousands of students. "We are data driven. We know we're making an impact," she says. The platform allows students to engage with Jewish history, culture, and contemporary issues, strengthening identity and fostering pride in their community.

David Smokler, the executive director of the K-12 Fairness Center at StandWithUs, says antisemitism extends beyond students to teachers. "Jewish teachers are often ostracised by colleagues. They may walk into the teachers' lounge, and everyone goes quiet. Some even feel they must deny any affinity for Israel to fit in." This creates a hostile professional environment, and highlights the importance of school-wide interventions to ensure inclusivity and fairness.

One key challenge is biased or unvetted classroom content. "Teachers bring in lessons that aren't reviewed," Smokler says. "Sometimes they are unintentionally biased; at other times, they actively promote antisemitic tropes." Parents and educators need to scrutinise syllabi; review educational material; and maintain open communication with students about what they are learning. Monitoring the content that reaches children helps prevent misinformation and ensures that lessons about Jewish history and contemporary issues are accurate and balanced.

When antisemitism occurs, trauma-informed practices are essential. Clinical psychologist Dr Miri Bar-Halpern says students experiencing prejudice may be hypervigilant, anxious, or withdrawn. Trauma-informed approaches recognise these responses, and create safe environments for emotional and physical well-being.

"Schools need to ensure that every student feels safe at school, physically and emotionally,"

Continued on 11b>>

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## &gt;&gt; Continued from 11a

Bar-Halpern says. "Students need a safe person to go to, and they need to understand the reporting process and protections in place."

These practices also emphasise giving students a sense of agency. "Trauma is often about loss of control," Bar-Halpern notes. "Giving children meaningful roles; teaching coping skills; and connecting them to community helps restore that control." Strategies such as emotional regulation, distress tolerance, and values-based action can empower students to respond confidently when faced with discrimination.

Collaboration between parents, educators, and community organisations is another critical component. Rush's work illustrates the importance of peer-led initiatives, where students take ownership of educational programmes, such as creating interfaith panels or organising cultural activities.

"Teens know their peers best," she says. "Allowing students to lead fosters creativity and meaningful relationships." These initiatives promote understanding among students of different backgrounds while reinforcing Jewish pride and identity.

Bar-Halpern also highlights the role of parents in offering support. Parents can prepare children for antisemitic encounters by discussing scenarios; teaching them what to say and how to respond; and identifying safe adults they can turn to. At the same time, parents must care for their own well-being. "Take care of yourself – therapy, self-care, limiting exposure to social media," she advises. "Parents' emotional resilience strengthens the children's capacity to cope."

In addition to proactive family strategies, schools must adopt structural measures. Educators should be trained to recognise antisemitism, respond to incidents, and implement inclusive curricula. Schools can create trauma-informed spaces, minimise triggers, and actively promote Jewish identity as part of broader diversity and inclusion efforts. Programmes should emphasise critical thinking, allowing students, Jewish and non-Jewish, to distinguish between propaganda, misinformation, and historical fact. "We need to teach children how to identify bias and hate," Bar-Halpern says. "Critical thinking is a protective skill."

Internationally, the lessons apply across contexts. Whether in the diaspora or in Israel, Jewish students benefit from environments that validate their identity and offer tools to respond to prejudice. Rush underscores that Jewish heritage is multifaceted and global. "Our story is much longer, and goes further back," she says. "Students need to understand that their identity is resilient, connected to a rich history, and relevant to the present." Emphasising this global perspective helps students contextualise antisemitism as part of a broader struggle while fostering pride and

belonging.

Ultimately, combating antisemitism at school requires a co-ordinated effort. Parents must engage with their children's learning; educators must be trained and supported; and students need access to identity-affirming programmes and peer networks. Trauma-informed practices; resilience-building strategies; and critical thinking are vital components in creating safe, inclusive, and empowering environments. As Rush reminds us, "The best way to respond to hate isn't just to survive it, but to thrive – celebrating identity, taking meaningful action, and connecting to community."

For Jewish students around the world, the lessons are clear: know your history; be proud of your identity; seek allies in educators and peers; and develop the skills to navigate challenges safely. When schools embrace these strategies, they not only protect Jewish students from harm, they cultivate generations which are confident, resilient, and empowered to stand against antisemitism wherever it arises.



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# Three tools to ace human resources at home

GILANA LAB

Though most people devote years to training for their careers, “almost none [of us spend time] preparing for parenting”, says educational psychologist Ashley Jay.

Speaking at a Chevrah Kadisha talk on tools to balance work and family,

Jay describes parenting as “the one exam with no syllabus and no do-overs” in which many professionals feel “more skilled at Excel than empathy, more fluent in PowerPoint than power struggles”.

Jay, also a keynote speaker, author, and creator of social-emotional learning programmes, works with tweens, teens, young adults, and



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their parents, helping them to navigate big emotions and build confidence.

Drawing from both Jewish and workplace wisdom, Jay outlines three tools to help parents balance professional ambition with family connection.

### The 3x3 rule

“Three moments a day, three minutes each. That’s it.” These rituals – morning kick-off, after-school reconnection, and bedtime wind down act as anchors in a child’s day.

“In the morning, this is going to be your child’s *Modeh Ani*. In workplace terms, it would be their kick-off meeting. The three minutes after school would be their emotional debrief. At bedtime, those three minutes, which are often the most important, become your family’s wrap-up meeting.”

The morning, she says, is a reset button. “Those first three minutes after waking up are about gratitude and connection. With a toddler, it might be a hug and, ‘Did you dream about dinosaurs or pancakes?’ What they’re really hearing is, ‘I am cherished. I am secure. I am connected to my parent right from the start of the day.’”

After school, it marks a transition back into family life. “If you don’t mark it, you miss that bridge – and it’s an important bridge. A tween doesn’t need an interrogation. Ask, ‘What was the best part of your day that didn’t involve food?’ It’s light-hearted, curious, and says their thoughts matter, not just performance.”

Bedtime, Jay says, is closure. “Traditionally, many families say the *Shema* before bed. Today, it might look like an emotional Netflix recap. A quick, ‘You good?’ clears their mental inbox so they don’t carry 47 unread messages into tomorrow.”

These moments aren’t about perfect conversations but consistent presence. “These nine minutes are your family’s cheat code for connection. They build the emotional immune system that holds everything together. Like daily stand-ups at work, short rituals have a big impact.”

&gt;&gt; Continued from 12a

**Use boundaries as scaffolding, not punishment**

"Sometimes being the parent means being a hard-ass temporarily. Kids won't thank you for boundaries in the moment. If you're doing them right, you're often cast as the villain."

Saying no to the third cookie or cutting off screen time isn't cruelty but clarity. "Sometimes that clarity sounds like cruelty to a brain still developing impulse control. But boundaries are actually *chesed* – kindness – because they create safety, responsibility, and empathy. Every system we trust runs on boundaries – companies, airlines, even Shabbos."

Children, she notes, will push back. "You're the worst! Everyone else's parents let them!" But resistance is proof that you're showing up for the hard stuff.

She distinguishes punishment from mentoring. "Punishment teaches fear. Mentoring teaches reflection. Instead of, 'You've lost your iPad privileges,' try, 'Who was affected by this? How do you think it felt for them? What can we do to make it right?'"

This shift may not win immediate approval. "It often earns you a very average, short-term performance review from your kids. But in the long term, it changes their thinking – from 'How do I avoid getting caught?' to 'When I hurt someone, I take responsibility.'"

Being the "temporary hard-ass", Jay concludes, is like performance management at work. "You wouldn't fire a junior employee who was never trained. You'd guide them, give feedback, and another chance. Parenting should be no different."

**Parent like a lighthouse, not a firework**

Jay warns parents not to equate good parenting with spectacle. "Fireworks are super exciting but fleeting. They light up the sky, everyone claps, and then they're gone. There's nothing but bad-smelling smoke."

Lighthouses, by contrast, were never built to dazzle. "They were designed to save lives. Centuries later, lighthouses still mark dangerous coastlines. They didn't change the weather or make the storm disappear. They cut through with one steady beam of light so sailors knew where safe was."

She applies this image to parenting. "Your child's emotional storms may look like yelling, crying, or slamming doors. Their fog may be silence, withdrawal, or 'I'm fine' when they're not. What they need is your steady beam of consistency."

In Jewish life, Jay sees a parallel. "The *Ner Tamid*, the everlasting flame in shul, doesn't flicker for attention. It doesn't dazzle. It's always there, quiet and unmoving. A signal of consistency in a world that is always changing."

At work, such consistency builds trust; at home, it builds safety. "Think less hero, more project manager. Hold the line, track the vision, stay calm when the team wobbles. If you are their lighthouse, their *Ner Tamid*, they will spot you in the dark again and again."

Her takeaway is simple. "Great kids don't need a chief executive parent with a five-year plan and a keynote speech at bedtime. What they need is a consistent leader who checks in, leans into tough conversations, and has their back no matter what."

Jay draws on *Pirkei Avot's* "Raise up many

students." For her, "our first students are our kids". Their review of us as parents "isn't about brilliance, it's about consistency, presence, and steadiness".

Ultimately, what endures in memory isn't tantrums or fireworks but reassurance. "One day, they won't remember the tantrum in Pick n Pay, but they will remember that your voice steadied them. Years later, they may call you, not because they need something, but because your voice still feels like belonging."

"That's high performance," Jay says. "And that's the review that really matters."

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# Tailored support needed to turn neurodiversity into superpower

GILLIAN KLAWSKY

"People often say, 'Everyone's a little on the spectrum,' but neurodivergent brains are truly different – not broken, not less – just wired differently. Neurodivergence includes things like autism, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder [ADHD], and dyslexia, real, diagnosable differences in how the brain processes the world."

So says Stacey Urdang, the co-owner and lead educator at The Lighthouse Learning Hub in Sandton,

a co-working space designed specifically for kids and teens, facilitated by occupational therapists and educators.

With the differences that characterise neurodivergence come incredible strengths, Urdang says, including creativity, out-of-the-box thinking, and intense passion. "When harnessed correctly, they can become a child's superpower or gift to the world. The real struggle isn't the child, it's the rigid systems they're forced into. Traditional schooling often doesn't leave space for how neurodivergent kids learn best.

At The Hub, we don't try to 'fix' kids. We adapt the environment so they can thrive as they are." The Hub assists parents in choosing the right online curriculum for their child's individual needs.

True inclusion begins with understanding, Urdang says. "When we take the time to educate ourselves and others, we start breaking down the stigma and fear that often lead to exclusion. Support and understanding shifts the focus from just tolerating differences to truly embracing them, and that's where real change begins."

Simone Herring, a literacy and dyslexia therapist, says her most important role is to be a mom to her wonderful sons who needed non-traditional, divergent learning support. "I realised that there was something different about my son's way of learning," she says. "I was trying to teach numbers, for instance, and there was difficulty recalling these."

After having him assessed when he was in Grade 0, she found that he had dyslexia. "Early intervention is essential," she says. "If a mom has a feeling that the development isn't as you would expect it to be, you need to take it further, whether a school tells you to or not. Trust your instincts. A huge red flag for dyslexia is memory – of colours, numbers, changing orders of numbers, rhyming words, and so on."

She appeals to parents not to worry about any stigma associated with remedial school. "Once these children go into remedial schools, their self-esteem and self-worth soars."

Joining mainstream high school, however, is often an adjustment. She stresses the importance of constantly advocating for your child no matter which school they attend. Ask what concessions are available, use internal and external experts, and find the way that your child learns best. Herring has also developed a flashcard learning tool that engages high school students, creating independence, higher-order thinking, and active learning. Text-heavy notes are chunked, bulleted, and made more accessible.

"The worst thing people can say to parents who have children with learning difficulties is, 'Your child is lazy, or has no work ethic,'" she says. It may just appear that way since studying is so overwhelming for some of these children.

"In teaching children with literacy difficulties, you have to create new neural pathways to develop memory, because those existing neural pathways are not as developed as somebody who learns to read easily."

Parents don't need to be experts, Herring stresses. "It's hard, it's exhausting, it's frustrating, and the successes take time. Scaffold your children emotionally and academically, and seek advice and support."

Andrea Ben, the principal of Jewish remedial school King David Ariel, says neurodivergent children often encounter social and emotional challenges such

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is about difference, not deficit," she says. Accommodating each child requires open and sensitive collaboration between teachers, therapists, and parents. From next year, Yeshiva High School will also offer tailored support through the Yeish Centre.

At King David High School Victory Park, neurodivergent pupils are part of mainstream classes, says the educational support team, which includes a speech and language pathologist, an occupational therapist, an educational psychologist, and a social worker.

Whether it be through streamed

classes; small group or remedial sessions complementing daily classes; special resources; schoolwide enrichment lessons; and actively building skills and confidence, support is multifaceted.

"No two children are the same, so they cannot be supported in the same way," says the team. "When you've met one neurodivergent child, you've met one neurodivergent child, each has their own unique strengths and needs. This is why support is individualised to match the child while still ensuring they meet the academic outcomes required by the Independent Examinations Board."

## >> Continued from 13a

as feelings of isolation and difficulties in forming friendships. "King David Ariel offers specialised programmes to help these children navigate their unique needs," she says.

These include cognitive enrichment programmes, which enhance critical thinking and problem-solving abilities; as well as instrumental enrichment, which offers structured tasks that teach essential cognitive skills and foster independence. "Then, social-emotional learning groups create a safe environment to practice social interactions, manage emotions, and develop resilience," Ben says.

The school fosters an inclusive environment, encouraging acceptance and understanding, empowering neurodivergent students and promoting resilience, she says.

"King David Ariel manages the transition for neurodivergent students into mainstream education through structured programmes and peer mentorship," Ben says. "This gradual approach helps build confidence and social competence. We emphasise the importance of awareness, patience, and respect for diverse communication styles, fostering meaningful interactions among all students."

Roseen Ress, an occupational therapist and department head of the Yavneh remedial stream at Yeshiva College, which runs from Grade 1 to 6, says Yavneh is part of the mainstream school, so pupils join their peers for many shared activities. Neurodivergent children can, however, sometimes be overwhelmed by a large and sometimes unpredictable mainstream setting. In such cases, the school works with families to determine an appropriate path.

"Children are provided with practical tools for self-regulation; the language to express their needs; and opportunities to practise social interactions, knowing that there is always an adult available for support," Ress says. "Simultaneously, all pupils across the school benefit from guidance and social-emotional groups, which encourage empathy, inclusion, and respect for difference.

"At Yeshiva College, we believe neurodivergence



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# Education Africa beats impossible odds in SA schooling

South African social entrepreneur **James Urdang** has just launched a book of his memoirs, *It Always Seems Impossible – My fight to build and save Education Africa*. The *SA Jewish Report* chatted to him just before the launch.

**Describe Education Africa. What inspired you to start it?**

Education Africa is a non-profit organisation whose goal is to create opportunities for disadvantaged South Africans by providing poverty alleviation through education. I started it because education didn't come easy to me – I'm dyslexic and I have Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) – so I struggled through school and wanted to help others.

**What have you achieved?**

We have been able to give educational opportunities

to those who ran the risk of simply becoming another statistic in yet another lost generation. We have had several projects that span over more than three decades. Our current flagship projects are:

**Early Childhood Development (ECD)** – Our teach the teacher programme addresses the need for qualified ECD teachers and provides training, resources, and ultimately SAQA (South African Qualifications Authority) accredited NQF (national qualifications framework) Level 4 ECD qualifications for students from disadvantaged areas. In addition, we run a trainer internship programme, and



**David Jennings, principal of Masibambane College, and James Urdang (right) at the book launch**

our latest programme, the ECD teacher mentorship programme, offers professional development for ECD educators.

**Marimba project** – This is a four-dimensional project comprising marimba hubs; the Education Africa International Marimba & Steelpan Festival; the Sounds of Celebration Concert; and the Education Africa All Star Marimba Band. Essential skills necessary for successful learning are acquired through learning to play the marimbas – an African xylophone. Additionally, we host a growing number of musicians who compete in our festival and concert.

**Masibambane College** – Founded by Education Africa and partnered with St John's College, this school is an example of how quality educational institutions can be built and run effectively in poor communities.

Additionally, we run the **Social Architecture Project**, which addresses the need for safe and well-structured facilities to ensure the care and education of pre-school children. Our **Walter Sisulu Scholarship Fund**, established in 1995 by Education Africa together with Walter and Albertina Sisulu, gives access to education to impoverished pupils who excel in mathematics and science at secondary and tertiary level, allowing them to complete their schooling at a quality institution.

**What were your biggest challenges?**

Education Africa, like most non-profit organisations, has an ongoing struggle to raise much needed funding for its projects. Charities are vulnerable, and we faced a hostile takeover from an international financial institution! For more on this, you will need to purchase my memoir from any major bookstore across South Africa.

**What inspired the title, *It Always Seems Impossible*?**

Life so often seems impossible. I succeeded in making real change happen by providing poverty alleviation through education when I had struggled through my own educational challenges.

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**You were mentored by Walter Sisulu; entrusted by Nelson Mandela; and supported by Helen Suzman and Dr Aggrey Klaaste. How did that happen?**

When I was embarking on my Education Africa journey, I knew that I would need the support of the African National Congress and got on the phone and asked to be put through to Sisulu's office. We met, and the rest is history. *Tata* Sisulu opened the door for me to do some unique, historic work with Nelson Mandela. My late brother knew Helen Suzman, and introduced me to her – she was one of Education Africa's first patrons. And I was introduced to Dr Aggrey Klaaste by one of our first trustees.

**Why did Sir Bob Geldof call you a "genuine African hero"?**

This one I can't answer. In most cases, I introduce myself as "Just James".

**What impact did dyslexia and ADHD have on you as a child?**

Educationally my childhood wasn't easy. My first year at school in 1971 at King David Linksfield didn't work out – I couldn't read and write – so I went to Crossroads School, which was in its infancy in a house in Parktown. In those days, support for children with dyslexia mixed with ADHD wasn't readily available. We didn't have the educational interventions that you have today, so I landed up becoming an outpatient at Tara Hospital Childrens Clinic. I mainstreamed at St Stithians College in Standard 3 (Grade 5), and enjoyed school so much that I repeated Standard 4! Sport – specifically rowing – helped me navigate my way through school. I finished school with not much behind my name save for a school leaving certificate.

**Being dyslexic, it must have been a challenge to write a book. Take us through the process.**

Writing a book, specifically a memoir, would be a challenge for most. But learning that most memoirs are written with the support of ghost writers made the impossible possible. I soon learned that I was in a better position than most as I have my diaries from 1992 and a horde of documents and memorabilia, enabling me to record my journey accurately.

**When did you start Masibambane College and why?**

To build a school was always my dream, and in 1994, I got a call from the general manager of Austrian Airlines who had seen me on SABC [the South African Broadcasting Corporation]. He said he was the son of the mayor of Vienna, and the city wanted to support a school project in Soweto. Being young and just starting out, I reached out to Sisulu, who said he would like to see a school built in Orange Farm. I knew we couldn't do it alone and reached out to St John's College as we needed a top educational institution to partner with, something I had learned from the twinning of St Stithians College with Penryn College in the Lowveld – the first education project I got involved in. Our school was officially opened in September 1996. Today, we have a high-performance school from Grade R to matric with more than 1 250

pupils.

**What have you achieved through the college?**

We have proven that you can build quality educational institutions in disadvantaged communities. We have matriculants who have gone on to become accountants, actuaries, lawyers and so on, and most importantly, many have gone on to become teachers so they, too, can give back.

**You are said to believe that education isn't a right but a responsibility we share. Please expound on this.**

For a black South African child to get a quality education is still about beating the system. For South Africa to create a

more equal society, it can only come through education, making it a responsibility for all of us to create educational opportunities for fellow South Africans.

**Why did you feel the need to write this book?**

I've been encouraged for years to share my story. I see my memoir as an opportunity to open doors to bring in sustainable funding for Education Africa as we work at making the organisation sustainable, scalable, and next-generation ready.

**What impact did being Jewish have on your path, if any?**

Being a Jew, we all have the responsibility for *tikkun olam* (healing the world).

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# Shabbos seating – a royal conundrum

This week marks three years since the passing of Queen Elizabeth II. And while I'm hardly a monarchist, I've always been fascinated by the peculiar traditions of the British royal family, particularly its obsession with seating arrangements.

At Buckingham Palace, seating is diplomacy. You don't plonk down anywhere near the soup tureen because it's closer to the kitchen. No, no. Every chair is placed with military precision, based on rank, lineage, and which conversation the monarch wants to have first. The king begins his meal by speaking to the

person on his right, then turns to the one on his left for the next course. When he puts down his fork, you do too, even if your roast beef is still intact. Garlic is banned because, apparently, nothing spoils royal repartee like bad breath. And then, of course, there's the late Queen's famous handbag code: if she placed her bag on the table, it meant she was ready to leave; if she shifted it from one arm to the other, it meant she wanted to escape the conversation immediately.

And then there's my Shabbat table.

In our home, there exists a charming little



**INNER VOICE**  
Howard Feldman

fiction that I am in charge of the seating. My wife will ask me before Shabbos, "Where should everyone sit?" Dutifully, I'll consider the personalities, the feuds, the dietary restrictions, and of course the need to keep anyone with strong political opinions away from anyone else with strong political opinions. I'll declare my seating plan. She'll nod thoughtfully, and accept my offering. And then, just before everyone sits down, she'll rearrange the place cards. My suggestion that she takes charge of this delicate matter has long been rejected, because, as she says every week, "What, are you crazy? Me? I'm terrible at it. I trust you on this. You know what you're doing."

And so it continues.

And then there's the religious tightrope. Do we sit men next to women, like a dinner party in Sandton, or do we separate them like a shul dinner in Bnei Brak? In theory, egalitarian mixing is fine. In practice, one poor single woman wedged between the men's Padel squad spends the evening learning about backhands and wrist injuries. Not ideal. So someone, usually my wife, suggests dividing the table: men on one side, women on the other. The men always feign disappointment, "But darling, I wanted to sit next to you tonight," even if they have argued the whole way over because he has left her all morning with the kids, again, while secretly delighting at the freedom to loosen belts, slurp the soup, and argue shul politics without spousal kicks under the table.

And that's before we even get to the minefield of whose offspring are to be exiled to the children's table – which, let's be honest, is actually the most fun.

The royals may have centuries of protocol to guide them. We have years of bad experiences, some folded index cards, and the fragile hope that no-one will notice they've been "strategically" placed.

But perhaps, as we remember Queen Elizabeth this week, we can take a page from her book. Seating isn't just about chairs, it's about creating harmony, about making sure that for a few hours on a Friday night, we feel like part of something bigger than ourselves.

And if that means I let my wife completely rewrite my carefully considered plan five minutes before kiddush? Well, as any king will tell you, sometimes the real power is in pretending you had the final say all along.

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# Connection, recollection, condolence

This week, the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) continued its vital international engagements, fostering connections that strengthen our community on the global stage. National Director Wendy Kahn joined counterparts from 60 communities around the world at the World Jewish Congress (WJC) National Community Directors Forum in Bratislava, Slovakia. This gathering provides an invaluable space for open dialogue, where they share experiences, exchange ideas, and learn from one another in a spirit of collaboration and mutual support.

Kahn had the honour of speaking on a panel addressing five pressing challenges facing Jewish communities worldwide: resilience; antisemitism and online hate; security; diplomacy; and youth engagement. Her address focused on diplomacy, drawing from the SAJBD's successful efforts to engage with universities at various levels, yielding meaningful outcomes for our community.

The meeting was timed to coincide with the "Day of the Victims of the Holocaust and Racial Violence" which marks the adoption of the 1941 "Jewish Code", the most extensive anti-Jewish legal measures of the wartime Slovak state. The code introduced a racial definition of Jews, leading to their exclusion, impoverishment, and deportation. By the end of the war, tens of thousands of Slovak Jews had been murdered in Nazi extermination camps. A solemn ceremony was held on the site where the synagogue once stood, forging a profound connection between the WJC's work and the painful lessons of our history. Such moments ground us, urging us to remain vigilant and committed to remembrance.

I, too, have been immersed in reflecting on our people's harrowing past. This week, alongside Vice-President Mary Kluk, I attended the Claims Conference directors' meeting in New York. The Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, or "Claims Conference", represents the world's Jews in negotiating for compensation and restitution for victims of Nazi persecution and their heirs. As a member organisation, the SAJBD holds a seat on its board, and it's a privilege to contribute to this essential work. With the number of survivors dwindling each year, the Claims Conference's role grows ever more crucial, ensuring that those who endured unimaginable suffering can live their remaining days with dignity and security. We owe it to them to honour their resilience and preserve their stories.

Our hearts are heavy with the tragic news of the deadly shooting at a bus stop in

Jerusalem this week, which claimed at least six lives and left seven others critically injured. This senseless act starkly reminds us of the persistent and grave threats facing Israel's citizens and the broader Jewish world. The hatred and violence that ignited the 7 October 2023 attacks linger as a constant shadow, in Israel and beyond.

We extend our deepest condolences and unwavering support to the victims' families, praying for the swift and complete recovery

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

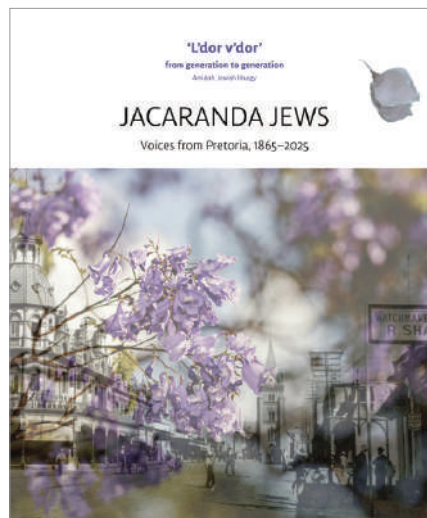


## ABOVE BOARD

Karen Milner

of the wounded. We continue our call for the immediate release of the hostages, and an end to this devastating war that has weighed so heavily on Israel and our global community for far too long.

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



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