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# Jewish Report

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## Extremists threaten Holocaust Centre over Israel stance

TALI FEINBERG

Anti-Israel extremists in South Africa have waged a campaign of intimidation against Holocaust & Genocide Centres in Cape Town, Johannesburg, and Durban throughout the Israel-Gaza war, including protesting outside their premises and pressuring their leadership to state that the war was a “genocide”.

Now, as a ceasefire and peace plan have been adopted and the “genocide” accusation loses steam, the anti-Israel lobby is desperately ramping up its campaign against these centres of learning and remembrance.

This includes threatening to pressure the City of Johannesburg to end its public-private partnership with the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre (JHGC) if the centre doesn’t “fall in line” behind the South African government’s case against Israel at the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

It also includes falsely claiming that JHGC Director Tali Nates stated that she believed the war was a genocide. Nates told the *SA Jewish Report* that she “certainly didn’t call the war a genocide”.

This false claim arose in a “declaration of intent to the JHGC” written by 24 local anti-Israel organisations after a delegation representing them met the JHGC on 6 October. In the declaration, the anti-Israel extremists say that they “demand” that the JHGC describe the Gaza war as genocide.

Professor of Holocaust Studies at the University of Florida, Norman JW Goda, told the *SA Jewish Report* that this “effort to bully a Holocaust centre is appalling. The insistence that the JHGC declare Israel guilty of genocide, and then [tell the centre it must] change its own mission – or suffer consequences – is a dire threat that should alarm everyone.”

The declaration says that the JHGC must declare Gaza a genocide because others have said so, and the JHGC has no right to draw its own conclusions.

It states that the JHGC made a statement on 7 October 2023, and therefore is obligated to make statements about the war. It threatened that if the JHGC didn’t give in to its demands, it would “engage the city directly to review [the JHGC’s] partnership, to press for compliance with South Africa’s duties under international law”.

The extremists demanded that the JHGC “must publicly acknowledge” its “complicity through silence”, and issue an apology. They told the centre’s leadership that its mission must “evolve” to align with anti-Israel actions and narratives in South Africa.

The extremists said that this wasn’t the time to look at “both sides”, and that they intended to protest outside the centre on 20 and 24 October while the JHGC hosted the International Association of Genocide Scholars (IAGS) conference. The declaration concluded in a threatening tone, saying “You have

been given every opportunity. You now face a choice.”

Speaking to the *SA Jewish Report*, Nates said the JHGC “met them [the delegation] in good faith for

an informal meeting, and even offered to organise a formal one, which they refused. We completely disagree with their characterisation of the informal meeting. During the meeting, we emphasised our mission of education, remembrance, and learning lessons from the past, as well as our commitment to being a space for dialogue.”

Pre-eminent Holocaust scholar Dr Michael Berenbaum told the *SA Jewish Report* that the war in Gaza isn’t genocide. “Genocide has a legal definition and legal precedents and hinges on the issue of intent. Israel is at war with Hamas, not the Palestinian people. There was a ceasefire on 6 October 2023, which was broken by Hamas.”

Israel has “no intent to kill the Palestinian people, and does not target Palestinians, whose number have increased”, says Berenbaum. “The harsh conditions [in Gaza] and deaths of civilians, tragic as they are, result from conditions determined by Hamas.”

“There’s no doubt that the Israel Defense Forces made mistakes,” he said. “There are internal judicial processes to adjudicate these. We must also condemn voices within Israel that have called for genocide, even those in government. But they haven’t dictated government policy. Furthermore, never in the history of genocide has the dominant party declared a ceasefire.”

Goda says the extremists’ declaration “reveals the longstanding resentment of the Holocaust by some activist groups, and their desire to rid it of its Jewish character. This goes back decades, but with this attempt to force Holocaust institutions to kneel, the wave seems to be cresting in very worrisome fashion.”

He says insistence that “Jewish citizens who run a Holocaust centre 4 000 miles [6 437km] from Gaza are complicit [in the war] unless they twist their own history in their own institution, is antisemitic, pure and simple”, and asks, “Why are these activists so threatened by a Holocaust

Continued on page 3>>

### No marathon, no medal, no regrets



See story on page 11

“We came to Cape town to run a marathon, and weren’t leaving until we had,” said Nicole Glickman, seen here with her running mates on Sunday 19 October: (L-R) Lauren Friedman; Cindy Bean; Nicole and Anneke Fourie

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# Perez family turns grief into call for unity



ZEV KRENGEL

OPINION

“The smallest nation, but the biggest family.” Given the unimaginable pain that the family has endured since 7 October, it’s hard to imagine a more moving statement than this, made by Rabbi Doron Perez when his beloved son, Daniel, was finally laid to rest last week.

It epitomised how the members of the Perez family have from the very outset responded to the tragedy that befell them, and so many other fellow Israelis, on that never-to-be-forgotten day. Not with despair, not with bitterness, not with anger, but with a rousing call for unity among the Jewish people, everywhere.

I couldn’t attend the funeral personally since it took place on the second day of Shemini Atzeret-Simchat Torah, still *yom tov* in the diaspora. I arrived the following day to be with



Zev Kregel and Rabbi Doron Perez during his shiva week

more about the heroism of Daniel and his tank crew in their final, desperate struggle, how in holding the terrorist onslaught at bay for so long they saved the lives of countless others.

We also learned the extraordinary story of how Daniel’s elder brother,

originally stationed far from that conflict zone, arrived to fight and finally win the battle where his brother had lost his life. And we learned how, despite the tragic circumstances and having himself been wounded, he went ahead with his planned wedding just 10 days later. That life-affirming decision was emblematic of how not just the Perez family but the people of Israel as a whole have responded to this latest attempt to annihilate them.

The fate of the four-man tank crew commanded by Daniel was in many ways a microcosm of how 7 October played out that day and the impact it had on the Israeli people in the weeks and months that followed. What happened to each of the four young men is mirrored by what variously befell more than 1 000 other Jewish Israelis, whether soldiers or civilians, along with a sizeable number of innocent people who weren’t Jewish or even Israeli citizens. Matan Angrest was taken alive to Gaza along with the bodies of Daniel and Staff Sergeant Itay Chen. Sergeant Tomer Leibovitz died in the tank; he was the first to receive a proper burial. Two years later to the

day, Angrest was released, having somehow survived the brutality of captivity at the hands of Hamas. The body of his commanding officer who fought and died beside him was likewise repatriated, but that of Chen remains in Gaza. No effort must be spared to ensure that he, too, is returned home. In Rabbi Perez’s own words, “No element of relief can be complete until every single one comes home for burial in Israel.”

Last month, Rabbi Perez took a Jewish leadership delegation from South Africa on a visit to the site where his two sons fought and where the younger had sacrificed his life. One can imagine how painful and difficult it must have been for him, yet he did it so that the leaders of our community could bear witness to what happened that day and remember, again in his own words, how his son “gave his life doing everything he could to save those most dear to him”.

We will always remember Daniel Perez and those like him with gratitude and pride, even as we mourn their irreplaceable loss. Whether in captivity or in death, they brought us all together, as one great family, even as our enemies did everything in their power to sunder those bonds. And as a South African Jew, it makes me deeply proud how Rabbi Doron and Shelly Perez and all their children, a family that hails from our community, has chosen to approach the great tragedy they have experienced as a way of uniting the Jewish people. For those who fell on 7 October and in the many months of harrowing conflict that followed, there can surely be no greater, nor more meaningful tribute.

• Zev Kregel is national president of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies.

the family during the *shiva* week. It also marked the conclusion to what has been one of the predominant concerns of my own life over the past two years.

The story of how Captain Daniel Perez was first reported missing after 163 agonising days, his death in combat was finally confirmed; and how, after a further 17 months of the deepest stress and anxiety, his remains were finally returned to Israel for burial, is one that has resonated particularly strongly, particularly in his native South Africa.

As a community leader, one who also has a close connection to the Perez family, I have been among those who have devoted countless hours behind the scenes and followed up every possible avenue in the effort to bring Daniel home. For me, together with his family, friends, and comrades, his laying to rest on Mount Herzl alongside the many other heroic soldiers who sacrificed their lives over the decades in defence of the Jewish people also marked a much longed-for closure.

As further information trickled in, we learned

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## Finding sanctuary in the storm

Torah Thought



Rabbi Motti Hadar  
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**W**ow, coming off the high of the high holy days and the events of the past few weeks, how do we ensure that we don’t come down crashing and burning now that we return to routine?

When everything feels overwhelming, where do you turn to for refuge?

In this week’s parsha, *Noach*, we read the words “*Bo el haTeivah*” (Come into the ark.) G-d calls to Noach, inviting him and his family to enter the *teivah* to be saved from the flood that was about to cover the earth.

At first glance, it may sound like just another moment in the Torah’s ancient narrative, a story of a man, an ark, and a flood. But the Torah isn’t a storybook. It’s a guide for life. Every word, every phrase, every letter is a message that speaks to each of us, in every generation. Wherever you might be in your life, whatever you might be experiencing, the Torah is written for you, in that moment.

Chassidic teachings explain that the word “*teivah*” (ark) also means “word”. G-d’s instruction to Noach, “*Bo el haTeivah*”, can also be read as “Come into the words.” The words of Torah. The words of *tefillah*.

When the floodwaters of life threaten to overwhelm us, when the world feels chaotic, when the news is heavy, when our personal challenges seem too much to bear, G-d is telling us to find sanctuary in the words of Torah and prayer.

We have witnessed this truth vividly over the past year. Our beloved brothers and sisters who endured the unimaginable, the hostages held captive in Gaza, have shared how they held onto words of *emunah* (faith) and *tefillah* (prayer) in the darkest moments of their lives. They whispered “*Shema Yisrael*”. They repeated *tehillim*. They clung to the *teivah*, to the holy words that became their ark, their protection, even in the hellish tunnels of Hamas.

Some freed hostages have even described their efforts to recreate the connection they felt to G-d while praying in captivity. Their strength is a reminder to us all: no matter where we are, no matter what we face, the words of Torah and prayer have the power to sustain us.

As we begin this new year and strive to capture the inspiration of the past month, it’s worth pausing to think about what it means to “enter the ark”

in our own lives. We’re so blessed to live in a time and in a community where Torah learning is more accessible than ever before. From in-person classes and *shiuirim*, to online resources and podcasts, to daily WhatsApp Torah messages, the *teivah* is open and waiting for you to enter.

May we each hear G-d’s call, *Bo el haTeivah*, and find our own personal entry into the holy words of Torah and *tefillah*. In doing so, may we seize the energy and power of the present moment to fuel the way forward.

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# Foundation slammed for platforming Albanese, a sanctioned antisemite

TALI FEINBERG

When United States (US) Secretary of State, Marco Rubio, sanctioned United Nations (UN) special rapporteur Francesca Albanese in July, he said that it was because she had “spewed unabashed antisemitism, expressed support for terrorism, and open contempt for the US, Israel, and the West.”

Less than three months later, the Nelson Mandela Foundation (NMF) chose Albanese to deliver its prestigious 23rd annual lecture, named for Mandela, on Saturday, 25 October at the Sandton Convention Centre. Albanese will also speak at the University of Cape Town’s Nelson Mandela School of Public Governance.

“The NMF was once a symbol of unity, integrity, and reconciliation,” says South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) National Director, Wendy Kahn. “Today, under the chairpersonship of Dr Naledi Pandor and the platforming of Francesca Albanese, it has become something else entirely, a stage for antisemitism disguised as human rights advocacy. Two women, both repeatedly accused of antisemitic bias, now stand together under the banner of the Mandela name, not to bring South Africans together, but to unite them in hate.”

The NMF showed that it wasn’t bothered by Albanese’s record of antisemitism and US sanctioning when the *SA Jewish Report* wrote to its head of marketing and communications, Tshepang Motsekuoa, to give the organisation the opportunity to address these concerns. The *SA Jewish Report* also asked for an update on the NMF’s Solidarity in Action Awards, which target Christian Zionism.

Motsekuoa emailed her team, mistakenly copying in the *SA Jewish Report*. She said that the concerns about Albanese’s antisemitism and sanctioning were “nothing”, and “we do not need to give this air. Happy to move on if everyone is.”

According to one analyst, such a prominent organisation inviting Albanese to South Africa could hurt this country’s relationship with the US, which is already on fragile footing.

Benji Shulman, director of the Middle East Africa Research Institute, said, “The NMF has, for a long time, increasingly taken an anti-Israel stance in its public communications and organising.” However, under the chairmanship of Pandor [since September 2024], this has ratcheted into a new gear. The invitation to Albanese is likely to further undermine South Africa’s relationship with the US because of Pandor’s past role as minister of international relations and cooperation.”

Given Albanese’s sanctioned status and

the fact that South Africa is at a critical juncture in terms of its negotiations with the US for a new trade deal, among other things, “This is likely to attract the attention of those in the US who are concerned about this relationship, and focus a spotlight on the people and activism that the NMF has been enabling since Pandor became chairperson,” Shulman says.

South African Zionist Federation spokesperson Rolene Marks points out that the US sanction means that “those who materially support Albanese, including by facilitating her visit to South Africa, risk sanctions themselves.”

Kahn says that for years, the SAJBD has warned that Pandor’s conduct “has created a hostile environment for South African Jews”. As minister of international relations, “she presided over the ideological capture of South Africa’s foreign policy, turning the Department of International Relations and Cooperation [Dirco] into an instrument of anti-Israel hostility and selective morality. Even after Hamas’s 7 October 2023 massacre, Dirco failed to condemn terrorism.”

Now, as chairperson of the NMF, “Pandor continues that same trajectory, and the NMF has followed her lead.” By hosting Albanese, “a figure widely condemned for antisemitic bias and Holocaust inversion, the NMF has betrayed its founding values.” The institution that “once symbolised unity and reconciliation has become a platform for division.”

The theme of Albanese’s talk is “enhancing peace and global co-operation,” but the NMF and Albanese have both taken extreme stances against Israel, and the NMF has been silent about the new ceasefire and peace plan.

The last statement the foundation made on the Middle East was on 3 October, condemning Israel for detaining participants of the Global Sumud Flotilla who illegally tried to break its Gaza blockade. It made no mention of the hostages who were still held by Hamas at the time, and hasn’t commented on the ceasefire, peace plan, or release of hostages.

On X, the Israeli embassy in South Africa commented that after the US sanctioned Albanese, “the NMF saw that and thought, ‘Perfect! Let’s make her our keynote



Photo: Facebook

Nelson Mandela Foundation chief executive, Dr Mbongiseni Buthelezi, accompanied Francesca Albanese on a tour of the Apartheid Museum

speaker.” The embassy said Albanese was “punished for hate, and rewarded for it too.”

Advocate Mark Oppenheimer has long tracked the NMF’s turn to radicalism. Now, he says, “Francesca Albanese, the UN’s tireless apologist for terror masquerading as a special rapporteur, has finally found her perfect partner in sanctimonious hypocrisy: the once-noble, now-rotting NMF, whose descent from moral clarity into fashionable antisemitism is tragic.”

He predicts that the NMF event will be

“a hate-fest” and “an echo chamber of self-righteous venom.”

“Expect speeches about ‘resistance’ delivered with the moral earnestness of a snake-oil salesman, and applause from those who believe that hating Israel is the highest form of compassion,” says Oppenheimer. “No doubt the gathering will invigorate the hearts of *jihadis*, armchair revolutionaries, and every champagne socialist who mistakes moral confusion for virtue.

“In the shadow of Mandela’s legacy, these new acolytes have erected a shrine not to peace or justice, but to resentment,” Oppenheimer says. “The foundation that once

embodied reconciliation now plays host to those who excuse rockets fired at civilians and call it human rights. And Francesca Albanese, ever the performer, will surely relish the stage, her sanctimony sharpened, her applause assured, her conscience conveniently asleep.”

Marks says the NMF’s decision to invite Albanese to deliver its prestigious lecture is “a shameful stain on Mandela’s legacy”. Albanese isn’t a neutral human rights lawyer,

she is “a figure widely condemned for repeated antisemitic rhetoric, and has been sanctioned by the US government.”

She says Albanese’s record is clear and well-documented. “She has claimed that America is ‘subjugated by the Jewish lobby’; accused the ‘Israeli lobby’ of infiltrating politics ‘like it’s in your veins’; shared conspiracy theories blaming Mossad for terror attacks; and described Gaza as a ‘concentration camp.’”

Even after Hamas’s massacre of 7 October, “she insisted the victims ‘were not killed because of their Judaism’, grotesquely downplaying antisemitism,” notes Marks. “These are classic antisemitic tropes and Holocaust distortions, condemned by democratic governments and watchdogs worldwide.”

Worse still, “This invitation forms part of a broader, co-ordinated attempt to hijack the Mandela name to delegitimise Israel,” says Marks. “Figures like Mandla Mandela have long used their family legacy to promote this agenda, and the recent appointment of Pandor, a vocal Hamas sympathiser, as chair of the foundation, deepens that trend.”

Kahn says that the NMF is at a critical juncture. “Antisemitism has no place in government, in diplomacy, or in any civil society organisation that bears Mandela’s name. The NMF must decide whether it will follow South Africa into isolation, or reclaim the moral clarity that once made it a symbol of unity, justice, and peace.”

## Extremists threaten Holocaust Centre over Israel stance

>>Continued from page 1

remembrance institution?”

The declaration contains “falsehood after falsehood”, Goda says. For example, “The ICJ is hardly on board with South Africa’s genocide accusation. The court refuted most of it in January 2024, which was why Naledi Pandor stood on the steps of the Palace of Justice not knowing what to say. This is why activists cite those who want to bypass the court with a fake genocide judgment.”

He notes that “Eighty-six percent of the members of the IAGS most certainly didn’t affirm that there is a genocide in Gaza. Most mainstream Jewish and Israeli academics don’t see Gaza as a genocide. United Nations statements are just not serious. Francesca Albanese’s reports are little more than dollops of gauzy academic theory combined with falsehoods.”

As for the JHGC hosting the IAGS conference, Nates says, “Two years ago, we agreed to host, for the first time on the African continent, the IAGS Biennial Academic Conference. We advance education, remembrance, and dialogue, and our space is open to all who value debate anchored in history.”

Regarding the centre’s partnership with the City of Johannesburg, Nates says, “As an acclaimed educational institution, the JHGC supports the national curriculum’s [study of] Nazi Germany and the Holocaust, and actively collaborates with the city, the province, and partners beyond to educate on the dangers of hatred.”

South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) National

Chairperson Professor Karen Milner says the SAJBD condemns the protests against the JHGC. “These groups represent a broader campaign of anti-Jewish activity in South Africa. They have repeatedly targeted Jewish institutions, businesses, and individuals, attempting to silence or coerce those who don’t conform.”

To target the JHGC “is deeply anti-Jewish, and fundamentally contrary to South Africa’s democratic values”, says Milner. “To attempt to coerce the JHGC into aligning with political slogans is intimidation.” The SAJBD is also deeply concerned by the “deliberate manipulation” of Nates’ remarks.

Milner emphasises that the Jewish community of South Africa is “diverse and principled,” and “what unites us is the rejection of hate, intimidation, and the distortion of Jewish institutions and memory for political gain”.

South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) spokesperson Rolene Marks says the declaration is “ideological blackmail”. It attempts to “bully a Holocaust centre into surrendering its independence and parroting a radical agenda, threatening funding and partnerships if it dares refuse”.

For Marks, “this is a grotesque abuse of Holocaust memory”. The signatories “twist ‘Never Again’ into a weapon against the Jewish people. They lie about the law, and they lie about people too. That’s not a misunderstanding, it’s a deliberate falsehood.”

The SAZF “rejects this attempt to hijack Holocaust history for political ends”. Institutions devoted to genocide education “must not be forced into ideological conformity”, Marks says.

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## Can SA offer anything to the Middle East?

STEVEN GRUZD

With a fragile Gaza ceasefire just about holding after two years of brutal war, the South African government still claims it has a positive role to play in the Middle East. However President Cyril Ramaphosa wasn't among the many world leaders gathered for the flashy, made-for-TV ceremony to mark peace in Gaza laid on by United States President Donald Trump and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt, on 13 October.

Even Muslim states like Pakistan and Indonesia were present. This snub clearly indicates that the South African government has no role in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

When the Gaza ceasefire finally arrived, the South African government's response to the Trump peace plan was tepid. Then Ramaphosa doubled down, continuing to lambast Israel for reducing aid trucks into Gaza and pressing ahead with the genocide case against Israel at the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

Chrispin Phiri, the spokesperson for the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (Dirco) told the *SA Jewish Report*, "South Africa remains deeply concerned

that, despite the ceasefire, Israeli military operations have continued, including over 100 airstrikes targeting civilian areas. South Africa calls on all parties to honour their commitments. Hamas has released all living hostages, and must continue co-operating to ensure the dignified return of the remains of those who died in captivity."

Phiri expressed sympathy for Hamas not being able to locate the dead hostages in Gaza's chaos and rubble, but said, "These challenges do not absolve any party of its responsibilities under international humanitarian law. South Africa urges Hamas to continue co-operating in good faith to ensure the dignified repatriation of all remains, and calls for transparency in this process."

Said Phiri, "South Africa's commitment to justice and human rights is shaped by our own history of struggle against apartheid. We stand with the oppressed, and our support for the Palestinian people is rooted in principles of international law and shared humanity. We are ready to share our experiences in peacebuilding, transitional justice, and reconciliation, and to contribute meaningfully to efforts aimed at ending the conflict."

"South Africa continues to condemn the systematic violation of international



United States President Donald Trump met with leaders of the Western and Arab world in Egypt to discuss peace in the Middle East

law by the Israeli government, including the expansion of settlements, the blockade of Gaza, and the disproportionate use of force against civilians. These actions reflect a broader pattern of domination and dispossession that must be dismantled if peace is to be achieved. We stand ready to contribute to peacebuilding efforts, drawing on our own experience of transition."

But critics have their doubts. Phiri sparred in the press with Ambassador Tony Leon, the former leader of the Democratic Alliance. Leon was clear that South Africa had "no role to play at all. It does not seem that Dirco has moved beyond sloganeering and posturing

to offering anything of substance or an engaged and thoughtful plan for the Middle East and other global conflict areas."

Free State University head of the Political Studies and Governance department, Professor Hussein Solomon said, "South Africa was never viewed internationally as a neutral partner, but as biased towards Hamas. So, less emphasis on hostages, and more on the suffering of Gazans."

Former United States diplomat and writer J Brooks Spector said South Africa's absence from Sharm El Sheikh spoke volumes about its irrelevance. "But rather than employing formal diplomatic efforts,"

Spector said, "perhaps it's possible that jointly with other nations, South Africans could pursue track-two diplomacy in pursuit of building common ground and better mutual understanding, despite the death and destruction that has occurred, or perhaps because of that and the possibilities, yet worse could come without some real trust building." He also suggested that South Africa might "offer a symbolic contingent of security forces to serve as part of the planned stabilisation force for Gaza".

Analyst Terence Corrigan said, "South Africa - here I mean the ANC [African National Congress] and its offshoot parties, and Dirco, which has been reserved as a closed mandate for the ANC - is entirely onside with the Palestinians. That was why the immediate response from Dirco to 7 October was to refer to an 'escalation' and to make it clear that this was 100% Israel's fault. It was only after Israel retaliated and it felt that there was an equivalence of sorts, that it ventured any recognisable criticism of Hamas's actions."

"South Africa has no experience of rival nationalism with a religious inflection, and very little with competing territorial claims," Corrigan said. "Nor does it have some sort of exceptional ability to engage in dialogue. That's a comforting national myth, but it's a myth, and one rolled out for international consumption. Nor does South Africa have anything to offer in terms of inducements or security guarantees. It's spent two decades alienating the US, and so it's ensured itself a disinclination from any efforts. And it has made its loathing of Israel so apparent, that as an interlocutor, South Africa is thoroughly repugnant to that side. Ironically, one minor role that South Africa might be able to play would be to help deliver the Palestinians to a compromise agreement. But there's nothing like that in the offing that I can see, and South Africa's positioning is such that it would never do that."

Said Solomon, "Officially, South Africa can play no role since it's not regarded as a neutral mediator. But there's still a possibility of some moderate Jewish and Muslim voices in South Africa engaging with Israeli and Palestinian moderates to increase the middle ground for peace."

Pretoria's years-long hostility to Israel - and its difficult relations with Washington - have surely precluded it from playing a constructive role. South Africa cannot have its cake and eat it. Being so unabashedly partial to one side in this conflict will prevent it from mediating. The Israeli government would likely reject South Africa's interventions, given its vituperative criticism and actions over the past three decades. No one said peacemaking was easy.

## Netflix's plastic surgeon puts microscope on antisemitism

LEE TANKLE

Best known for her precision in an operating room and her powerful presence online, Dr Sheila Nazarian has also become a prominent voice for Jewish pride and Israel advocacy. The Iranian-born, Los Angeles-based plastic surgeon uses her influence beyond aesthetics, speaking out on issues of identity, freedom, and the fight against antisemitism.

The daughter of Iranian Jewish refugees, Nazarian grew up aware of what it means to lose one's freedom and fight to reclaim it. Her family's escape from post-revolution Iran instilled in her resilience and conviction. Those early lessons now echo in her advocacy against antisemitism and for the right of Jews everywhere to live openly and proudly.

Nazarian will be in South Africa next month with the Young Presidents' Organization, and will speak at Chabad of Sandton in a "Women's event Celebrating Beauty, Courage & Jewish Pride" on 9 November.

Though Nazarian was born in New York, she and her family moved back to Iran in 1979, right before the Iranian revolution.

"There were bombs flying everywhere, very similar to the sirens you hear [in Israel], except there are no bomb shelters in Iran," she told the *SA Jewish Report* this week. "So we would just sort of run to the windows, and you would see them coming over Iran."

Nazarian said that her parents had to make the impossible choice to leave to save their two young daughters as they could see where Iran was headed. Nazarian's family was the last unit within their family still in Iran at that point, as many other family members had gone to Israel to get better medical care.

"My dad recalled being afraid every day, just not knowing if he was going to be taken away or what was going to happen to him," she said. "He ran the Shahid Rajaie

Cardiovascular, Medical, and Research Institute in Tehran. He was chief medical officer. Anyone affiliated with the Shah was in danger. One day, he told the government he was going to a medical conference. They let him go, but they kept my, my mother's, and my sister's passports."

Soon afterwards, Nazarian, her sister, and her mom were in the bazaar and got into the back of a covered truck with other strangers curled in a foetal position, puzzled together on the floor, with burlap sacks and corn on top of them, and were smuggled closer to the border.

"At about 02:00, the border police spotted us and started shooting, so we ducked in the back of a pickup and drove over the sand," she recalled. "We got away, then spent three months in Karachi and another three months in Vienna, waiting for visas to come to America and reunite with my dad."

Once they got to the United States, the family lived with Nazarian's grandmother in Queens, New York, for a month, then moved to Los Angeles where they lived in a two-bedroom apartment with her aunt until her dad passed the bar so that he could practice in the US.

After establishing her private plastic surgery practice, Nazarian successfully founded several ventures, including her own skincare line called Nazarian Skin; The Skin Spot ecommerce site; Nazarian Plastic Surgery; and Spa26 and Physique26 weight management programme. She

gained international recognition as the star of Netflix's *Skin Decision: Before and After*, a reality series showcasing the transformative and restorative side of plastic surgery.

She said beauty was a large part of her cultural upbringing. Being on *Skin Decision* didn't change the way she thought about what she does, rather the way others see plastic surgery. "Unlike other plastic surgery shows that mocked patients, *Skin Decision* showed real people making real decisions, not always for aesthetics, but for quality of life. It humanised plastic surgery," she said.

While Nazarian was studying at Columbia University, she witnessed alarming levels of antisemitism and Israel hatred. "I studied Islam in pre-med because I wanted to understand why my family had to leave Iran," she said. "Even at Columbia, I could see antisemitism firsthand. I realised the fight against it wasn't over."

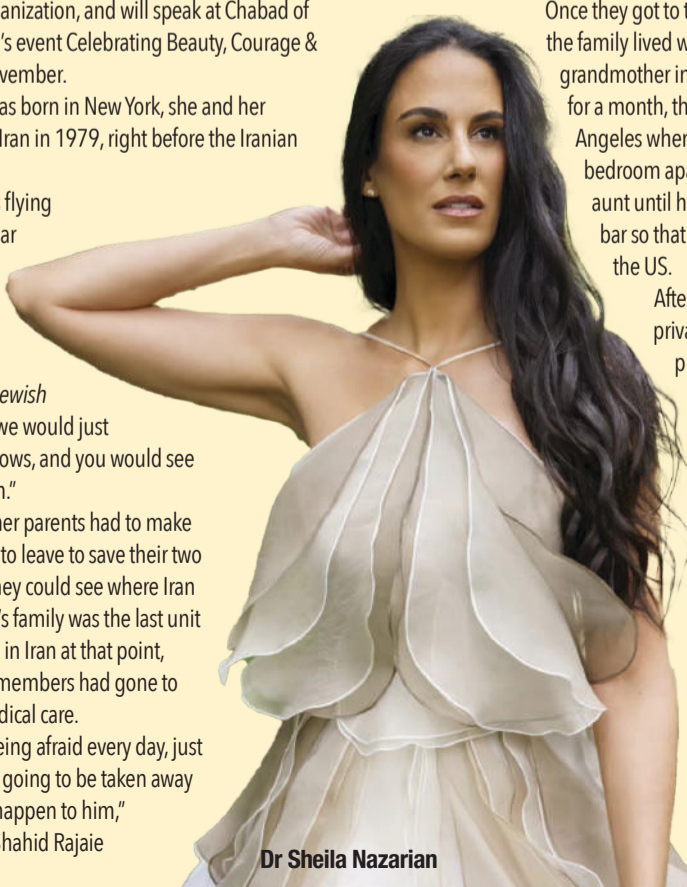
On social media and in public forums where she reaches hundreds of thousands across the globe, Nazarian has become a leading voice against antisemitism and misinformation about Israel, often speaking from personal experience as a Jewish refugee from Iran.

This is why in May 2021, when Israel launched Operation Guardian of the Walls, an 11-day military campaign against Hamas in Gaza following intense rocket fire and escalating violence in Jerusalem, Nazarian decided that she wanted to highlight antisemitism.

"I was screaming from the hills. My entire social media went to defend Israel," she said, "People were like, 'Thank you so much, but also you're a little crazy because it's not that bad.'"

"When 7 October came around, everybody was like, 'It's really bad! Everybody kind of woke up, and I felt a lot less lonely on social media. We experienced that in our own lifetime. We saw what happened to Iran. It was the same thing happening here. It was Islamists joining hands with the socialist communists, and it started on college campuses too. We were kind of seeing a replay of what we'd seen happen. We were like, 'Not again.' And so, we were the first to raise the red flag and be like, 'We're not going to let this happen to America.'"

"It never benefits us to stay quiet and assimilate. We need to fight back; we need to show how unacceptable it is; and we need to create stigma around antisemitism," she said.



Dr Sheila Nazarian

# Former Joburg mayor's pro-Hamas post ruled hate speech

NICOLA MILTZ

The South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) has ruled that former Johannesburg mayor and current Al Jama-ah councillor Thapelo Amad's inflammatory social media post glorifying Hamas amounts to hate speech, ordering him to issue an unconditional public apology.

The ruling follows a complaint lodged by Cape Town-based public relations strategist Tim Flack, who accused Amad of spreading hate speech and incitement. Amad, who has not responded to calls and questions from the *SA Jewish Report*, has so far remained silent on whether he intends to comply.

In its finding, the SAHRC said Amad's post, published on X shortly after Hamas's 7 October 2023 massacre in Israel, crossed the line from political expression into unlawful hate speech. In the post, Amad posed with an assault rifle and a Hamas flag, and declared, "We stand with Hamas, Hamas stands with us, together we are Palestin [sic] and Palestin [sic] will be free. With our souls, with our blood, we will conquer Al-Aqsa."

The commission concluded that such rhetoric amounted to incitement to violence and concluded, "The statement demonstrates a clear potential to incite harm and promote hatred, particularly in a society still marked by racial tension and inequality".

It recommended that Amad publicly apologise on the same platform where the post appeared and was soon after deleted. If he fails to do so, the SAHRC noted, the matter could be referred to the Equality Court, which has the power to issue a legally binding order.

"This ruling matters because it draws a moral and legal line that should have been obvious: glorifying Hamas isn't political speech, it's hate speech," Flack said. "For me, it's about restoring the principle that Jewish lives matter in South Africa too. The commission's finding confirms that public figures cannot hide behind slogans while promoting violence or antisemitism. Justice begins when accountability replaces impunity, and this decision is a step in that direction. I have not yet been informed whether Mr Amad has complied, but his apology will mean little if it's not matched with genuine remorse. I don't suspect he will – during mediation there didn't seem to be any acknowledgement of anything, really. We held a discussion, and he had lawyers with him."

Flack, who specialises in intelligence analysis, media influence, and counter-extremism, said the outcome underscores that political figures cannot "wrap extremism in moral rhetoric and expect impunity".

Advocate Mark Oppenheimer, a constitutional lawyer and expert on freedom of expression and hate speech, described the ruling as an accurate interpretation of the limits of free speech.

"In my view, [the SAHRC's recommendation] correctly identifies Mr Amad's remarks as unprotected hate speech, given that they amount to a tacit incitement to violence against Jews and Zionists."

However, he pointed out that the commission's recommendations aren't legally binding. "It properly notes that only the Equality Court can issue a binding order. The recommendation makes it clear that the complainant may pursue further action in that forum. An Equality Court has the power to order an apology, which Mr Amad would then be legally obliged to make. In this case, while it may be prudent for him to apologise, he's not legally required to do so at this stage."

He said the ruling had the advantage of sending a "moral signal". "Most people read

this as condemnation by the commission, and that's a good thing, which may well set the tone and deter politicians from making statements like this."

Milton Shain, emeritus professor of Historical Studies at the University of Cape Town, welcomed the SAHRC's decision.

"This is a welcome ruling. Former Johannesburg Mayor Thapelo Amad clearly went too far. Of course, he's not the only South African to identify with Hamas and its deadly agenda. As former mayor of a multicultural city with diverse views, he should have known better. Perhaps senior ANC members will take heed. One hopes so. Public support and sympathy for Hamas on the part of our leaders have been significant, this despite many countries outlawing the movement and noting its noxious worldview. We now await

a public apology from Amad. Let's see if this puts a dampener on hate-filled language."

Wendy Kahn, the national director of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD), has called on the African National Congress (ANC) to sack Amad as a city councillor,

saying it's unconscionable that he continues to serve in public office after endorsing a terror organisation. "It's encouraging that our country's advanced hate speech legislation protects all South African citizens from hateful rhetoric and threatening language," she said.

"This finding has set a useful precedent which the SAJBD can use for current and future cases to protect South African Jewry from this type of incitement."



## A Palestinian state already exists – it's called Jordan

OPINION

EZRA STONE



History has a way of exposing hypocrisy, if only we care enough to read it. When people chant, "Free Palestine," they never mean Jordan. And yet, Jordan is Palestine, at least if we follow the actual maps and documents rather than propaganda.

Here are the facts.

In 1920, the League of Nations entrusted Britain with the Mandate for Palestine. The language was explicit: this land, from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea and eastward beyond the Jordan, was to be developed as the "Jewish national home". That was the deal, ratified by international law.

But Winston Churchill, with the quick stroke of a pen in 1921, amputated 77% of this territory. Everything east of the Jordan River was handed to Abdullah of the Hashemite clan, a family not even native to the land, but expelled from the Arabian Peninsula by the Saudis.

In other words: imported rulers were gifted the vast majority of "Palestine", transforming it into what we now call Jordan.

So everything east of the Jordan River, three quarters of the mandate, was given away.

No-one asked the people; no-one voted; no-one objected. It was simply imposed by decree.

And yet today, Jordan is a stable Arab state, universally accepted, and home to a majority Palestinian population. Nobody calls it "occupied". Nobody marches for its "liberation". Nobody demands its erasure to restore it to "native Palestinians". Why? Because it's Arab-ruled.

But the remaining 23% – the sliver west of the Jordan River that became Israel – has been the object of relentless delegitimisation, boycott, terrorism, and war. Not because of land. Not because of law. But because it's Jewish sovereignty in the Middle East.

Strip away the rhetoric and the hypocrisy is

undeniable:

If the world truly wanted a Palestinian homeland, it already exists. It's called Jordan;

The demand for a second Palestinian state, carved out of Israel, isn't about justice. It's about the elimination of Jewish self-determination; and

What's tolerated, even celebrated, when Arabs rule is demonised when Jews rule.

This is the great lie of the so-called Palestinian cause. It's not a liberation movement but a ruse, a pack of crude antisemitic lies designed to mask the oldest hatred in modern language.

Jordan is Palestine. Israel is Jewish. For millennia. That, and that alone, explains the fury.

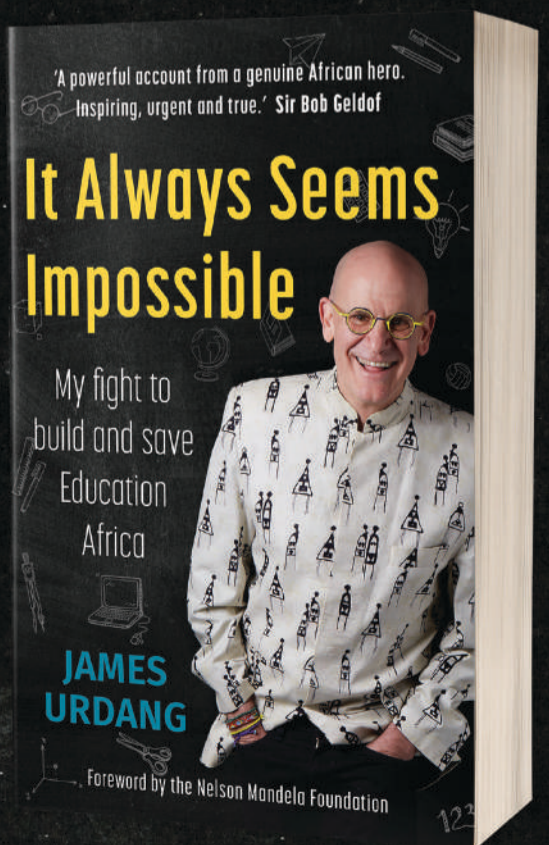
• Ezra Stone was born in Natal, South Africa, and now writes from Buenos Aires. His work explores history, resilience, and identity, tracing the unbreakable threads between past and present.

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**B.** EXCLUSIVE BOOKS



# South African Jewish Report

## It's not over until it is over

When I arrived in Israel just days after all the living hostages were returned, I expected to feel elated and in a country in the midst of crazy celebration. But as I walked down the corridor at Ben Gurion Airport, which had previously been lined with hostage posters, I noticed they hadn't all been removed. A number of posters of those who had already been returned were still up, but they had various stickers on them. Obviously, the posters of those whose bodies have not yet come home were still there too.

Much like the confusion around the hostage posters, there isn't a clear-cut sense in Israel of extreme happiness that all the living hostages are home and the ceasefire is in place. Truth is, ask any Israeli, nothing seems concrete. While there is reason to celebrate all the living hostages being home and surrounded by loved ones, they have endured excruciating horror over the past two years. That won't disappear, nor will the deep scars and emotional wounds heal quickly, no matter how much we wish them away.

We also have a country of people who have been through a two-year-long war. And though the Iron Dome may have saved millions of lives by protecting citizens from physical devastation, they have still lived through a war, causing massive psychological and emotional distress throughout the country.

Very few Israeli families have been left unscathed by the impact of the massacre on 7 October 2023, and then their sons, husbands, fathers, boyfriends, and friends having been sent to Gaza or serving on other borders. Those doing their military service had no choice but to serve where they were sent, most often to Gaza. Neither did those who were called on many, many times for extended periods to do their *miluim* (reserve duty) in Gaza or wherever they were needed in the war. The impact of what they have experienced and the sleepless nights of their families back home worrying has taken its toll.

I'm sure each person impacted has somehow been changed by his or her experiences. When a war goes on for two years, it's impossible to walk away unscathed, no matter how strong and resilient you are. And Israelis are clearly resilient and strong, but so very human too.

So, yes, there is a definite sense of relief that there is a ceasefire, however most Israelis seem hard-pressed to believe that it is actually all over – and will stay over. Though there's no question that they all wish the war was behind them and that they could now move on to healing and a peaceful future, there's deep cynicism about it.

Truth is: Israel has never really known peace, and while this is everything the country stands for and fights for, most often it feels like a far-off dream.

I overheard an Israeli man with years of experience in the military explaining that it was all very well that there was now a "ceasefire" or "end-of-war" agreement with Hamas, but at the end of the day, Israel has never been able to trust anything that terrorist organisations have said or done. So, it's hard to start believing them now, not least of all after their clear promises to destroy Israel "from the river to the sea", and what they did on 7 October.

Having said all that, there's a different feeling in Israel to what I experienced when I was last here in June 2024. The pressure has been lifted from the pressure cooker.

I'm also aware of a deeper compassion emanating from ordinary Israelis. People seem more helpful and caring. Perhaps it's in my own head, but I don't think so.

A few nights back, I was having a late-night drink with family and noticed a large group of men nearby drinking and having a good time. At one point, we noticed them laughing nervously when they brought their bill, which was extensive, and had to have been very expensive judging by the empty bottles of alcohol on their table.

We asked the manager about them. He told us that they were all *miluimniks* in Gaza together, and this was a reunion for them. He said that an Israeli man who wasn't connected to them, nor did he know any of them, had paid their huge bill for the night, which was well over R5 000. He didn't speak to them, nor did he ask for acknowledgement. He paid the bill and left, telling the manager to thank them for what they did for Israel.

I happened to be working on the *SA Jewish Report* while here and rushed out to get a coffee and was on the phone, complaining about bad luck I had that day. When I paid for the coffee, the woman serving me, who had overheard my conversation, offered me a pastry for free to improve my day.

I could go on, but you get the picture.

When I heard that the living hostages had returned, I messaged the *SA Jewish Report* team with happy tears in my eyes to say that we could finally drop the yellow ribbon we have kept on our masthead since the hostages had been kidnapped and forced into Gaza. However, as you may well notice, it's still there because there are still some Israelis who haven't yet been returned. As of today, Wednesday, 22 October, 13 bodies are still in Gaza – 11 Israelis and two foreign nationals who were all abducted on 7 October. Like Israel, the *SA Jewish Report* will wait for their return to drop the yellow ribbon from our masthead.

And as I write this, I can hear people passionately singing "Am Yisrael Chai" in the distance on the streets of Jerusalem because United States Vice President JD Vance and his wife, Usha, are visiting. While there's frustration on the streets because roads are closed and massive traffic jams abound, I'm so grateful to be able to be here this week and experience this incredible country.

**Shabbat shalom!**

**Peta Krost**  
Editor



## SA's 'Zionist problem' an ominous portent

OPINION

PROFESSOR MILTON SHAIN



Not since the 1930s have Jews in South Africa felt as uncomfortable as they do today.

That South Africa had a "Zionist problem" was made patently obvious when young David Teeger had to relinquish his captaincy of the South African Under-19 cricket team shortly after he publicly lauded the Israel Defense Forces in the wake of the 7 October 2023 Hamas assault. Teeger could captain the team as a Jew, but not as a Zionist.

A few years earlier, African National Congress Secretary General Gwede Mantashe – seemingly forgetting that the United Nations had created the Jewish state, described Israel as a state founded on the basis of apartheid which, according to international law and several UN conventions, is a crime against humanity.

These are ominous portents.

It is common knowledge that South African Jews are overwhelmingly Zionist. Zionism for them is a "civil religion" and the Jewish state is sacrosanct. But Zionism is now under assault. It's associated with exclusivism, expansionism, and oppression. The term has been mangled. "Settler colonialism"; "white supremacy"; and "apartheid" are bandied about. Few today acknowledge historic ties between Jews and the "land of Israel". Israel has become "the Jew" writ large – a locus of global evil.

Zionism as an ideology of liberation and rebirth – an escape from oppression, marginalisation, and persecution – has been forgotten. Its enemies diligently work at delegitimisation.

In South Africa this is driven by human rights-oriented elites – both black and white, Christian and Muslim – who wish for the destruction of the Jewish state, a wish that preceded 7 October.

Gaza has fuelled hatred. The optics are horrific. Talk

shows and media columns are cluttered with simplistic critiques and claptrap. Yet it's notable that despite generalised hostility towards Israel, protest marches are dominated by Muslims. However, this isn't the case in England, France, Germany, and Australia.

Why?

Perhaps it has something to do with the unequivocal support for the Palestinians on

the part of the South African government and even public support for Hamas. "From the river to the sea" has been chanted by President Cyril Ramaphosa. Keffiyehs around the necks of senior politicians at official events are commonplace.

None of this should come as a surprise. "Progressive" intellectuals, radical Muslims, and Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions activists have been at the forefront of anti-Zionism for decades. Jews see this as a new form of antisemitism – the latest iteration of the "longest hatred". Antisemitism, they argue, is eternal; and anti-Zionism a hygienic form of Jew-hatred.

Anti-Zionists deny this. It's true that anti-Zionism cannot axiomatically be equated with antisemitism, but it's also true that some anti-Zionists are motivated by Jew-hatred. One recalls the words of prominent intellectual Farid Esack when asked if Jews would be accepted by the Muslim community if they renounced all recognition and support for Israel. "Nothing that the Jews do will be enough for Muslims," he answered.

South Africans aren't immune to antisemitism.

- Think of Holocaust denial that surfaces from many quarters;
- Think of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* that is also affirmed from time to time;
- Think of the United Nations World Conference Against Racism in Durban in 2001 that descended into an antisemitic hate fest;
- Think of South Africa's former deputy foreign minister, Fatima Hajaig, telling an audience that the United States

and most Western countries were "in the hands of Jewish money and when Jewish money controls ... you can expect anything";

- Think of Tony Ehrenreich, a trade unionist and a senior ANC politician in the Western Cape, calling on Jewish leaders supporting Zionism to leave the country;
- Think of "Keep Calm and Kill the Jews" posted at one time on the ANC Youth League website.

And the list goes on.

Anti-Zionists claim that Jews play the antisemitic card in order to justify their claims on Palestinian land and to suffocate legitimate debate. Here, they echo those European commentators who, in the late nineteenth century, accused Jews of sounding antisemitic alarm bells to resist assimilation and bind the community.

The divide in South Africa is deep.

Not since the 1930s – a time of fanatical 'Shirtist' antisemitism and burgeoning volkisch Afrikaner nationalism – have Jews felt as uncomfortable as they do today in the country of their birth. They cannot understand why a country that celebrates cultural diversity – enshrined in the Constitution – is unable to entertain space for a minority that overwhelmingly, albeit not uncritically, shares the Zionist dream. An important dimension of Jewish identity is thereby fundamentally challenged.

Can the friction be contained, and the heat reduced?

If anti-Zionism is simply a new iteration of "the longest hatred", this is unlikely. But, if it's a product of an "occupation" that has lasted too long, it is possible that moves towards a two-state solution will help. But will Islamists and leftist "progressives" relinquish the dream of destroying the "Jewish state"? Will "greater Israelists" relinquish their dreams?

These are open questions.



**Tony Ehrenreich called on Jewish leaders to leave South Africa and was later forced to apologise**

Can Zionists recover lost ground in the propaganda battle?

For a start, they need to remind South Africans of the words of Nelson Mandela when addressing the 37th Congress of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies in 1993.

"As a movement, we recognise the legitimacy of Palestinian nationalism just as we recognise the legitimacy of Zionism as a Jewish nationalism. We insist on the right of the state of Israel to exist within secure borders, but with equal vigour support the Palestinian right to national self-determination."

Engagement is better than silence. The reestablishment of normal ties between Israel and South Africa is imperative. Ambassadorial relations must resume.

Zionism will, of course, continue to be challenged, and intellectuals won't stop engaging with the past. This is unavoidable. When all is said and done, however, the Jewish state belongs to the family of nations. It's not perfect. No nation is. Historian Walter Laqueur put this succinctly in the 1970s, saying, "Zionism, no doubt, can be subject to trenchant criticism from different points of view. But as a national movement and a *weltanschauung* [philosophy], its validity can neither be proved nor refuted; it is as legitimate, or illegitimate, as other national movements or nations. And as far as antisemitism is concerned, Zionism has a strong case; its analysis has been more fully confirmed by recent history than the predictions of its critics."

- Milton Shain is Emeritus Professor of Historical Studies at the University of Cape Town.

# Agam Berger's violin lights up 7 October ceremony

LEE TANKLE

As we remember what was lost on 7 October 2023, Jewish people around the world are still feeling the pain of that day two years later, but there is also a sense of immense joy at what we got back.

Nothing embodied this mix of emotions more than the commemoration ceremony hosted by the South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) in collaboration with the Israel Centre, a branch of the Jewish Agency; the World Zionist Organization; the Israeli embassy in South Africa; and the United Communal Fund at Yeshiva College on 16 October. The Johannesburg community gathered not only to commemorate what was lost that day, but to celebrate the joy that has rocked the Jewish world since 13 October, when the last of the living hostages were released.

"Two years, two years since the darkest dawn our generation has known. Two years since the sirens, the screams, and the silence of 1 200 Jewish souls butchered in their homes, on their kibbutzim, and at a music festival that is meant to celebrate life," said Craig Pantanowitz, the acting national chairperson of the SAZF. "Seven October wasn't just an attack on Israel, it was a declaration of war on every Jew. It was the message that the enemies of our people have never stopped chanting: that Jews don't deserve to live free, safe, or sovereign. They failed then, and they will fail every single time, and every day that Israel stands strong and the Jewish people remain united."

"Two years later, the pain is still with us, but so is the strength that came out of it," said Ariel



Seidman, chargé d'affaires of the Israeli embassy in South Africa. "Out of the tragedy, we have seen tremendous resilience. Out of heartbreak, we have seen unity. The Jewish people have always known how to turn grief into purpose. Israelis came together in ways we haven't seen in years. Jews around the world came together, and so the South African Jewish community. From the very beginning, you stood with us. You spoke up when it mattered the most and where it mattered the most. You comforted, you prayed, you gave support and strength."

Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein, said that two years after gathering on the Yeshiva College fields, we could now declare that "the state of Israel has won this war. Our hostages have been returned. The ceasefire has been agreed to. They have returned our hostages, and agreed to a ceasefire because they have been defeated, as King David says in the book of Psalms that G-d gives his people strength, and then he blesses his people with peace. Peace comes through strength."



Former Israeli hostage Agam Berger performing at the 7 October commemoration in Johannesburg

"There is peace today. There is a ceasefire because of the strength and the might of the state of Israel, with G-d's blessings. Because all of our enemies have been defeated through their strength. Through the strength of the Israel Defense Forces and the bravery of the Air Force. The ground forces. The special forces. Iran has been defeated. Hezbollah has been defeated. Assad deposed the Houthis. Hamas, and even Qatar learned the lesson," said Goldstein.

The community didn't only hear a musical tribute from a 20-piece orchestra directed by Jonathan Birin and conducted by Dan Selsick, it heard a performance by released hostage Agam Berger and her violin teacher, world-renowned violinist Ariella Zeitlin, who were brought to South Africa by the Israel Centre.

Berger was raised in a traditional Jewish home, and when she was eight years old, a boy in her class brought a violin for show and tell, and she was immediately hooked and started playing at school ceremonies. When Berger entered the army, she was a lookout soldier on the border of Gaza. And on 7 October, terrorists stormed her base and dragged her and many of her friends across the border into Gaza, where she was beaten, starved, and hidden in homes.

Zeitlin said that Berger held onto her faith even in captivity. She asked her captors for a siddur; kept Shabbat; and kept kosher the entire time she was held in captivity.

"On 7 October, at the age of just 19, she made a final call to her father before being dragged to Gaza in her pyjamas. For 482 days, she was shuttled from one hiding place to another, enduring airstrikes, deprivation, and fear," said Pantanowitz. "And yet she clung fiercely to her faith, keeping Shabbat, keeping kosher, praying, and even celebrating Passover in captivity. She did not break; she became stronger."

In Gaza, she became a source of strength for others, braiding the hair of her fellow hostages, tiny gestures that grew into a symbol of dignity and hope. Those braids have since become a movement across the Jewish world, synagogues, schools, and families, all braiding in her honour, turning her care into a banner of resilience.

Berger's parents encouraged people to start keeping Shabbat

in honour of Berger's return, and started lighting Shabbat candles and going to the mikvah.

"Now, most of us, if we're faced with a situation



like that, when we're faced with that level of darkness, we fall," said Zeitlin. "But Agam had something that we could all use a little bit more of. She had faith in G-d. And faith helps us tell a different story. Faith helps us see that the darkness is just temporary. That the darkness is just the way that we expand our vessels, the way that we create more light one day in the world."

On the helicopter after her release, Berger held a sign that said, "I chose the path of faith, and in faith, I returned."

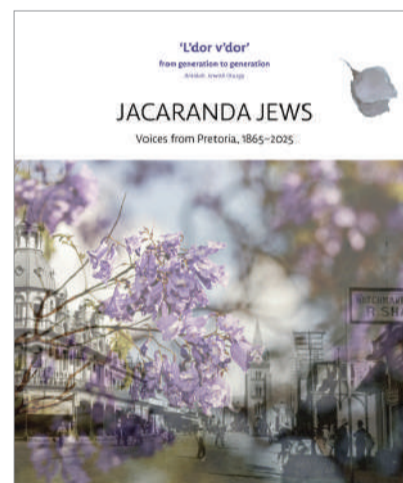
"This isn't a sentence; it's a creed for our people. Agam, when your violin sings tonight, it will be the voice of every hostage who has been returned. It will be the voice of every Jew who has ever faced down darkness and chosen life," said Pantanowitz.

Berger, with her violin that survived the Holocaust, played the songs *Habaita* and Leonard Cohen's *Hallelujah*, signalling that while we acknowledge joy, we have to acknowledge pain.

Pantanowitz said that while celebrating the release of the hostages, the entire South African Jewish community felt the pain of seeing Captain Daniel Perez finally returning and being laid to rest. "Daniel's return closes one wound, but his loss evens another. His courage reminds us that even in death, the Jewish soul cannot be taken hostage, and our heroes will always find their way home," he said.



Ariella Zeitlin



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## Freud filmmaker confronted by BDS protest about 'genocide'

LEE TANKLE

When Israeli filmmaker and peace activist Yair Qedar showed his film on the life and work of Sigmund Freud in Johannesburg on 26 September, he was confronted by protesters chanting, waving placards, and calling for a cultural boycott of Israel.

What was meant to be a quiet evening of film and reflection on the life and work of Freud through the lens of his identity as an outsider, especially his position as a Jew in Vienna and later in exile, turned into a confrontation over politics and identity.

As Qedar's documentary *Outsider: Freud*, which has been shown in 17 countries, began to roll, protesters aligned with the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement gathered outside the venue, The Inside Out Foundation, demanding a cultural boycott.

In promoting the screenings, it was made clear that though Qedar is Israeli, he attended the screenings as an independent filmmaker, and the film had not been financially supported by the Israeli government.

It was also stated outright that Qedar recognises the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people as enshrined in international law; and has welcomed the recent recognition of the state of Palestine. Also, he has long been active in peace and queer rights movements in Israel, including founding the first Arab-Israeli left-wing youth organisation; and he opposed the war in Gaza; has called for an end to violence; and supports peace with Gazans.

Despite this, protesters stood outside The Inside Out Foundation across from the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre (JHGC), asking for Qedar and the JHGC to acknowledge the genocide in Gaza and intimidating people who came to watch the film.

"We were setting up, and they're playing police siren sounds through speakers," said Michael Benn, a psychoanalyst who brought Qedar to South Africa. "There might have been 20 to 30 people, but they were very loud, very vocal. They started to shout at people coming in, and were quite intimidating."

Qedar has been a peace and LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer or questioning) activist for 20 to 30 years, so he found it troubling and unfair to be told by people outside of the conflict that he was doing the wrong thing while he was a guest showing his film about a historical figure.

Benn, a long-term fan of Freud, had seen the film making the rounds globally and wanted it to be shown to the psychoanalysis community in South Africa.

"In terms of psychoanalysis, we love Freud. He's the founder and probably one of the geniuses of our time," said Benn. "So I felt that it would be great to bring it to the

South African community because often these things go around the world and we miss out.

"I thought that this movie, which is brilliant and winning awards, was something that we should watch here. And we should watch it with the producer and director giving a talk. I reached out, we spoke, it was good chemistry, and we decided we would make it happen."

"Because the centre is located opposite the JHGC, they were singing songs that the Holocaust Museum needed



to acknowledge that a Holocaust was happening. They were loud and intimidating, and blocked people from coming in," Benn said.

"It got worse just before my arrival because we advertised it," Qedar said. "Then it escalated fast, and they were communicating with Mike, and there was some negotiation and a bit of bullying about the terms of protest. They decided that I was perhaps anti-war, but I wasn't anti-war enough. Because I didn't call it genocide, I call it another word, so you know, I didn't do the right thing there."

The protesters also posted pictures of Qedar and his son at an anti-Benjamin Netanyahu protest, and framed it as if he were a Netanyahu supporter on their social media. "I was giving out food for soldiers on 9 October because of the shortage in food," said Qedar, "and they called me an Israel Defense Forces [IDF] recruiter, which is a term that doesn't exist. What's an IDF recruiter? It's not a thing. It was unpleasant, especially the use of my son."

Qedar said that he felt threatened by the protesters outside the venue, and that the security present was useless.

"They [the protesters] were violent, personal, and threatening, but we didn't call the police," he said. "We felt like we were under siege and that any minute, they were going to penetrate the building. I didn't know what would happen."

While most of the protest action was outside the venue, one or two protesters bought tickets and were able to get inside the screening and disrupt the question and answer session. However, that was quickly stopped by other members of the audience.

"People started to leave, and it was hurtful as it had an impact on the screening, and then we had a vote as to whether to continue without political discussion," said Qedar. "I was afraid to leave the hall, but then we waited long enough, and they [the protesters] left so we could go home safely."

Though the experience upset him, Qedar said there wasn't any protest activity at the other screenings in Johannesburg and Cape Town. "I'm glad that it didn't snowball," he said. "Nothing happened later. It's a small, misguided phenomenon that was wrong and mislabelled."

He said many at the screening were confused about why the protest had happened.

"Everybody was appalled by this strange experience," Qedar said. He was astonished that these haters seemed to be taking on Freud. "Next thing, they are going to attack Einstein."

Qedar said he understood why people felt the need to protest, given the strong emotions involved. However,

they should consider who they are targeting.

"Some of the conversation and emotion stemmed from the current political situation – how do you relate to the Israeli government in South Africa and the memory of apartheid?" he said. "There's so much weight, so much historical burden, and it all seemed to be channelled into this evening. You also need to separate the historical burden from what happens now – people are quick to compare."

"I think it was a reaction. For example, one guy from BDS took over the microphone and said, 'I blame the Holocaust Museum for not calling it a genocide.' What's the connection to Freud?" he asked.



Yair Qedar

## Mandla Mandela's selective activism speaks loudly

OPINION

KENNETH MOKGATLHE



Nelson Mandela's grandson, Mandla Mandela's move to pursue anti-Israel campaigns may be viewed by some as positive, but it's worth noting that he leaves a cascade of problems in South Africa which his party, the African National Congress (ANC), has caused and fails to address.

It's his party, which he represented as a member of Parliament (MP) for many years, that has crippled the government at every level. It seems Mandela's approach is deficient in either compassion or basic common sense.

His cousins, Zaziwe Dlamini-Manaway and Zamaswazi Dlamini-Mandela, Nelson Mandela's granddaughters, recently embarked on a life-changing journey to Israel and Gaza to witness the conflict for themselves rather than relying on biased media reporting, which further complicates this complex conflict which has lasted for several decades. Their encounters changed their views about both Gaza and Israel. Unlike Mandela, their views aren't fixed.

Mandla Mandela has used the Israel-Palestine impasse as political capital to remain relevant in international discourse. During his time as a traditional leader and politician, it was his duty as MP to hold those who continued to steal public funds accountable. Public infrastructure collapsed in his home province of the Eastern Cape, but he didn't make a noise.

Each year, the Eastern Cape records the highest number of deaths of children from diarrhoea and malnutrition, but Mandela and his fellow leaders in the ANC haven't condemned these unnecessary deaths, which can be blamed on ineptitude, corruption, and mismanagement.

In 2008 alone, 80 children in the Okhahlamba District Municipality

died as a result of diarrhoea from unpurified water. As usual, Mandela didn't utter a single word then because the lives of the people of the Eastern Cape don't matter.

Or was it because such challenges don't draw media attention, and less political and financial interest than the Israel-Palestine conflict?

In the first six months of 2025, about 70 children have died from malnutrition, which should be blamed on the corrupt leadership of the ANC, which continues to collapse the government in that poor province. There's the possibility that the number of fatalities could be higher than those recorded at public facilities. Last year, 107 children were reported to have died from malnutrition in the Eastern Cape.

It doesn't augur well that we have someone like Mandla Mandela, who becomes an activist when it's convenient for him, but ignores other, more serious and urgent, situations in his backyard. It's said that "charity begins at home". This means that you should prioritise your own issues before you begin interfering in foreign places.

The situation isn't only dire in the Eastern Cape. There are parallel investigations into the criminal justice system by the Madlanga Commission appointed by the head of Cabinet, President Cyril Ramaphosa, as well as the Parliamentary Ad Hoc Committee doing the same thing. It shows that the country's intelligence is on its knees and has failed to perform its constitutional duties.

Mandla Mandela is aware that in 2024 alone, South Africa recorded 26 232 murders, surpassing the numbers coming out of war zones. He could start advocating at home to stop unnecessary killings by using his influence within his party and his kingdom. South Africa has problems where Mandela could play an effective role and help to transform the lives of the many, rather than grandstanding without any tangible results.

• Kenneth Mokgatle is a fellow at the Middle East Africa Research Institute (MEARI).



Mandla Mandela 'abducted' by Israeli forces during intercept of humanitarian flotilla

Lesotho Times

# Second wind: Cape Town's unofficial marathon of hope

CLAUDIA GROSS

When the Cape Town Marathon was cancelled less than an hour before the start, runners across the city refused to stay still. What followed was a day of heart, generosity, and resilience that turned disappointment into inspiration.

At 04:45 on Sunday morning, 19 October, runners across Cape Town woke to a message none of them expected. The 2025 Sanlam Cape Town Marathon had been cancelled less than an hour before it was due to begin. Months of training, sacrifice, and anticipation seemed to vanish in a single moment. Yet, as the sun rose over the Atlantic, the disappointment began to shift. The city that had been ready to host a world-class event found another way to run.

The Cape Town Marathon has become one of Africa's leading sporting events, drawing elite athletes and

community runners alike. With 24 000 entries this year, it was expected to strengthen the city's case to join the ranks of the world's major marathons. But overnight winds ripped through Cape Town, toppling fencing, tearing signage, and damaging parts of the starting area.

With gusts reaching dangerous speeds, organisers had little choice but to cancel. Safety, they said, had to come first. The shock was immediate. Runners who had travelled from across South Africa and abroad stood in disbelief, unsure what to do with the energy they had built up. But in true Cape Town fashion, the city's resourcefulness took over.

Almost as soon as the announcement spread, small groups began to gather. Along the Sea Point Promenade, through the southern suburbs, and across the City Bowl, runners tied their shoes and took to the streets. Some covered the full 42.2km, others shorter distances, but all shared the same intention: to



Aidan Bender lifting his daughter, Eliana Leah



Running the cancelled Cape Town Marathon

and fundraising, cancellation didn't stop its runners, the organisation says. "Even without medals, timing chips, or a finish line, they ran. Many completed the full 42.2km anyway, knowing exactly who they were running for: their DL Link Warriors."

The group dedicated the run to little Eliana, who had travelled to Cape Town to cheer on her father. He had planned to

finish what they had started.

There were no timing chips or medals, only determination. Cars slowed to offer water. Strangers shouted encouragement. Pacers who had planned to lead official groups lifted their flags anyway and guided spontaneous clusters of runners along new routes.

Among those who kept moving were 37 members of the DL Link team, who had trained to raise funds for South Africans living with cancer. Dressed in bright blue shirts, they ran their chosen distances along the promenade, cheered by supporters waving banners and shouting encouragement.

After the run, the team met for a meal and reflection. For Aidan Bender, whose five-year-old daughter, Eliana Leah, has been undergoing chemotherapy for leukaemia, the event carried deep significance. DL Link's organisers said the day was a reminder of "strength, love, and unwavering support" for those facing cancer.

After months of build-up, early mornings, sweat, tears,

carry her on his shoulders across the finish line. When the official line disappeared, DL Link made its own, banner and all, so that he could still keep his promise.

"Nothing stops DL Link," the organisation said.

"Nothing stops people who run with heart and soul for those fighting battles every day. No winds will stop us; they only push us further." For the DL Link community, the day was less about what was cancelled and more about what was affirmed: courage, compassion, and commitment.

The cancellation also led to an unexpected act of generosity. As official food sponsor of the marathon, Woolworths had prepared food for 24 000 runners: everything from 26 000 bananas and 20 000 Clemengolds to 5 000 apples, 1 800 sandwiches, and hundreds of kilograms of potatoes and dried fruit.

When the marathon was called off at 04:45, the Woolworths team immediately began co-ordinating with

Continued on page 14 >>

## Shmukler brings Blue Fairy magic to Pinocchio

Gina Shmukler is about to perform as the Blue Fairy in the annual Janice Honeyman pantomime in Johannesburg. The SA Jewish Report caught up with her in early rehearsal.

**You have performed so many varied roles in your career, but pantomime is one you have rarely touched on. Why?**

Honestly, my husband always wanted to leave Joburg on 16 December, so the panto was out for me. After *Mamma Mia*, I made a commitment to myself that I had to perform once a year, as it truly is my soul's happy place, and here I am.

**Describe the role of The Blue Fairy of Goodness Gracious?**

The Blue Fairy of Goodness Gracious, aka Bella Bouboulina of many blues, is sassy and fair. She loves a bit of fun and naughtiness while going about her business, making magic, and ensuring that Pinocchio learns his life lessons in order to become a boy.

**What would you like people to remember about this character?**

The Blue Fairy brings magic. If only we could wave a wand, and goodness would trump evil. What I would love the kids to take away from this is that you should always listen to your conscience – that niggly voice that tells you what's right and wrong. If that voice is there – don't do it! We may have a kinder place for kids – and adults. The truth always wins, even if it's hard.

**How close is this character to your personality? What's similar or different?**

There are similarities in that I genuinely believe in kindness and always strive for fairness. I wish I had a magic wand that brought peace to all.

**How did you make it your own?**

As in all theatre processes, but especially with Janice, you are empowered to create and mine the material to make it your own, to bring the truth and the joy.

**Is working on a pantomime different to other forms of theatre/musicals?**

Pantomime is a much more interactive and energetic connection with the audience, and a willingness to break the fourth wall (shatter the imaginary barrier that separates the stage from the spectators), which is thrilling and demanding.

**What's it like to work with Honeyman, especially as this is her 38th pantomime?**

Working with Janice and her entire creative team is super. I have had a long working relationship with her, and I carry the gems she shares as she is directing my work. Even as I teach, I tell students, 'This is Janice Honeyman 101, remember these things.' Someone should capture all her wisdom in a book that gets handed down to all generations.

**There are some beautiful lessons in this story. What would you most like your own child and the children around you to learn from it?**

Tell the truth, be kind, and remember to see the magic!



Gina Shmukler as the Blue Fairy of Goodness Gracious

**What was the last pantomime you did, and when did you do it? What was that like?**

Wow, you are giving my age away! I was in my twenties. It was *Snow White*, for Janice Honeyman at the Joburg Theatre. I loved playing her, and still remember the magic of that show.

**What drew you to do Pinocchio?**

I guess it's not so much *Pinocchio* but doing the pantomime itself as an adult performer. Pantos bring magic, and they are pure theatre, and I have loved taking my daughter to the annual panto since she was four, so what a treat to be a part of it this year!

**What is it about this pantomime that you really enjoy?**

I'm writing this in our first week of rehearsal. I'm loving watching all the young talent in the cast. They are fierce, disciplined, and fresh. It's also a space where we can bring our own flair to the character and create.

**What has been challenging, and how did you deal with it?**

Words, words, words! The Blue Fairy has a lot of words!

• Janice Honeyman's 2025 pantomime of Pinocchio will run from 31 October to 24 December 2025, at the Joburg Theatre.

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# Wiener exposes GNU back story in *The Deal*

GILANA LAB

When acclaimed journalist Mandy Wiener sat down to write *The Deal*, she didn't intend to write a book. "It was never the plan," she admitted at her recent book launch at Exclusive Books in Hyde Park on 16 October. "It just evolved, and then it happened. Before I knew it, I was really deep in it."

Wiener was in conversation with fellow senior political journalist Ziyanda Ngcobo, who also covered the origins of the Government of National Unity (GNU). The two of them are great friends, and originally agreed to write the book together, but that didn't materialise.

Wiener was sure that when the dust had settled after South Africa's most unpredictable election in 30 years, the story of how the GNU came about would have to be told. "All of us in the journalist class were trying to work out what the hell was going on behind closed doors," she said. "A few people started tweeting, saying, 'Don't worry, some journalist will write a book about this.' And I thought, you know what, I'll be that journalist."

For Wiener, *The Deal* isn't just another political book, it's a historical record. "Growing up, I was really fascinated by books like *Tomorrow's Another Country* and *Eight Days in September*," she said. "I always thought, I'd love to write a book that stood the test of time, that for generations, for posterity, would continue to tell the story of South Africa."

That sense of responsibility drove her to document the behind-the-scenes negotiations that followed the 2024 election – the chaos, the secrecy, and the monumental shift that led to the country's first true government of national unity since 1994.

"This is a story that had to be told as a record of our history," Wiener said. "It's not pro-GNU or anti-GNU. It doesn't take a side. I wanted to include everybody's voice."

*The Deal* delves far deeper than news reports or sound bites ever could. The book is based on nearly 100 hours of interviews with political leaders – from President Cyril Ramaphosa to the Democratic Alliance's John

Steenhuisen, and Freedom Front Plus's Pieter Groenewald.

Some interviews were easy to secure, others required relentless persistence, she said. "Every Monday morning, I'd message Vincent Magwenya, the president's spokesperson, begging for an interview with President Ramaphosa," Wiener recalled. "He finally told me, 'Tomorrow morning, 11:00 at the Foundation – get someone to stand in for you.' I couldn't believe it. It was 20:00 and I had finally got this interview."

That interview, squeezed in just before the book went to print, proved essential. "The story would never have been told fully without the president," she said. "He was the strategist behind the ANC's [African National Congress's] negotiating team, co-ordinating, using tactics from CODESA [the Convention for a Democratic South Africa]. To get him was necessary."

The book reveals that even those at the top were blindsided by the ANC's electoral collapse. "When I asked President Ramaphosa about it, he said it was like watching a horror show," Wiener said. "Another person close to him said it was like a bomb exploding under their feet."

Ramaphosa, she noted, had ignored the polls. "He felt going door to door, seeing the impact of the R350 grant, that that would get people to vote for the ANC." Instead, the ruling party lost its majority, a moment Wiener describes as "a fundamental shift in our politics".

"I call it a coalition draped in rainbow flair," she said of the new government. "What our politicians achieved in 14 days takes others 18 months to do. It was largely peaceful. The judiciary presided over it, and a president and Cabinet were appointed in 30 days. I don't think we celebrate that enough."

One of the most gripping parts of *The Deal* delves into



Mandy Wiener and Ziyanda Ngcobo

the internal tensions of political parties. Said Ngcobo, "We always report on factions within the ANC, but the infighting in the DA [Democratic Alliance] was something else."

Wiener agreed. "They described it as robust and creative differences," she said, laughing. "But there were stand-up screaming matches on the pavement outside a hotel with Tony Leon waving his finger in Helen Zille's face."

Even after the book was finished, several politicians asked her to remove expletives from their quotes. "The amount of F-bombs were vastly reduced upon request," she admitted. "But that's the thing, everyone has a different version of the truth."

Wiener also uncovered how business interests shaped negotiations. "There was this constant hovering, ominous threat of the markets," she said. "The DA spoke about being under pressure from funders, getting phone calls from lawyers in New York and investors saying, 'You have to get a deal over the line.'"

Ramaphosa himself, she noted, confronted business leaders. "He told them, 'Don't come here and put pressure on me. You've been bad-mouthing the country. Go speak to the DA and sort this out.'"

Much of the real action, Wiener said, happened

through "back channels" – informal networks of wealthy intermediaries. "That's the story you didn't get in the media at the time," she said. "That's why telling it retrospectively matters."

Though *The Deal* is rich in political intrigue, Wiener insists it's ultimately about people. "I wanted to get to know them as humans," she said. "We see politicians campaigning, but we don't see who they are when they're home, watching the results come in."

She laughed about her curiosity. "I want to know what's going through John Steenhuisen's mind when he wakes up in the middle of the night and turns to his wife and says, 'I'm not sure we're going to be able to get this back.' Or what Ramaphosa is thinking when he's watching the results at home in Hyde Park."

Reflecting on the fragile GNU, Wiener offered perhaps her most memorable metaphor of the night: "I like to describe it as the parents being in a miserable marriage but staying together for the kids. The kids are you and me – the citizens. And I think they realise they have to stay together because the alternative is too terrifying to contemplate."

Despite the uncertainty, she believes the coalition will endure, at least for now. "It's going to hold," she said. "Because the alternative is too terrible to contemplate."

After months of research and interviews, Wiener confessed that finishing *The Deal* was its own kind of victory. "It was exhausting," she said. "It took a lot of begging, a lot of energy, a lot of patience from my family. But the best part was actually getting access to these people and understanding them."

As the launch drew to a close, Wiener said her publisher, Terry Morris, called *The Deal* "one of those books that will stand the test of time." It's a sentiment hard to argue with as it is a work that captures not just a political turning point, but a nation trying to redefine itself.

Or, as Wiener herself put it, "We've had a fundamental shift in the landscape of our politics. There has been a seminal change, and because it all happened so smoothly, we haven't truly felt the impact yet."

# Cape Town Jewry unites in hope for a new day

MICHAEL KRANSORFF

The Cape southeaster may have blown the Cape Town Marathon off course, but it couldn't keep the Jewish community away from the 7 October commemoration "A New Day Will Rise". Nearly a thousand people filled the Albrow Centre in Gardens on Monday evening, 20 October, coming together to remember, weep, sing, and, in the end, dance again.

It was an evening that captured the full emotional range of the past two years since the horrors of 7 October 2023. As Rachel Goldberg-Polin, the mother of slain Israeli-American hostage Hersh Golberg-Polin, so poignantly put it on the day the hostages were released, "There is a time to sob and a time to dance,

and we have to do both now." That was the spirit of this remarkable gathering.

It was an important moment of unity, bringing together the full spectrum of Jewish communal life



including Bnei Akiva; Habonim; Netzer; Diller; BBYO; Herzlia Schools; Cape Town Torah High; the Cape South African Jewish Board of Deputies;

the Israel Centre, South African Union of Jewish Students; Women's International Zionist Organisation (WIZO); Elevate; The Base; and the Jewish National Fund South Africa. Each organisation contributed to the evening's narrative of remembrance and renewal, reflecting the strength and diversity of Cape Town Jewry's connection to Israel.

The programme, compiled by the South African Zionist

Federation Cape Council, opened with haunting images of the 1 200 lives lost on that black Saturday. Prayers were led by Cantor Ivor Joffe and the Marais Road Shul choir, followed by video messages of thanks and support for the Cape Town Jewish community from President Isaac Herzog; Ifat Ovadia-Luski, the chairperson of Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael Jewish National Fund; and Israel's Christian allies.

The highlight of the evening was a stirring violin performance by Agam Berger, a survivor of Hamas captivity who spent 482 days in Gaza. Her



music, from *Yerushalayim Shel Zahav* to *Habayta to Hallelujah*, carried the audience through her journey from pain to hope. Her quiet strength silenced the hall, and many in the crowd wept as her violin gave voice to what words couldn't express.

The focus then turned to resilience and renewal as Tamara Davidson, the vice-chairperson of the South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) Cape Council, reminded the community that hope isn't passive. "Hope is

sustained by community and rooted in memory and passion, directing us toward action."

She spoke of Jewish resilience. "The story of the Jewish people, and the story of Israel, has many chapters of pain. But each chapter is meticulously bound together with thread forged in resilience, and a stubborn, luminous insistence on rebuilding, on singing, on choosing life."

Davidson paid tribute to South African heroes who have "held the line", from CSO volunteers to parents returning their children to Jewish schools, saying that this collective strength embodies the covenant between faith, community, and action.

The JNF SA and The Base community were also recognised for their ongoing work to support returned hostages, bringing them to South Africa for rest and recovery. Their initiatives, along with WIZO's



public hostage-awareness campaigns on the Sea Point promenade and outside Parliament, as well as SAZF Cape Council Chairperson David Cohen's 26-day solidarity run along the Israel Trail, showcase the deep sense of shared purpose that has characterised the Jewish response since 7 October.

Reflecting on the evening, Rabbi Aharon Zulberg of The Base said, "It was heartwarming to see the pride the Cape Town Jewish community has for the work its members and organisations have done to support Israel during this challenging time. It's been wonderful to partner with

so many people who have such a strong love for *Am Yisrael*."

As the Herzlia Vocal Ensemble closed the evening with *A New Day Will Rise* and *Hatikvah*, the message was clear: Cape Town's Jewish community may have gathered in mourning, but it left renewed – united in hope, faith, and an unbreakable bond with Israel.





South African Olim continue to play a meaningful role in Israel's rebuilding and rehabilitation, assisting evacuees, supporting our heroes & helping restore communities in the North & South

## ALIYAH: BUILDING ISRAEL. TOGETHER.

As we approach Aliyah Day, I find myself reflecting on the extraordinary strength and unity of our Olim - those who arrived decades ago and those who came in the midst of a war.

In one of the most difficult and traumatic times our nation has ever faced, people around the world still choose to make Aliyah. They come not only to live in Israel, but to contribute - to be part of rebuilding, healing and strengthening the country they love. This spirit lies at the heart of Telfed's story and of our community's Zionist roots.

Over the past two years, we have seen what it means to truly stand together - renovating community centres in kibbutzim and moshavim along the Gaza border, supporting our heroes, assisting the wounded and embracing evacuees. Aliyah is not the end of a journey, it is the beginning of a lifelong commitment to give back, to build and to belong.

At Telfed, we are privileged to walk this journey with our Olim - helping them find their place, strengthen their roots and turn shared values into action. Together, we celebrate every Oleh and Olah who continues to weave courage, compassion and Zionism into the living fabric of Israel. We call on you to join us in building Israel's future.

Maish Isaacson, Chairman of Telfed



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# Change in airwaves as Feldman takes over ChaiFM

GILANA LAB

Longtime broadcaster and morning show host Howard Feldman is taking over the reins of ChaiFM as Kathy Kaler, who has been at the helm for more than two decades, hands over leadership of the country's only Jewish community radio station.

The move marks both the end of an era and the beginning of a new, ambitious chapter for the station.

"Everything is about timing, and it's perfect timing," Kaler, who will be involved until February 2026, told the *SA Jewish Report* this week. "I've been doing this for nearly 22 years. I never started ChaiFM for myself. It has always belonged to the community. We have a board on which all the community organisations sit."

Kaler maintained that the decision wasn't difficult; rather it was natural. "If I had started it for myself, it would be difficult, but I didn't. It's for the community," she said. "I've got other projects I want to begin and some to complete, and I want

to do that while I still have the energy to do it. I'm very, very proud of what we've built, and I have no doubt Howard is going to continue that legacy."

Feldman agrees that the timing could not have been better. "It's one of those things that happens slowly and then all at once," he said. "For years, I'd spoken to Kathy about taking ChaiFM to the next level, but the timing was

never right. Then a few months ago, I sensed it was time. I reached out, and within days, we had an agreement. It was years in the making, but when it happened, it happened quickly because the timing was right."

Having hosted his own show on ChaiFM for nearly a decade, Feldman has long been part of the station's heartbeat. His transition into leadership feels less like a takeover and more like a continuation of a shared vision.

"Kathy ran this for 21 years and built it up from scratch," he said. "She saw that it was time for new blood, new management, and new ideas. It can't be easy for her, but it's a credit to her that she recognised the need for the next phase, and that she's supported it so fully."



The ChaiFM team in action

Kaler echoes the sentiment. "Howard has been a partner in terms of programming and funding for a very long time, a lot longer than anybody really knows," she said. "I think the station is going to go from strength to strength under his leadership."

For Feldman, the vision for ChaiFM's next chapter is clear: to strengthen its community focus while modernising its reach.

"The potential is enormous," he said. "I'm bringing in a team of people to look at marketing, digital strategy, and programming to make the station more viable and resilient. We want to grow, diversify our shows, and most importantly, adapt to the changing digital landscape."

He emphasised the need for evolution. "We have to be more digital," he said. "Younger audiences aren't turning on the radio the way older generations did. They're on podcasts, YouTube, and social media. So we have to meet them where they are, with content that's relevant and exciting."

But even with this focus on growth and innovation, Feldman insists that ChaiFM's identity as a platform for honest community dialogue will remain its core. "We're a robust community station," he said. "We talk about the things that matter, and we're prepared to have the difficult conversations others avoid. It's about being independent, real, and relevant."

Like many community organisations, ChaiFM has faced financial pressures, and Feldman isn't shying away from the topic.

"There were financial constraints," he acknowledged. "The station went through a lean time, and that was one of the reasons I stepped in to help address that. But this isn't a corporate buyout. Some of it I'm self-funding, and some comes from people who believe in ChaiFM's importance. There are no big investors behind it, just a few of us who care deeply about making sure that the station not only survives but thrives."

That mix of personal investment and

community support reflects the ethos Kaler established from the start. "I've always put the community, the listener, before anybody else," she said proudly. "That's what it's all about."

Despite the leadership change, Feldman said ChaiFM's staff remained strong and stable. "Everyone's staying," he confirmed. "We've got incredibly talented people. Mukundi, for example, is taking on more responsibilities.

He's brilliant at content. It would be a waste for him to focus only on technical control."

He credits the team's hard work and reputation for drawing in high-calibre guests and building a loyal audience. "Our producers are exceptional and I think people trust us to have meaningful,

authentic conversations. That's why guests come on, and that's why listeners stay."

The feedback from the community, he says, has been overwhelmingly positive. "People are excited about what's ahead. I'm daunted by the responsibility, but I'm also incredibly excited. I want ChaiFM to be different, quirky, and real. We're a smart community, and we deserve content that reflects that."

As she prepares to hand over the reins officially, Kaler says she does so with gratitude and optimism. "I'm happy about it," she said. "I think it's wonderful. The timing is perfect. ChaiFM has never been stronger, and I believe Howard will take it to even greater heights."



Howard Feldman and ChaiFM host, Simon Anstey

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## Second wind: Cape Town's unofficial marathon of hope

>>Continued from page 11

local charities to ensure that nothing went to waste. By 10:00, more than 500kg of food had been collected by 18 organisations, including orphanages, old-age homes, and soup kitchens.

Spencer Sonn, Woolworths' Chief Customer Officer and an avid runner, said he had planned to be at the halfway mark cheering on the athletes, including many Woolworths employees. "Of course, it was disappointing to hear the marathon was cancelled because we know how much effort goes into training," he said. "The silver lining was that all that good food helped feed our city's most vulnerable people. That is the Woolworths difference in action."

The donation formed part of Woolworths' Good Business Journey, a programme that last year provided more than 800 000kg of surplus food to South African charities. On a morning defined by resilience, the gesture reinforced the idea that setbacks can still nourish hope.

Among those who ran despite the cancellation was Nicole Glickman, who had travelled from Johannesburg to take part. She leads Catch Me If You Can, a women's running group established to promote fitness, safety, and solidarity among female runners. "When the news broke that the marathon was off, there was confusion and disbelief," Glickman said. "But I told my group that we could still run what we trained for."

By sunrise, they were ready. At 06:49, Glickman and her teammates began their own marathon along the Sea Point Promenade. They covered the full 42.2km, enduring fierce winds and the absence of hydration stations or crowd support. "It was harder than an organised race because we had no entertainment or crowds to push us along," she said. "But it was also more meaningful. It reminded us that we run for ourselves and for each other."

For Glickman, running is more than a sport. Having taken it up four years ago while recovering from a traumatic loss, she sees it as a source of emotional healing

and strength. Her group also advocates for women's safety in public spaces, partnering with Women for Change to raise awareness of gender-based violence. "We run to reclaim our streets and to show that women belong in every public space," she said. "That morning showed us that when women stand together, nothing can stop us."

Across Cape Town, the story was the same. Families stood on pavements offering fruit and water; cyclists stopped to cheer; and pedestrians joined the runners for a few kilometres. Cafés along the promenade opened early to serve tired but smiling athletes. By mid-morning, the streets were filled with music, laughter, and conversation. Social media buzzed with photos of smiling runners crossing self-made finish lines and hugging friends. Hashtags such as #CTMarathonSpirit and #RunAnyway trended throughout the day.

Marathon organisers expressed regret at the cancellation, but said the safety of runners, volunteers, and spectators had to remain the priority. They commended the generosity of sponsors such as Woolworths, and the resilience shown by the running community. Future plans include reviewing the event's weather protocols and possibly moving the date to reduce the risk of spring wind disruptions.

What unfolded on 19 October went far beyond sport. The day became a study in perseverance, creativity, and kindness. The runners showed that meaning can be found even when plans collapse, and that community can transform disappointment into celebration. For DL Link, it was a statement of faith and endurance. For Woolworths, it was a demonstration of corporate compassion. For Nicole Glickman and her fellow runners, it was proof of leadership, safety, and sisterhood in action.

Each story echoed the truth that the human spirit cannot be cancelled. The 2025 Cape Town Marathon will be remembered not for the gusts that halted it, but for the hearts that kept it moving.

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

# Waiting to exhale

There are moments in our collective memory that etch themselves into our hearts, and this Simchat Torah, marking two Hebrew years since the horrors of 7 October 2023, is one such moment. On that day, Hamas shattered our world, leaving scars that still ache. Yet, this year, the return of the last twenty living hostages has brought a measure of healing, allowing a little joy to rekindle the spirit of this festival. The circle, though not fully closed, feels a step closer to wholeness, and for that, we are grateful.

Still, we cannot fully exhale. Hamas continues to withhold the release of the bodies of those still held, denying them the dignity of a proper burial. We continue to demand their swift release so that they may be buried with the dignity and honour they so deserve. To those families, bearing the unbearable weight of loss, we extend our deepest love and unwavering support.

The South African Jewish community feels this pain acutely with the return of the mortal remains of Daniel Perez, one of our own. Born and raised in South Africa before making aliya at 13, Daniel was a tank commander at Nahal Oz, where his extraordinary bravery on that fateful day saved countless lives. Tragically, he paid the ultimate price, his body taken to Gaza and held as a cruel bargaining chip. It is our solemn prayer and hope that the return of his body and his proper burial may provide his family some small comfort among their boundless sorrow.

Daniel's funeral was attended by

## ABOVE BOARD

Karen Milner



hundreds and broadcast live, including on international news networks, a testament to the importance of this moment and the respect that his family holds. He was eulogised by released hostage Matan Angrest, who was a member of Daniel's tank crew, and by Israeli President Isaac Herzog who stated, "On that bitter, hasty morning two years ago, Captain Daniel Perez commanded 'Team Perez' with composure and extraordinary courage."

The juxtaposition of our joy, relief, and continued grief was evident at the powerful 7 October commemoration hosted by the South African Zionist Federation at Yeshiva College last week. The event included a violin performance from former hostage Agam Berger. Agam's performance was a triumph of courage and stoicism, leaving few dry eyes among the thousands in attendance.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to America and the Arab nations – including our fellow African nation, Egypt – which have brought about this historical moment. It's our hope and prayer that this moment of calm and quiet will lead to a lasting peace and a period of prosperity for Israel and the region as a whole.

• 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

# Powerhouse performers for Investec Jewish Achiever Awards

GILANA LAB

There's just more than one week to go before the gala Investec Jewish Achiever Awards 2025 on 2 November. At this event, we recognise outstanding individuals who have excelled not only in their professional fields, but in community service, culture, arts, and social impact. And, along with the inspiring main event, there will also be a showstopping night of music, energy, and pure talent.

The entertainment will feature, among others, two powerhouse performers who are taking South African and international stages by storm: Dylan Janse van Rensburg and Dani Bitton.

Fresh off his starring role as Joseph in *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, Janse van Rensburg has been hailed as one of South Africa's brightest young musical theatre stars. Audiences have been raving about his magnetic stage presence and soaring vocals. One reviewer described him as "Absolutely captivating – his *Close Every Door* gave me chills." Another called him "a born performer with the voice and charisma to carry any stage".

Whether you've seen him on stage or are discovering him for the first time, Janse van Rensburg brings a mix of passion, precision, and charm that will have the Achiever audience on their feet. His performance promises to be a highlight of the night, a dazzling

celebration of talent and joy.

The sensational Dani Bitton, a local turned international singer and performer, DJ, and entertainer, will also grace the Investec Jewish Achiever Awards stage. And she knows exactly how to light up a room!

Known around the world as DJ Dani B, she's performed everywhere from New York to Hong Kong, and brings an irresistible mix of pop, dance, and soul.

But Bitton's story goes beyond music. After facing down major personal challenges, including a cancer diagnosis, she's turned her journey into a message of resilience and empowerment. Her fans describe her performances as "electrifying, emotional, and full of life". As one put it, "Every song she sings feels like a celebration of survival and joy."

Expect powerhouse vocals, infectious beats, and the kind of feel-good energy that leaves audiences glowing.

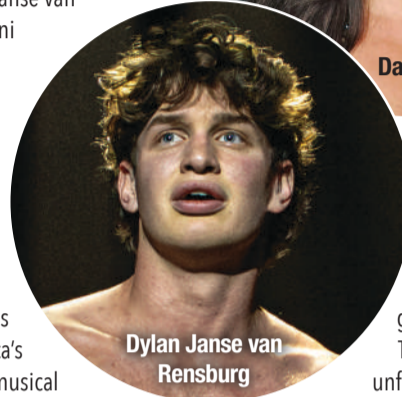
Together, Janse van Rensburg and Bitton promise an unforgettable evening, a blend of world-class theatre and global music flair that perfectly captures the spirit of the Jewish Achiever Awards: excellence, creativity, and the celebration of human potential.

So get ready for a night of inspiration for communal and national pride. This year's Investec Jewish Achiever Awards isn't just about honouring those who make a difference, it's about celebrating the magic that happens when extraordinary talent takes the stage.

Don't miss out, because when these two perform, it's more than entertainment. It's an experience. Book your tables on [bit.ly/ja25book](http://bit.ly/ja25book)



Dani Bitton



Dylan Janse van Rensburg





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# How to take the ping out of WhatsApp groups



**INNER VOICE**  
Howard Feldman

Every family has one. And as unique as you might think they are, they hardly differ from each other. Each has at least one participant who has never contributed to the conversation; each has an annoying person who shares outrageously fake news; and each has someone who has stormed off the group in protest, only to return quietly, if only to find out the theme of Jackson's birthday.

Family WhatsApp groups are a microcosm of that family unit: part love, part dysfunction, part endurance test. They exist somewhere between a bulletin board and a therapy session. They're where recipes, memes, holiday photos, and unsolicited medical advice meet. It's where arguments about politics or religion are often prefaced with, "I



don't want to start a fight, but..." right before starting a fight.

Then there are the class groups, the modern-day equivalent of the school-gate conversation, only with less eye contact and more hysteria. These groups are ruled by that parent who posts at 22:30 asking if "tomorrow is civvies day", sparking 47 notifications before anyone can reply with a simple "yes". They are also a place where a small misunderstanding about the tuck shop can turn into a full-blown debate about school policy, morality, and whether Mrs Grayson should still be teaching maths after what happened on the outing to the zoo – don't even get me started!

But where WhatsApp groups get truly complicated and troubling is in the workplace.

Or in professional-specific spaces. What was meant to be a tool for co-ordination and communication has increasingly become a platform for political expression, virtue signalling, and, far too often, hostility.

Over the past two years, many Jewish professionals have found themselves in work or industry WhatsApp groups that have morphed from sharing professional updates to becoming spaces of open, aggressive, anti-Israel sentiment. It's one thing to debate foreign policy around a dining room table; it's another when that debate turns into a torrent of memes, slogans, and slurs in what's supposed to be a professional chat.

When this happens, it's tempting to fire back or to leave in protest, but neither option really helps. A more constructive approach is to set the boundary clearly, calmly, and collectively. Something like: "Where I can respond and offer a counter to this, I'm choosing not to because it's not relevant to this group. I'm sure most participants would agree that introducing political or religious debate here will lead only to unhelpful conflict. I'd appreciate it if the admin and others on this group could support keeping this space professional." If necessary, repeat

this, and then repeat it again and again.

That kind of message doesn't escalate the conflict, it reframes it. It reminds everyone of the purpose of the group, and it often earns silent gratitude from those who felt uncomfortable but didn't know how to say so.

The irony, of course, is that WhatsApp was meant to make us more connected. Instead, it's made it easier to broadcast outrage and harder to maintain civility. The same app that keeps grandparents in touch with their grandkids has become the arena where misinformation and moral grandstanding thrive.

The time has come to reclaim these spaces – or at least to remember their purpose. Family groups should be about love; school groups about logistics and Jackson's Pirates of the Caribbean party; and professional groups about professionalism.

Because once our digital conversations lose respect and context, they stop being conversations at all. They become shouting matches, conducted quietly, one ping at a time.

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