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# Jewish Report

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## Rabbi sues for defamation over 'genocide' claim

TALI FEINBERG

Rabbi Nissen Goldman, the co-director of Chabad on Campus at the University of Cape Town (UCT), is suing local author Zaahied Sallie and two South African anti-Israel organisations for defamation. This is after Sallie held up a poster showing his face, naming him, and saying he charged him with "genocide" at a protest earlier this year.

In March, the South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) Cape Council hosted a conference titled "Let's Talk! Zionist Connect: Cape Town 2025" at which they hosted local and international speakers including Gilad Erdan, a former Israeli ambassador to the United Nations (UN).

The event saw spirited debate on Zionism. Several panel discussions took place, and Goldman participated in one titled "Jewish on Campus 2025". Anti-Israel extremists protested outside the venue amidst a large security presence. It was there that Sallie held up a sign he had made with a photo of Goldman, along with the words "Rabbi Nissen, you can't hide, we charge you with genocide."

Local extremist groups South African Jews for a Free Palestine (SAJFP) and Cape Town Intifada (CTI) shared the images on social media, and are therefore also being sued by Goldman.

Cape South African Jewish Board of Deputies (Cape SAJBD) Chairperson Simone Sulcas says, "The Cape SAJBD stands in solidarity with Rabbi Goldman. We reject the baseless and defamatory accusation of genocide directed at him and, by extension, the Jewish community. Such claims are legally and morally unfounded and serve only to incite hostility and further misinformation."

Sallie is now raising funds for his legal defence, using the platform BackaBuddy. His fundraiser is titled "Zionist lawfare against justice activism." He writes, "I heeded a call from the SAJFP to protest outside the venue. During the protest, I held up a poster exposing [Rabbi Goldman's] association with Erdan and the genocidal state that he

represents and defends."

Goldman is the son of Rabbi Yossy Goldman, life rabbi emeritus of Sydenham Shul and the president of the South African Rabbinical Association. The younger Goldman was born and raised in South Africa, and is no way "associated" with Erdan or Israel. He is simply a Jew living in the diaspora, devoting himself to giving students a full, enriched Jewish life on campus.

"Every bit of support will help us to resist Zionist intimidation and their attempts to silence us in exposing Israel's crimes and holding its supporters accountable," wrote Sallie.

He said the SAZF had "hosted the Zionist conference flagrantly in the very country that brought the

[International Court of Justice] case. It remains our moral duty to act and speak up."

As of 18 November, Sallie had raised R34 600. One donor wrote, "May the Almighty facilitate success against these hooligans." Another supporter wrote, "Freedom to the world from Zionism."

The court summons, filed in the Western Cape High Court on 3 September 2025, describes how Sallie held up the poster knowing and intending that it would be photographed and shared widely.

The summons describes the poster as defamatory because it's understood to mean that Goldman has "perpetrated the crime of genocide [or] is responsible for the perpetration by others of the crime of genocide".

It frames Goldman as "a murderer" and "was published with the intention of injuring his reputation".

The summons says Goldman has suffered damages which Sallie refuses to pay. Goldman is asking for R500 000 in damages and an order directing Sallie to make an unconditional apology, "published in a manner and form to be determined by this court". He is also asking for costs. Goldman has indicated his agreement to the possibility of mediation.

"Charging someone with committing genocide is serious," says Milton Shain, local antisemitism expert and emeritus professor of history at UCT. "To my knowledge, Goldman has not been in combat in Gaza. And, even if he had been, Israel hasn't been found guilty of committing genocide."

All Goldman did was "participate in an event with Erdan", says Shain. Yet the poster is "unequivocal" in condemning him. "This is madness. Soon Zionists will have to wear a yellow 'Zionist' star, if Sallie and his ilk get their way. Supporting Israel, a legitimate member of the family of nations, and a state created by the UN, will be proscribed."

In their defendant's plea, the SAJFP said it had removed the image from its social media after it received Goldman's letter of demand. It said its Instagram post was simply "reporting" on the event. It also said that by attending the conference and being on a panel, Goldman "participated in propaganda", and therefore the poster was justified.

CTI shared the image on social media along with the caption "Rabbi Nissen is one of the hardest Zio agenda pushers in Cape Town." In its defendant's plea, it said the statement on the poster wasn't intended to be understood literally, but "the sting of the statement was true and published in the public interest". It said that because Goldman is a "public figure", the law requires him to be "more robust in the face of criticism".

Continued on page 3>>

## Unlearning hatred



Rawan Osman in South Africa this week

See story on page 7

Photo: Ilan Ossendryver



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# Ady Wander, gentle Holocaust survivor, dies at 89

STAFF REPORTER

**A**dy Wander, who passed away on 12 November at the age of 89, leaves only 15 remaining Holocaust survivors in Johannesburg, and only 12 still active enough to participate in Holocaust memorial gatherings.

Wander, originally known as Abba Adol Vanda, was born on 20 January 1936 in Vishniks, Bukovina.

His parents were forced by authorities to name him "Adolf", a marker of the growing antisemitism that would soon engulf their lives. During the war, his family was among 55 Jewish families taken from the town of Vishniks.

They were deported to the Copagorod Ghetto in Ukraine, where several thousand Jews were imprisoned under extreme conditions. Of those 55 families, only five people survived the Holocaust: Wander, his parents, a man, and a woman.

One day in the ghetto, the authorities asked for a volunteer capable of fitting windows in a local school building. Wander's father stepped forward, believing his skills might offer their family a chance of survival.

As a result, Wander and his parents were taken out of the ghetto and housed with a Ukrainian woman named Baba Mestra. By repairing the windows and maintaining the building, Wander's father secured their safety.

Wander credits this for the family's survival, saying that if they had remained in the ghetto, they wouldn't have lived.

After the war ended, the family attempted to reach Israel, but struggled due to immigration restrictions. Wander's father purchased three bottles of whiskey and used them to bribe a railway official overseeing a train transporting tanks from Ukraine toward Germany.

The official agreed to hide Wander and his parents under one of the tanks, instructing them to disembark at Chernivtsi. They travelled this way for a week before reaching the city, where they stayed until arrangements could be made to move further west. From Constanța in Romania, they eventually secured passage by boat and arrived in Israel in 1950.

Israel was facing a housing crisis at the time, and there was nowhere for new immigrants to live. Wander's family therefore spent four years in the Athlit transit camp near Haifa before moving into newly constructed public housing, known as *sikunim*.

Wander grew up there, and later served in the Israel Defense Forces, becoming a sergeant major.

In 1967, following the Six-Day War, he travelled to South Africa with his wife, who was born in the country and was working in Israel for the Designers' Federation.

The couple settled in South Africa. Wander worked in the dry-cleaning industry and later in the motor trade, including at Nissan from 1987 until 2009, continuing for several more years until his retirement.

Wander was an active member of the Johannesburg Holocaust survivor community, with his kind and gentle nature touching the hearts of all who met him.

Wander is survived by his wife, Rebecca, daughter, Sarah, and granddaughter, Leora.



Ady Wander with King David Victory Park students at a survivors' meeting at the JHGC, 2023

Photo: Catherine Boyd, JHGC



Rabbi Dovid Hazdan and Ady Wander at Sukkot this year

## Beans and birthrights

Torah Thought

"How odd of G-d, to choose the Jews," an antisemite had scrawled on the wall. One of our own responded, "No, not odd, the Jews chose G-d."

This week, we read of the birth of twins to Isaac and Rebecca. Jacob and Esau couldn't have been more different. Jacob is the diligent Torah scholar. Esau is a violent hunter.

One day, Esau returns from the hunt and finds Jacob cooking a pot of lentils. Esau pleads for the lentils. Jacob proposes a barter arrangement: I will give you the lentils and in return, you give me your birthright. Historically, the first born were chosen to minister in G-d's temple. Esau accepts the suggestion and the deal is done.

Yet, when we get to the Book of Exodus, (4,22) when G-d sends Moses to Pharaoh to redeem His people, He describes them as, "My son, My first born, Israel" and Rashi comments, "Here the Holy One Blessed is He affixed His seal to the sale of the birthright which Jacob purchased from Esau."

Four generations later? Why did it take G-d so long to put His stamp of approval on a deal that was entered into hundreds of years earlier?

The Israeli Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Moshe-Zvi Neriya, answered, You can sell your birthright for beans, but you can't buy a birthright for beans. To throw away one's holy heritage is easy, but to claim it takes years of effort.

Like the war hero who earned a row of medals for bravery and

courage under fire. Sadly, in his old age he is forced to sell his medals to survive. So, someone else walks into the pawnbroker, buys them, pins them to his chest, and walks down the street, proud as a peacock. But is there any validity to this shameless fraud? This man is no hero. He's a pathetic fool.

To wear the esteemed badge of honour of "My Firstborn Israel", the Jewish people had to be worthy of the honour. It wasn't enough that their father, Jacob, had purchased the birthright.

When Jacob bought the birthright from Esau, it was all legal. But did Jacob earn that hallowed title, or was he like the fellow who bought the war medals? But generations later, when his children went through the iron furnace of Egyptian bondage and still, with amazing faith and tenacity, kept their heritage, then they were deemed worthy of the honour of the birthright.

After the blood, sweat, and tears of slavery does the great Notary on High, the heavenly Commissioner of Oaths, take out that yellowed parchment deed of sale that had been waiting for generations and put His official stamp and the wax seal on that document. And He says, "Now you are worthy of the birthright. Today you are My Son, My

Rabbi Yossy Goldman  
 Life Rabbi Emeritus  
 Sydenham Shul



Firstborn, Israel."

Being Jewish is the birthright of every Jew. But it's not enough that G-d chose us, we must choose G-d. It's not good enough that our parents and grandparents were good Jews, or that my *zayde* was a rabbi or a *schochet* and my *bobba* made the world's best blintzes. What are we doing to earn our stripes?

You can sell your birthright for beans, but you can't buy a birthright for beans.

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# South African neo-Nazi's visa revoked after Sydney rally

CLAUDIA GROSS

Matthew Gruter, a South African civil engineer, was identified participating in a vehemently antisemitic neo-Nazi rally outside the New South Wales Parliament in Sydney on 9 November. This week, the Australian federal government revoked Gruter's visa, and he is likely to be heading back to South Africa soon after three years there.

The New South Wales Police Service confirmed that the group had been granted permission to protest. Police later said an internal breakdown in communication contributed to the authorisation being issued. The demonstration proceeded despite hate speech and incitement laws already in force in the state.

South African-born former chief executive of the New South Wales Jewish Board of Deputies, Dr Vic Alhadeff, told the

Affairs minister had recently taken similar action against other controversial figures, he said, pointing out that though Australia was experiencing significant social tension, "the overwhelming majority of Australians are fair-minded, law-abiding people."

"The issues that our country has encountered in recent times have emanated from a small but vocal minority," Alhadeff said. "What's needed more than ever is for civil society to recognise the erosion of social harmony and unequivocally condemn it."

Alhadeff said the NSN had declared its intention to form a political party called the White Australia Party. Under New South Wales law, a party requires only 750 signatures to register for the legislative council, and 1 500 signatures to register federally. He said lawyers were examining whether registration could be blocked on the basis that the name or logo may be offensive.

Alhadeff said that the New South Wales premier was considering extending the parliamentary session in November to introduce stricter anti-Nazi legislation. Proposed measures include banning swastikas and Hitler salutes, and tightening restrictions on hate speech.

South African Jewish Board of Deputies National Director Wendy Kahn said her organisation welcomed the action taken by the Australian authorities.

"We applaud the firm stance taken by the Australian authorities in deporting South African national Matthew Gruter following his neo-Nazi activities. This decisive action sends an important message to those who propagate antisemitic hatred and threaten Jewish communities that such behaviour carries consequences."

Kahn said the Board was monitoring developments and "should Gruter attempt to import his message of hate into our country, we will respond swiftly and firmly".

Dr Milton Shain, emeritus professor of Historical Studies at the University of Cape Town, said, "It comes as no surprise to read of Matthew Gruter. While I don't know if he was on any watchlist in South Africa, I do know that we have had our fair share of neo-Nazis through the decades." He referred to earlier individuals and organisations, and said, "Holocaust denial has flourished in certain circles. It will be interesting to know more about the South African circles in which Gruter operated."

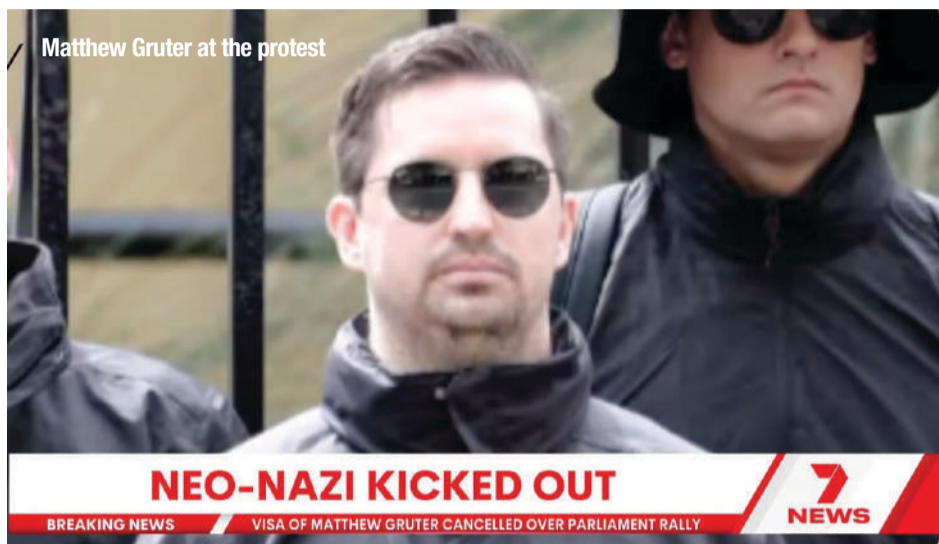
*SA Jewish Report* that the rally occurred during an already difficult period for Jewish communities in Australia.

He said that since 7 October 2023, there had been 262 antisemitic incidents reported to Jewish communal bodies. These included the destruction of a synagogue in Melbourne; vandalism at Jewish schools; doxing of Jewish artists; and incidents at universities. He said young people were instructed not to wear their Jewish school uniforms on sports fields, and some individuals felt unsafe displaying visible Jewish symbols.

"This has been an extraordinarily traumatic time for Australian Jewry," Alhadeff said. He said this rally was especially concerning because until very recently, people participating in such a demonstration "would have had masks on their faces. Now they were unashamedly identifying themselves."

"Media identified a number of the participants," Alhadeff said. "One worked for the railways; another worked for Australia Post; another was a fitness trainer; and the South African person was a civil engineer working for a senior engineering firm that had contracts with the Australian Defence Force and the New South Wales government." He said this indicated a spread "across civil society".

Alhadeff said the response from Australian authorities was swift once the identities of the participants became known. The Home



Matthew Gruter at the protest

The rally involved about 60 members of the National Socialist Network (NSN), Australia's largest neo-Nazi organisation. Gruter appeared unmasked and was photographed wearing a silver wristband inscribed with the Hitler Youth slogan "blood and honour", which indicates senior status within the group.

Australian Home Affairs Minister Tony Burke confirmed that Gruter's visa had been cancelled. Burke said people living in Australia had freedom of speech, but the government decided whether someone could enter or remain in the country if they are involved in activities that incite discord. The Home Affairs department said it couldn't comment on individual cases.

According to news reports in Australia, Gruter has been living in Sydney for three years and worked in his profession. He is reported to have listed the engineering firm Aurecon as his employer. Aurecon has held contracts with the Australian Defence Force and the New South Wales government. The company hasn't publicly confirmed his employment, nor replied to the *SA Jewish Report's* requests for comment.

The rally outside the New South Wales Parliament featured a large banner reading "abolish the Jewish lobby". Photographs published by Australian media show Gruter standing in the front row of the group. He was one of several participants identified by name after they appeared unmasked.

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Long-time Australian educator Dr Hilton Immerman said the rally raised concerns about the state of public life in Australia. It "should never have been allowed to proceed", he said, describing it as a failure of leadership by the New South Wales police.

Immerman said strong Jewish education and resilience remained essential for Jewish communities in Australia and South Africa and extremism should be addressed at legal and communal level. "Jews worldwide should stay resilient, united, and proactive. The key to doing so has always been commitment to providing strong Jewish education in the home, the school, and the community," Immerman said.

At the time of publication, there was no public confirmation of the visa category

under which Gruter entered Australia. Michelle Oztas, an Australian migration consultant, said that he probably entered Australia either on an Employer Nominated Visa or a Skilled Worker Visa. Both of these require that applicants sign a document called the Australian Values Statement, which binds them to adhering to Australian law and values. Oztas said it was unusual for Australia to cancel visas without warning, and she hadn't seen it happen in her career before.

Australian Home Affairs declined to comment on this or on any future legal implications. It's not yet known whether South African authorities will take any action following Gruter's return to the country, nor the exact date of his pending return.

## Rabbi sues for defamation over 'genocide' claim

>>Continued from page 1

Both groups repeatedly said the poster was justified because Goldman publicly and vocally supports Israel and its actions in Gaza. However, Goldman hasn't made public statements about Israel or the war. He rarely speaks to the media, and when he does, it's only about Jewish life on campus.

Sallie has long expressed radical ideas. On 23 November 2023, he wrote an article describing Israel as "a lunatic genocidal state" and said the West was "responsible for its metamorphosis into an unremitting violent obscenity".

He said Israel had "grown into an organism independent of the rule of law," and "the inner promptings of its conscience are extinguished". He described the Jewish state as "a rabid dog that will continue to inflict egregious harm if not disarmed".

Tapping into classic antisemitic tropes, Sallie said, "The South African government, the SAZF, and the SAJBD have become inextricably linked. Many members of the SAZF and SAJBD have grown into financial behemoths with the

power to influence governments. And influence, they do."

He wrote that "powerful Zionist actors are at play", and many South African politicians, "dance to the tunes of their wealth".

SAZF spokesperson Rolene Marks says the SAZF applauds Goldman "for his insistence of legal consequences for *ad hominem* attacks on his constitutionally protected rights to both association and belief".

Says Sulcas, "We support the right of community members to seek legal recourse when faced with such damaging allegations. Accusing Jews of 'genocide' can lead to antisemitism as it seeks to demonise and isolate the Jewish community, echoing patterns that have fuelled discrimination."

She says one "cannot tell untruths that Rabbi Goldman or any member of the Jewish community is 'committing genocide' under the pretence of freedom of speech. A successful court action will send a clear message that antisemitic rhetoric and defamatory attacks have no place in South African society."

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## Al-Majd defends Gaza flights as government flounders

NICOLA MILTZ

After days of explosive speculation and political theatre, Al-Majd Europe, an organisation that has been facilitating paid evacuations of Palestinians out of Gaza, has finally broken its silence.

Its statement comes in the wake of the controversial arrival of 153 Gazan refugees in Johannesburg last Thursday, 13 November.

The organisation has come under intense international media pressure and scathing scrutiny over its secretive and opaque operations. It stated on 18 November that it was breaking its silence after "96 hours of being defamed in international media", and it accused its critics of seeking to "strip the people of Gaza of their freedom of choice".

Al-Majd described itself as an association founded by refugees who had fled "dictatorial regimes" including Hamas rule in Gaza, motivated by a desire to assist people living under "oppressive authority" and "daily suffering".

It said it operated discreetly because Hamas, the Palestinian Authority, and Israel's Shin Bet all had the capacity to obstruct its work or target its volunteers globally. According to Al-Majd, the fees paid by travellers covered only part of the evacuation cost, with philanthropic donors subsidising the rest and volunteers carrying the operational load.

The organisation denied any connection to Mossad or any intelligence agency, saying



Gazans waiting on the plane at OR Tambo International

Photo: Facebook

Its stated mission is to offer Palestinians "real pathways to a better future", which it says will continue until a formal safe-travel mechanism exists.

The controversy began on 13 November, when a chartered aircraft carrying 153 Palestinians landed in Johannesburg after a complicated journey via Israel's Ramon Airport and Nairobi. Israel's Co-ordination of Government Activities in the Territories said Gazans in need of medical treatment and caregivers, as well as Gazans with dual citizenship, exited Gaza through the Kerem Shalom crossing and Ramon Airport only after a third country – in this case South

Africa – "confirmed" that it would receive them, and valid visas had been submitted for every traveller. Passengers were held for more than 12 hours in grim conditions on the tarmac after Border Management Authority officials deemed their documentation insufficient. Images and accounts of their plight ignited outrage, and immediately turned the arrival into a political flashpoint.

Al-Majd rejected claims that passengers were left abandoned or without documents, insisting that all received proper visas, permits, and accommodation arrangements.

that its only contact with Israeli authorities was to co-ordinate exits, a process it said was required for "every single person who has left Gaza since the start of the war". It accused the Palestinian Authority of trying to block its activities by halting passport issuance; lobbying countries to deny landing rights; and intimidating travellers.

Senior government officials delivered increasingly confusing statements. President Cyril Ramaphosa insisted that the group had "somehow mysteriously been put on a plane" and suggested that Palestinians were being "flushed out". International Relations and Cooperation Minister Ronald Lamola on Monday, 17 November, went further, describing the arrival as suspicious, and warning of a broader agenda to cleanse Palestinians out of Gaza. While calling for a thorough investigation, neither offered any explanation of who had approved the landings; how the documentation issue

arose; or why the two similar flights were treated so differently.

Documents confirm that the aircraft was issued an official South African landing permit. A landing permit doesn't grant passengers entry into the country, but it does confirm that the flight was declared, an application was submitted, details were known, and South African authorities approved its landing. This was no "mysterious" or unauthorised arrival. Somebody in government, or high up with influence, knew about it and signed off on it. Why border officials appeared blindsided remains unexplained.

Meanwhile, Sooliman simultaneously blamed South Africa's Departments of Home Affairs and Transport for mishandling the arrival and causing chaos. He has emphasised that he had no extensive prior knowledge of the operation before the aircraft landed. In a saga full of shifting stories, Sooliman's own explanations now raise further questions about what he knew, when he knew it, and how information flowed among various actors.

Interestingly, he has since positioned himself and Gift of the Givers as the central command structure controlling every aspect of the refugees' lives, from their whereabouts to their legal status, while invoking conspiratorial threats from "foreign agencies" to justify his unprecedented level of authority and gatekeeping over this group of refugees – especially amid international scrutiny during the G20 Summit.

An investigation by *Haaretz* identified Al-Majd as the organiser of multiple paid evacuations of Gazans to destinations including Indonesia and South Africa. The investigation linked the operation to an Israeli-Estonian businessman, and revealed that Palestinians were charged between \$1 500 (R25 785) and \$2 700 (R46 413) per person via WhatsApp to secure a place on these flights. It also noted that the organisation had no registered presence in several of the jurisdictions where it claimed to operate, raising troubling questions about transparency, oversight, and legitimacy, leading to further media investigations.

Everything around them – the contradictory government messaging; the opaque organisers; the sudden outrage; and the political posturing – suggests a much bigger story in the shadows.

The full truth of why South Africa became part of their evacuation route remains murky, contested, and politically combustible.

## 'We paid to leave Gaza', says Palestinian evacuee

CLAUDIA GROSS

A young Palestinian mother who paid to get out of Gaza said that Muslim and Jewish people have been helping them since she, her husband, and her young son landed in Johannesburg on 28 October.

Amal Abu Suleima, 27, said her family had received assistance from people of different backgrounds since arriving in South Africa. "Some Jewish people have been very kind. They helped me with information and support," she said. "I'm grateful for every person who has helped us."



Amal Abu Suleima and her family en route to South Africa

us. We understood it was for all the fees needed for the journey," she said.

She said she found a website offering evacuation opportunities, and chose to register after losing her home, her business, and any sense of safety during the escalation of fighting in Gaza. "I lost everything. There was nothing left to protect my son," she said.

Abu Suleima said she didn't know who organised her family's evacuation. "I honestly don't know who they are. The people who guided us were very kind, but I don't know their names or who they represent." She said she was instructed

to travel to the Kerem Shalom crossing, also known as Kerem Abu Salem, and from there was directed towards the aircraft that flew to South Africa.

She said the journey out of Gaza was emotional. "I was excited because I want a better future for my son, Kenan," she said. The process was orderly, and she felt hopeful during the flight. "We were tired but calm. Everyone was focused on their children," she said. She said she and the other passengers knew before departure that South Africa was the final destination. "They told us clearly that we were going to South Africa."

On arrival at OR Tambo International Airport, Abu Suleima said she was treated politely. "The people at the airport were kind and respectful," she said. The group was then taken to a hotel arranged for one week by a group she referred to as Al-Majd. "They put us in a hotel for one week. After that we had to take care of ourselves."

She said she and her family are now renting a small place in Johannesburg. "We found a small home. We pay the

rent ourselves," she said. She hopes to find employment teaching Arabic to non-native speakers, the work she did before the war, pointing out, "I need a job to support my family."

Abu Suleima said a local Islamic organisation had taken up her case and was assisting them to apply for residency and humanitarian asylum. She said she didn't know the organisation's formal name. "They are helping us, but I do not know their official name."

She said she left Gaza voluntarily. "No one forced me. I chose to leave because I wanted safety for my son." She doesn't expect to return, saying, "There's no life left for us there."

Before the war, Abu Suleima said she lived a quiet family life in Gaza. "I had a home, my small business teaching Arabic, and dreams for my son's future," she said. The destruction of her neighbourhood and loss of her work led her to look for ways to leave. "I registered on the website because I saw no other option to protect my family."

Her understanding was that the payment she made covered the entire cost of travel and visa-related arrangements. "That's what they explained to us. We believed it was everything required," she said. She didn't receive documentation identifying the organisers aside from the online registration and later phone call notifying her that an evacuation had been approved.

She said passengers on the flight were focused on the prospect of reaching safety. "People were quiet. Many were thinking about their families and about starting again," she said. She held her son throughout the flight. "I just wanted him to feel safe."

Abu Suleima said her family was now beginning the process of adjusting to life in Johannesburg, and "people here have welcomed us with kindness". She said she hoped her son would soon be able to start school once their applications had been processed. "I want him to grow up in safety."

Her focus is on establishing stability for her family. "I want a peaceful life for my son. That's all I want," she said.

She told the *SA Jewish Report* this week, "We paid \$2 500 [R42 975] each to leave Gaza."

Abu Suleima is believed to be among the first group of Palestinians to have recently arrived in South Africa on what are believed to be humanitarian flights. (See story on this page.)

She said the total cost for her family was \$7 500 (R128 925), and that the amount was described to her as covering visa and travel-related fees. "That's what they told

# So, you're thinking about Aliyah...

When I made aliyah, people were genuinely excited to meet a new olah. The comments ranged from 'Why?' to 'What took you so long?' It seems everyone in Israel has an opinion and they don't hold back!

**- Lara**

No one told me that I need to take a number in places where there's usually a queue (like a lottery ticket but who really wins at the doctor, bank or butcher?). Bureaucracy can be frustrating, especially if you have limited Hebrew. But once you've completed the process and you have your passport or driver's license, you feel like a winner. Really!

**- Joel**



You know you're in Israel when your building WhatsApp group messages include:

'Couch to give away – no legs.'

'Whose dog just \*%^& by the entrance?'

'Does anyone have a cup of sugar?'

and 'We're one short for a minyan.'

**- Daniel**

I was shopping online and ordered six onions.

Apparently, I clicked for six kilos!

So I spent the week handing them out to neighbours.

Turns out, even onions can open doors to new friendships.

I've learned never to be shy to ask for help - or to offer it.

**- Tali**



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# South African Jewish Report

## The truth will out

When a planeload of Palestinians arrived in Johannesburg last Thursday and were initially told they couldn't disembark or enter the country, there was an outcry. The outcry and chaos continues, and there's so much misinformation out there that it's tough to find the strands of truth. (See page 4.)

Immediately, no matter what the truth was, the anti-Israel antisemitic lobby found some way to blame Israel. To date, I cannot categorically tell you who is to blame – if anyone – but simply that it happened. Israel gets blamed for trying to rid Gaza of Gazans. But every one of those people on the plane wanted to get out of Gaza, so why is there blame? So many accusations, and so many yet unanswered questions.

Interestingly, the sense I get from those who were on board is that it's preferable to be in any country not ruled by Hamas. Whether or not they are able to find work or a roof over their heads, anywhere is still preferable to being under Hamas rule.

Amazingly, though Palestinians may not love Israelis – perhaps that is an understatement – they appear to hate Hamas much more. The reason I am making this point is that those around the world who have condemned Israeli people as genocidal maniacs have put Hamas members on a pedestal as freedom fighters and the so-called government that fought for the Palestinians' rights.

However, most Palestinians are clear about the fact that Hamas is terror personified. Hamas treats Palestinians abominably. For Hamas, Palestinian lives are irrelevant, and useful in as much as they can do for the terror organisation.

Obviously, their treatment of Palestinians is better than their desired treatment of Israelis or Jews. They make it clear by their actions that they don't value Palestinian lives either. Hence, Palestinians *en masse* are doing what they can to get out of Gaza. And they don't seem to care where they go. Simply, for them, anywhere is better than Gaza under Hamas rule.

This seems to be lost on those who hate Israel and Jews. They insist that Hamas did what it needed to do on 7 October 2023 to Israel, seemingly to help Palestinians, and then it was fighting for the lives of all Palestinians against this demon, Israel.

Hamas cares for no-one but Hamas, as was so evident after the ceasefire, when Hamas militants attacked and murdered Palestinians who had said or done something that didn't support Hamas during the war.

Unfortunately for Hamas, the truth will out, as it always does.

And as Palestinians flee Gaza, which they seem to be doing with some help from Israel, they are making it known that Hamas is the biggest threat to them. Hamas is what they are most terrified of.

Hamas has won the war on social media. It has managed to win hearts and minds with its misinformation. However, while so many people have turned on Jews around the world, the facts will ultimately speak for themselves. And as Palestinians find their way into South Africa and the rest of the world, the truth will eventually sink in. That is, if anyone is willing to listen to the truth. Or would they rather simply believe what fits their ugly antisemitic narrative?

In terms of 7 October 2023, I have to say I was horrified that the United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women and Girls, Reem Alsalem, now claims that no independent investigation confirmed rapes during Hamas's massacre in Israel. Seriously? What on earth is she thinking, and how dare she?

Pramila Patten, the UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, led a mission to Israel to investigate the allegations of rape and other sexual violence on 7 October. Her report was published in March 2024, and concluded that there were definitely grounds to believe that rape *en masse* occurred in southern Israel on 7 October.

Do the two UN women not speak to one another, or is it simply a case of if the women are Jewish, their rape didn't happen or isn't serious enough to acknowledge? How disgusting!

It's astonishing that two years after the most heinous crimes were committed against Israelis, this is still up for debate. There was footage taken by the perpetrators proving it. What more do they want? (See page 8.)

Alsalem claims that Patten's remarks were misrepresented. Really! I read the report. There was no room for misrepresentation.

I have to say – and my son may call me sexist for this – but I find it far more horrifying when women are the ones going up against other women, disbelieving what is obviously rape.

For this reason, the SA Jewish Report team, who are predominantly women, will be supporting the G20 Women's Shutdown and protest movement in South Africa against gender-based violence on Friday, 21 November. (See page 8.)

We feel strongly that we cannot turn our heads from the epidemic of rape happening in this country, much like the world dare not do so with regard to what happened to Israeli women on 7 October.

There will never be a time when gender-based violence is acceptable, and while some may pooh-pooh attempts to raise awareness of this plight, something has to be done about it.

In South Africa alone, an average of 15 women are raped a day. That is an outrage, and it continues unabated.

So, when women like Alsalem allow rape to be weaponised as has been done at the UN, we need to hang our heads in shame. Instead of doing everything in her and the UN's power to stop rape and gender-based violence around the world, she is actively aiding and abetting this scourge.

I wish I knew what would bring the rape numbers down or exactly what we can do to bring this to an end. However, I will do whatever I can in my power to protect South African, Israeli, and any other women from this horror.

And if stopping work on Friday, and lying down at midday is going to bring awareness to this plight, I'm all for it. So, there will be no Friday newsletter this week.

**Shabbat shalom!**

**Peta Krost**  
Editor



## Polyfilla for presidents: Joburg's G20 clean-up and the cost of pretending

OPINION

DANIEL SCHAY



It's Sunday, 2 January. We're in Plettenberg Bay. The car is packed. Everyone has promised their boss they'll be back at work on Tuesday. One problem: the turbo air-intake pipe has cracked clean through. Everything is closed. But we need to hit the road. So, we do what every South African does when desperation meets confidence: we innovate badly. We find a hardware store. We buy a rubber plumbing pipe not designed for engines, and slide the broken pipe through it. We reinstall it, tighten the clamps, and congratulate ourselves.

On the tar road, the car runs beautifully. We're geniuses. Then we reach Prince Alfred's Pass, a remote, winding dirt road up a mountain. No signal, no civilisation, and halfway up, our brilliant DIY fix collapses. The car loses all power. We're stranded in the dust, surrounded by silence and regret. The lesson is immediate: quick fixes always fail on the next hill.

I'm reminded of that story every time I look at what's happening in Johannesburg. Because right now, the G20 is coming, and the city is applying Polyfilla to its collapsing foundations.

Johannesburg is in a panic. And whenever global attention swings our way, the city snaps into a frantic performance, suddenly remembering that pavements exist, potholes matter, and weeds don't belong between bricks.

What we're seeing right now isn't urban management, it's municipal makeup artistry. A bit of filler here, a bit of paint there, a mad rush to finish a Rea Vaya stretch, and an all-hands-on-deck clean-up for the tiny slice of the city where motorcades will pass.

Two blocks away? The same decay as always. This is the high-impact illusion. It looks impressive from a distance, but it's a movie set: staff pulled from across the city to blitz one area for a few hours while the real problems remain untouched. It's Joburg's classic formula: impress the guests; ignore the residents.

### The backlog behind the façade

But the illusion isn't free. In fact, its cost is devastating. While every available truck and all available staff are yanked from their depots to sprint around Sandton, the rest of Johannesburg is left to burn. Urgent issues in every ward are being ignored. Backlogs are exploding. And residents will hear the usual, "We're attending to it soon." Except "soon" now means "next financial year".

But the real cost is already paid. The operational budget – the money for your services for the entire year – has been rapidly depleted on this one-week performance. Is the material budget left? Unlikely. The very limited overtime budget? Probably expended.

So, when a burst pipe or collapsed road finally gets logged, the quiet, unspoken truth is that there's nothing left in the bank. The money was taken to paint a kerb in Sandton or near Nasrec. The backlog isn't delayed. It's abandoned until July. And the list of what's broken keeps growing while the city spends the last of its maintenance budget polishing kerbs for foreign dignitaries and paying ransoms to the very unions who guarantee the decay.

This is patch-and-pray governance in action. If you think I'm exaggerating, look at the Sandton CBD right now.

My fellow ward councillor has chased leak after leak in that area since the day she was elected. Every time one is repaired, another bursts. Why, because the pipes themselves are operating decades beyond their intended lifespan.

The city's own entities have failed to meet the bare minimum 8% maintenance target for more than a decade.

And now, while teams are scrambling to beautify Sandton for the G20, the inevitable has happened again. A pipe at Katherine Street and Protea Avenue burst, again, leaving a gaping, untarred wound on a primary route to the highway. In the exact week the city is trying to impress the world.

This is the predictable outcome of rewarding cadres who cannot manage a maintenance schedule and unions who

strike against consequence management. You cannot Polyfilla decade-old pipes. You cannot patch your way out of structural rot. Eventually the system simply refuses to behave. And no amount of ribbon-cutting can hide the consequences.

And here's the part that captures South Africa perfectly.

The real structural reforms this country needs are the very reforms we refused. We didn't just need economic or energy reforms. We needed to break the stranglehold of cadre deployment. We needed critical labour reforms to build professional, effective, and accountable entities that can actually start making headway into years of maintenance backlogs.

Instead, we protected the cadres. We empowered the unions who hold the city hostage. This isn't a vague political statement. It's the entire G20 story.



Planting flowers in Johannesburg this week, just before G20 begins

On the very eve of the summit, with the city's international reputation on the line, municipal unions held the administration hostage. This was the moment for a structurally sound city, led by professionals, to stand firm. Instead, our years of failure were leveraged against us. The unions didn't demand better tools to fix the maintenance backlog. They didn't demand accountability for the deployed cadres who have hollowed out our entities. They demanded money. They presented a bill for a staggering R10 billion in pay increases over the next three years, a demand made with the implicit threat of total service collapse during a global summit, and the mayor caved in. This is extortion, plain and simple, the direct, predictable consequence of empowering unaccountable actors over effective labour.

This is the structural reform we refused. And now we're paying the price, literally. We're paying a ransom to the very people guaranteeing the decay, all to put on a show. Had we implemented real reforms, Joburg wouldn't be scrambling to look presentable for visitors. Had we implemented them, the city would look this good all year. Had we implemented them, the G20 itself wouldn't have mattered.

Because here's the uncomfortable truth: Donald Trump isn't coming. And when the United States president withdraws, China withdraws. The Chinese premier isn't coming either. Why? Because South Africa, in its current form, isn't seen as credible, reliable, or strategically aligned. Our structural rot is obvious to the world. So, what are we doing? We're applying frantic cosmetic repairs for a half-strength G20, an event weakened by the very structural failures those cosmetic repairs are trying to hide. It would be funny if it weren't so painfully accurate.

### Polyfilla governance cannot hold a city together

A city that looks presentable only under international pressure isn't a functional city. It's a façade. A stage set. A house of cracked foundations with a fresh coat of paint for company.

South Africans deserve better than Polyfilla governance. They deserve institutions that work all year, not just when motorcades are nearby. They deserve effective entities run by professionals, not cadres, and a workforce dedicated to service, not extortion. They deserve leaders who prioritise residents, not optics. And they deserve a Johannesburg that doesn't collapse the minute the convoy turns the corner. Because a city built on quick fixes will always, always, fail on the next hill. And we're running out of hills.

• Daniel Schay is a member of the City Council of Johannesburg, serving as the DA Shadow MMC of Development Planning and Ward Councillor for Ward 72.



Photo: Ian Ossendryver

# Activist describes journey from Hezbollah to Judaism

LEE TANKLE

"When I began examining why I hated Jews and realised how deeply Hezbollah had shaped my perceptions, I became angry. I understood that we had been intensely indoctrinated and fed a steady stream of hatred that ultimately harms us all."

These are the words of Syrian-born German political activist and self-proclaimed reformed antisemite Rawan Osman on unlearning her hate-filled view of Jews after leaving Lebanon and Syria in her twenties.

Osman is visiting South Africa to attend the Aish Hatorah annual gala dinner and to give a social media workshop on combating anti-Israel bias at The Base community.

"This propaganda wasn't created by Hezbollah alone. It's part of a highly organised and dangerous alliance in the Middle East, led by the Islamic Republic of Iran. Its network includes Hezbollah, the Assad regime, the Houthis in Yemen, and, of course, Hamas," she said.

"Hamas could never have carried out such a co-ordinated attack on 7 October without Iran's training, funding, guidance, and logistical support. And to build fighters like that, you have to start young," Osman said. "Recruitment happens indirectly by poisoning the education system and shaping children long before they realise what's being done to them."

Osman was born in Damascus to a Syrian Sunni father and a Lebanese Muslim mother, and grew up in secular Lebanon after the civil war, attending a French Catholic school.

backed plot to take Palestine. She said students internalise the idea that Palestine was always a country, but she later realised that Jews are indigenous to the Middle East and that countries like Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Jordan, and Kuwait are also modern ethnostates formed after the Ottoman Empire's collapse.

Osman was brought out of this daze of Israeli hatred when she moved to Strasbourg, France, in 2011 and met Jewish people for the first time while living in the Jewish quarter.

The first time she ever met Jewish people, she was shopping in a store around the corner from her home and saw two visibly Jewish men walk in, and her body went into a panic.

For weeks, she had to think about why her body reacted this way to sharing a space with a Jew, considered her enemy, for the first time. She then had to ask herself why she hated Jews with such passion, and why other Arabs like her hated Jews too. It was only then that she confronted the idea that everything she knew about Israel and the Jews came from the leader of Hezbollah.

She started doing research and got extremely angry to realise that her "side" was the bad side and "tens of thousands lost their lives because of the Palestinian cause, all of which could have been avoided had the Arabs accepted sharing the land with Jews", she said.

Before moving to France, she hadn't realised that Hezbollah openly stated its

aim to turn Lebanon into an extension of the Islamic Republic of Iran, something she never supported. When she discovered this had been public knowledge for years, she felt increasingly alienated and left for Europe, believing that she wanted to raise her son with Western values.

But even there, she found no escape. Waves of terrorism and the growing influence of Islamist ideology made her feel pursued, as if extremists wanted to "bring her back". She even considered leaving Europe, but friends in places like New Zealand and Canada were reporting similar issues. After major attacks in France, she realised there was nowhere left to run, only the need to push back for the sake of future generations.

"This is personal. My mother grew up in the Lebanese war, traumatised. And what led to the Lebanese war is the Palestinian cause. So my parents have war trauma. Their parents have war trauma. Everybody in Lebanon and Syria, I would think, in most of the Middle East, including in Israel, suffers from war trauma," she said, "We carry this baggage with us, and sometimes we pass it on to the next generation. I just wanted it to stop. But also to expose the lies. Because I realised that we are intensively brainwashed."

This is why she decided to start Arabs Ask, a social media channel with about 200 000 Instagram followers in which Osman, as well as German academics, target head on misinformation about Israel spread by the Arab world.

Osman is converting to Judaism, a process which she started a year and a half before the tragic events of 7 October

2023, as when studying Jewish Studies at the University of Heidelberg in Germany, she realised that she identified with being Jewish.

"I knew in my heart that I'm Jewish. It was such a clear and overwhelming grace, and I knew that I wanted to convert and make aliyah before I had ever visited Israel," she said.

After visiting Israel 16 times since 7 October 2023, the one thing she takes away from the country and its people is resilience.

"Israel's enemies undermine how resilient the Israelis are. Israelis bicker a lot, and their enemies mistook it for division," she said, "They thought you could hit them where it hurts and finally get rid of the country, destroy it from within. They had no idea. They fight each other that badly, just imagine what they're gonna do to you. So the country's here to stay."

She says what pains her most is how convinced many are that Israelis are hateful and indifferent to killing, a belief she insists is completely false. Even her far-right Israeli friends, despite their harsh political views, would never wish harm on Arabs or teach their children to hate or kill. They simply want to be left alone, not commit violence, she said.

As a person who grew up around war trauma, Osman believes that peace can be achieved only when "the world stops infantilising the Palestinians. The world needs to understand that the Palestinians aren't senile, handicapped, or stupid people. On 7 October, they showed all of us that they are capable of a lot. So, it's time to tell them that actions have consequences, and this is the last time you ever opt for terrorism."



Rawan Osman

Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

"Growing up, the only thing everybody hated was the Jews, slash Zionists, slash Israelis," she said, "We didn't make a distinction between Jewish and Israeli."

Osman said Lebanon's primary school curriculum teaches children a simplified history of the region, portraying Theodor Herzl as a villain and Zionism as a Western-

## Caring with a heart Innovating hope in a public healthcare crisis

BS"D  
ADVERTORIAL

SOSA Medical has long been a lifeline for community members who cannot afford essential medical care. But behind the scenes, the organisation – driven by the compassion and determination of its founder, Rabbi Shaun



Wingrin – has been quietly expanding its services to meet the growing crisis in public healthcare. Today, SOSA doesn't just offer support; it delivers dignity, comfort, and real solutions for those who would otherwise be left without hope.

While SOSA currently assists more than 100 Jewish families with medical aid, the organisation recently discovered a deeply troubling reality: many critical medications needed by patients in state hospitals simply do not exist in the public system. Rabbi Wingrin experienced this firsthand during his own recent treatment. "My specialist, who also works at a state hospital, told me that the most important medication I take is generally not available in the public sector," he says. "When I began researching this, I found that 50% of oncology drugs are not accessible to state patients."

Realising the seriousness of this gap, SOSA immediately launched a dedicated medications fund to ensure Jewish patients in state hospitals receive the treatments necessary for their recovery and survival.

But another heart-wrenching situation revealed yet another need. Families often cannot reach their loved ones in public hospitals – or get any information at all. "We cared for an elderly woman who broke her hip," Rabbi Wingrin recalls. "Surgery within the first 24 hours gives patients the best chance of recovery. But she waited more than four weeks, bedridden, across several government facilities. After surgery, she was

discharged, unable to reach the bathroom on her own."

To ensure no one endures such neglect again, SOSA created a nursing team specifically tasked with visiting hospitalised patients, advocating for their care, checking on their well-being, and keeping families informed. This simple intervention has already proven life-changing.

Yet, as Rabbi Wingrin emphasises, the most powerful protection anyone can have is a basic hospital plan. "Many people feel they can't afford it," he explains, "but the reality is, they also can't afford not to have one."

He recounts the painful experience of a man in his 40s suffering from psychiatric illness. Although he had basic cover through SOSA, his care team didn't know, and he was taken to a state hospital by mistake. "He waited in casualty for more than 24 hours with no food, first in a chair and later tied to a bed. He spent 48 hours in isolation. It was traumatic." Once SOSA intervened, he was transferred to a private psychiatric hospital and received 21 days of quality care funded by his basic plan. "Every member of our community deserves that level of dignity," Rabbi Wingrin says.

SOSA is now preparing to launch its next initiative: a fresh, nutritious kosher meal service for private hospitals, developed with professional nutritionists and designed to deliver meals within an hour of ordering.

SOSA's annual fundraiser launches on 23 November, with a goal of R3.3 million for life-saving care. Every donation will be matched, doubling its impact.

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## Outrage over UN envoy downplaying 7 October rape



ROZANNE SACK

OPINION

Recently, Reem Alsalem, the United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women and Girls, made headlines by claiming on X that “no independent investigation found that rape occurred on October 7”. Her remarks have provoked outrage, and rightly so, because they directly undermine well-documented findings from both the UN’s own fact-finding mission which led to the report by Pramila Patten as well as an independent analysis by the Dinah Project.

Here’s why Alsalem’s framing is deeply problematic, and why we must criticise it.

Pramila Patten, the UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, led a mission in early 2024 that produced a report stating there were “reasonable grounds” to believe that Hamas committed rape, gang rape, and sexualised torture during the 7 October 2023 attacks at the Nova festival and surrounding areas. The mission reviewed more than 5 000 photos and many hours of video. They also conducted in-depth interviews with eyewitnesses, first responders, released hostages, and healthcare providers. They documented patterns that are strongly suggestive of sexual violence, for example, bodies – mostly women – found partially or fully naked from the waist down, with hands tied, many shot in the head.

The report explicitly notes its limitations in that Patten’s mission wasn’t a criminal investigation and didn’t have prosecutorial powers. Crucially, they didn’t interview any victim of sexual violence as those who survived were at that time too traumatised to speak about their abuse. These findings aren’t speculative but the verified results of a UN-led fact-finding investigation.

The Dinah Project, a collective of Israeli legal, gender, and human rights experts, published a

separate, in-depth report in July 2025 titled “A Quest for Justice”. Its research strengthens and deepens what Patten found, framing the 7 October atrocities not as spontaneous chaos but as tactical, systematic sexual violence.

It documents at least six locations where sexual violence was reported – the Nova festival; Route 232; the Nahal Oz military base; and several kibbutzim – Re’im, Nir Oz, and Kfar Aza. Its evidence includes eyewitness testimony and reports from former hostages; first responders; morgue staff; and health professionals. The patterns are consistent with victims found naked or semi-naked, often bound, sometimes tied to poles or trees, sometimes subjected to gang rape, executed, or mutilated. It also documents sexual violence during captivity including forced nudity, threats of forced marriage, abuse, and humiliation.

Importantly, it highlights the evidentiary challenges, which means that traditional legal methods may fail. It proposes new legal frameworks which take into account the lack of survivor testimony, calling for collective responsibility (command structures); lower evidentiary thresholds; and international mechanisms that can still hold perpetrators accountable. When Alsalem claims, “No independent investigation found that rape occurred on the 7th of October”, she overlooks, misrepresents, or downplays the well-respected Patten and Dinah Project reports.

Alsalem claims that there was no systematic or genocidal use of rape, stating that “neither any other independent human rights mechanism established that sexual or gender-based violence was committed as a systematic tool of war or as a tool of genocide”. But the Dinah Project explicitly presents its findings as a weapon of war, not just a byproduct of violence.

Her characterisation ignores the practical and legal challenge that many of the most grievous claims cannot be “verified” in classical forensic ways because

the victims are dead and the trauma is such that survivors cannot testify. That doesn’t diminish the credibility of the accounts it reflects, and amplifies the brutal reality.

Alsalem’s framing of “no independent investigation” seems to be an intentional strategy to delegitimise the suffering of Israelis. This clearly demonstrates once again the conscious bias against Jews as being immune to harm and violence. It reflects a pattern where Jewish or Israeli suffering is treated as not credible or valid. It rests on historical antisemitic tropes such as “Jewish claims are exaggerated or fabricated”; “Jews are self-victims”; or “We won’t trust them.” It also draws from the “coloniser” versus “colonised” construct that the “powerful” Jews can never be victims and that the “righteous” Hamas operatives could never be perpetrators of acts of sexual violence. There is also the belief that “Israel had it coming to them”, and that any civilian in the context of this conflict is fair game.

If sexual violence on 7 October isn’t recognised as systematic, it becomes all the harder to demand accountability. Legal frameworks may not adapt, and perpetrators may escape justice. Survivors and their families may feel disbelief and retraumatised if high-level UN officials cast doubt on their accounts. If international institutions don’t properly acknowledge what happened, future generations may misremember or misunderstand the full scope of the atrocities.

Alsalem’s recent statement cannot stand unchallenged. Her role as an appointee of the UN to report on the proceedings of its meetings demands that she has a responsibility to relay evidence, not dismiss it. Denial or equivocation from UN representatives not only dishonours victims, but undermines the possibility of justice.

As a Jewish community that values memory, justice, and the dignity of all human beings, we must demand clarity, accountability, and truth not just for the sake of history, but for the sake of surviving victims and future generations.

• Rozanne Sack is a co-founder of Koleinu SA, a helpline and advocacy organisation for victims of gender-based violence and child abuse in the Jewish and wider community.



Photo: Ilan Ossendyevier

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## SA women go purple in national shutdown over GBV

LEE TANKLE

At 12:00 on Friday, 21 November, Jewish women will join women across South Africa in lying down for 15 minutes to honour the 15 women murdered every day in this country.

“It’s to raise awareness of the issue of gender-based violence [GBV] against women and children, particularly femicide, and to get people on board in the fight against it,” said Wendy Hendler, the co-founder and director of Koleinu SA, the helpline for victims of abuse in the South African Jewish community.

The activism is being conducted in solidarity with the G20 Women’s Shutdown instituted by the organisation Women for Change, which calls on all women and members of the LGBTQI+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, and intersex) community to refrain from all work to demonstrate the economic and social impact of their absence because “until South Africa stops burying a woman every 2.5 hours, the G20 cannot speak of growth”.

GBV is an epidemic in South Africa, one that touches all communities, including students. On the University of the Witwatersrand campus on 10 November, news broke that a student seeking help was allegedly raped by a newly elected student representative council member.

The South African Union of Jewish Students (SAUJS) at Wits condemned the attack, with members taking part in the 11 November rally, handing out water bottles with its logo turned purple to show solidarity against GBV.

“I was angry about what had happened, not only at Wits, but also after hearing stories coming out of Stellenbosch and UCT [the University of Cape Town],” said SAUJS Wits Committee Member Greg Landau.

Said Wits SAUJS Chairperson Leah Meyerowitz, “Sexual assault and GBV are global issues. There’s a reason so many Jewish girls are afraid to take Ubers alone. It’s all part of the same bigger problem.”

Sasha Said, SAUJS national chairperson, said that it was of the utmost importance that Jewish students join the call to stand against GBV, as “students aren’t just witnesses

to GBV. Often, we’re first responders; we’re the friends survivors confide in; we’re the people who see what institutions overlook or ignore. And if we don’t stand up, who will?”

“As Jewish students who don’t live in residence, we often feel detached from campus life, but GBV affects all of us, regardless of where we live or what we study,” said Landau. “Just as off-campus students can feel removed from issues in residence, our community can feel detached from broader South African problems. But GBV happens everywhere, including in the Jewish community.”

For Koleinu SA co-founder Rozanne Sack, the most important thing to take away from the national shutdown is greater education and awareness of GBV and the way men interpret masculinity.

“Ninety-five percent of perpetrators are male. And this is where we believe that the most work needs to be done,” Sack said.

Author and men’s development expert Craig Wilkinson said that though he supported the intent behind the shutdown, he believes far more needs to be done in

terms of educating men about the issue.

“Men can be passive and stay silent in the face of evil, or they can be aggressive and become perpetrators. Or they can choose a third path: to use their strength for good, to stand up against what’s wrong and defend what’s right.”

Wilkinson believes that this can be done by not demonising masculinity, and by telling men to hold other men accountable. “When men hold each other accountable, abusive behaviour stops. An abusive man often won’t listen to a woman, but he will listen to another man who is willing to confront him. That’s why we need men to use their strength to say, ‘This isn’t acceptable. Don’t do it.’ It starts in the everyday spaces – the locker room, the jokes, the comments. When men speak up and shut it down, things change.”

“The shutdown is more than just a symbolic moment,” said Said. “It’s a real, uncomfortable confrontation with how deeply GBV has embedded itself into university life. I hope it disrupts lectures, routines, and comfort zones because women’s lives are already being disrupted every single day. The shutdown is about honouring survivors, demanding institutional accountability, and refusing to let another statistic pass unnoticed. It’s about insisting on a future where safety isn’t a privilege, it’s a basic and uncompromisable right.”



# UCT initiates anti-Israel resolutions despite court case

TALI FEINBERG

The University of Cape Town (UCT) is taking steps to implement its two anti-Israel resolutions despite the fact that there hasn't yet been judgement in the court case reviewing them.

Professor Adam Mendelsohn, director of the Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies, took UCT to court over anti-Israel resolutions that he said were adopted irrationally, unlawfully, and unconstitutionally. The case was recently heard in the Western Cape High Court before a full bench, and judgement was reserved. The matter is therefore still *sub judice* (under judicial consideration).

Yet on 12 November, UCT's deputy vice-chancellor of teaching and learning, Professor Brandon Collier-Reed, wrote to staff and students saying, "A working group of the UCT Senate has been established to develop a proposal regarding how the 'Gaza resolutions' can be operationalised." The Senate is UCT's second-highest decision-making body.

A stakeholder speaking anonymously for her own security says UCT going ahead with implementing the resolutions shows "contemptuous disregard" for those who oppose them. "It feels that, once again, UCT is thumbing its nose at Jewish staff and students."

Independent practising attorney David Polovin says, "UCT's decision to begin 'operationalising' the resolutions while they are still under judicial review raises serious concerns about respect for the rule of law."

Moving ahead with the resolutions "effectively assumes the outcome of the court process and risks

undermining the authority of the judiciary", he says. "A public university, bound by constitutional principles, must demonstrate respect for due process, not act as though its decisions stand above the law."

Mendelsohn called on the court to order UCT to review or set aside two resolutions that were adopted by UCT's highest-decision-making body, its Council, in June 2024. The first "resolves to reject the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's [IHRA] definition of antisemitism". The second states that "No UCT academic may enter into relations with, or continue relations with, any research group or network whose author affiliations are with the Israel Defense Forces or the broader Israeli military establishment."

UCT spokesperson Elijah Moholola says UCT is "aware of the pending Western Cape High Court outcome in the matter around the Gaza resolutions. In accordance with South African administrative law, the resolutions remain valid, binding, and in effect unless and until a court orders otherwise."

"The Senate group isn't working on implementing the resolutions but was established to develop a proposal regarding how the resolutions can be operationalised," he said.

However, the deputy vice-chancellor's email was titled "Towards implementation of the Gaza resolutions," and the word "implementation" was used multiple times in the text, concluding with the phrase, "How these two resolutions can be implemented."

In court hearings, Advocate Tembeka Ngcukaitobi SC, representing UCT, said that the resolutions were only a

symbolic gesture of solidarity with Gaza, and weren't yet being put into policy.

He also said that a Senate committee would provide guidance on the meaning of the resolutions' wording. This is at odds with "operationalising the resolutions", echoing earlier interactions between UCT and the court. Mendelsohn alleges that Council Chairperson Advocate Norman Arendse misled the court about events around the adoption of the resolutions. Now, UCT's actions again differ from what it told the court.

Collier-Reed asked staff and students to provide anonymous feedback on how the resolutions could affect them. However, the link he provided for feedback asks them to log into a Microsoft form, which means that it's not anonymous. In addition, there's no requirement to give one's connection to UCT, so anyone can flood the system.

Collier-Reed said UCT would use the feedback to "ensure that we better understand the nuances involved in the implementation of the resolutions". Once the Senate working group has developed draft guidelines, members of the university community will be invited to provide additional input.

The anonymous UCT stakeholder says staff members emailed the UCT executive asking why the university was proceeding with the resolutions while the matter was *sub judice*, but no response has been received.

She says there isn't a representative of the Jewish community on the Senate working group, nor an expert on antisemitism.

Collier-Reed sent the texts of the resolutions in his email, and on re-reading them, the stakeholder was "once again struck by their blatantly anti-Jewish sentiment".

She noticed that they include "no condemnation of the 7 October [2023] attacks, nor support for Israeli civilians who have suffered".

While the resolutions express solidarity with "academic colleagues victimised for speaking out [against Israel]", there's "no expression of solidarity with colleagues who are victimised for their support of Israel," notes the stakeholder.

She was also struck anew by the university's rejection of the IHRA definition of antisemitism. "Normally, when a body adopts a definition of racism or sexism, it does so with a view to protecting the victims." But here, UCT adopts a definition "to protect critics of Jews from being labelled antisemites".

Wendy Kahn, the national director of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, says working to implement the resolutions prior to the court's judgement, "shows bad faith by UCT".

The university's "belligerence" in getting these "flawed resolutions" implemented, despite the "serious consequences for UCT, its students, and academics", shows its "blind-sighted obsession" and "disregard for the issues that were exposed in the courtroom", Kahn says.

It shows a lack of respect for "due process and procedure", pushing "political agendas above the interests of UCT", she says. "These virtue-signalling exercises cause only division and hostility among the UCT community. It's regrettable that UCT wouldn't prioritise the interests of its academics and students above pursuing the resolutions."

South African Zionist Federation spokesperson, Rolene Marks, agrees that the establishment of the working group "is in bad faith" because it shows "flagrant disregard" for the rule of law. It's "disrespectful to the courts for UCT to plough ahead when the court's judgement is pending", Marks says.

She notes that the time for consultation was before Council adopted the resolutions. "Council was unconcerned with input from academics and students at that point," says Marks. "UCT's thinly-veiled attempt now to try to undo its failure to consult with stakeholders is a farce."

Polovin says UCT's leadership should "pause all implementation efforts until the court has spoken. Anything less conveys disregard for the legal process and the fundamental values of accountability and institutional integrity that the university should be upholding."



## Israel supporters join protest for freedom of religion

CLAUDIA GROSS

The Israeli flags waving above thousands of Christian protesters marching to Parliament in Cape Town last Thursday, 13 November 2025, represented a shared commitment to a single constitutional principle: freedom of religion.

The demonstration, organised by the South African Church Defenders (SACD) to oppose the government's proposed regulation of churches, had an active presence from the South African Friends of Israel (SAFI), underscoring that the fight for religious autonomy is a non-denominational issue that has an impact on all faith communities, including the Jewish community.



SAFI Executive Director Daniel Yacobi emphasised the Jewish community's vested interest in the march against state regulation. Though the proposal targets Christian organisations, the principle of governmental oversight, if established, could easily be extended to other minority faiths, including Judaism, he said.

Yacobi said that the proposed regulatory framework, which critics fear would require faith leaders to obtain a licence to practice, would constitute an infringement on

religious freedom. This measure, he said, is fundamentally an attempt at control, and any attempt to restrict the religious practice of one community ultimately threatens all of them.

"The regulation of churches would inevitably also affect synagogues," Yacobi said, positioning SAFI's involvement as a proactive step to protect the Jewish community's constitutional rights. The core concern among opponents is that legislated "self-regulation", even if couched in protective language, amounts to a dangerous erosion of the independence of all religious institutions.

The march on 13 November was the culmination of mounting opposition to the efforts by the Cultural, Religious and Linguistic (CRL) Rights Commission to implement a new oversight mechanism for religious organisations. The CRL's initiative, known as the Section 22 Committee, arose from a 2017 report on the commercialisation of religion and abuse of people's belief systems. The commission asserts that the committee is merely a peer-review mechanism designed to facilitate a voluntary "self-regulatory" framework aimed at promoting accountability and curbing abuse within churches.

However, the Christian community, represented by the SACD and supported by legal advocates like Freedom of Religion South Africa, views the initiative as an unconstitutional attempt to establish state control over the internal life and affairs of the church. Opponents argue that existing laws dealing with crimes such as fraud, assault, and other misconduct are more than sufficient to address wrongdoing by any individual, including a religious leader, provided they are properly enforced. They contend that applying a regulatory blanket to the entire sector based on the excesses of a few charlatans unfairly infringes on the constitutional rights of the majority.

The Western Cape Provincial Christian March to Parliament drew an estimated 4 000 Christians, who came from across the province to present a memorandum to Parliament. The memorandum was received by Dr Zweli Mkhize, the chairperson of the National Portfolio Committee on Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs, who promised march leaders an opportunity to

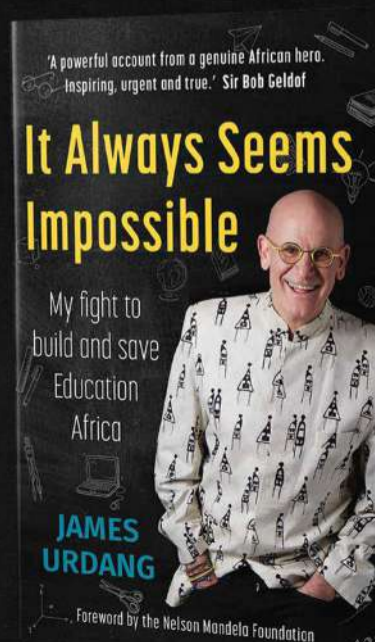
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# NOW AVAILABLE

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EXCLUSIVE BOOKS



# Lithuania's first SA rugby player – a Jewish Joburger

GILANA LAB

When Johannesburg rugby player Jake Glass flew to Europe earlier this month, he never expected to become the first South African and first Jew to represent Lithuania in rugby.

"I joined the team on Monday the 10th, trained with them until the 14th, and then we played against Denmark on the 15th," said the son of acclaimed local Jewish cookbook author Sharon Glass.

Jake grew up in Johannesburg, and started playing rugby at eight. His path has taken him from Pirates Rugby Club through school and university rugby, and eventually to teams in both South Africa and the United States. Along the way he was selected for the Lions U16 Invitational squad; played 1st XV at King Edward VII School; represented the Wits Young Guns; and earned All American and All Conference honours at Kutztown University. He went on to play for Santa Monica Rugby Club in Los Angeles, and now runs out for the Wanderers 1st XV in Johannesburg.

Glass has been around the game almost his entire life. "I have been playing rugby since 2004 – for 21 years," he said. "In South Africa and then in America, rugby managed to open doors in both countries." His path to Lithuania wasn't planned to be taken through sport, but family heritage. "When we got given our Lithuanian citizenship in 2021, I wasn't even playing rugby. I was on sabbatical," Glass said.

Everything changed when he returned to

the game in 2023. "I landed up reaching out to the Lithuanian Rugby Federation and just introducing myself," he said. "I was coming to Europe anyway, so I asked if they wanted me to come early. They said, 'Yes, come, we will put you up and pay for your food.'" That message turned into an international debut days later.

The biggest challenge wasn't the rugby, but conversation – or lack of it. "There was very little English spoken," he laughed. "Luckily, rugby is quite a universal language. If you understand the game, you can kind of get away without speaking to anyone. You just clap your hands and ask for the ball."

"I didn't know half the players' names," he admitted. Their names are insane. I knew the captain's name, and that was it."

The language barrier became one of the funniest parts of the trip. "I think it might have been the least English I have spoken in my whole life," Glass said. "Then, after the game, we had a couple of beers and suddenly, everyone could speak English. They kept it back until I had played with them." For a week in which he could barely communicate with teammates, he ended up feeling completely at home.

"Rugby is the same everywhere," he said. "The system they were running is what we run, so I knew where to be and how to do it." He plays first team at Wanderers in Johannesburg while balancing a full-time job. "I still live in Johannesburg with my wife. My dad is there, and my sister. I work



in Johannesburg, so I cannot just disappear. I've been working remotely while here."

Despite adding international rugby to his schedule, Glass managed to keep up his routine. "The time zone is the same, which makes it a lot easier," he said. "Training was conducted late at night after work hours, so it didn't really have an impact on work."

But his trip was more than about rugby, it became a chance to explore his family's story. "There's so much Jewish history in Lithuania. My dad was with me. He had never been there, so he explored his own history of the family."

Glass shared the roots that made his Lithuanian citizenship possible. "My great-

grandmother was born in a place called Rakishkis, one of the Jewish shtetls. She fled in the 1920s to South Africa, and that's how we got the passport." Visiting sites connected to that history meant a great deal to him, especially the newly built Lost Shtetl Museum.

Becoming an international player for a country with a small Jewish population added even more weight to the moment. "I don't know how many Jews are left in Lithuania. It says there are about 2,400, which is tiny," he said. "I also don't know when the last time was that a Jew represented Lithuania."

"I'm the first player ever from South Africa to play for them," he said. "They are trying to figure it out at the same time that I am." The logistics are complicated. "They can fly me out at their discretion from a cost standpoint.

If there's a need, they will pull me into the team. But South Africa is far compared to players already in Europe."

The cultural contrast between South African and Lithuanian rugby became immediately clear. "Rugby in South Africa is life," he said. "In Lithuania, it's not the biggest sport. Basketball is number one, then soccer, then rugby." He pointed out that most of the squad balances sport with their jobs. "It's not like the Springboks. These guys cannot fly across Europe in the middle of the work week. They don't get much funding, so it's difficult."

People often ask if this experience could open doors to play for South Africa, but Glass

is realistic. "I couldn't play for the Springboks now. I don't think I'm good enough, and I'm capped for another country." He hopes that instead, this debut could help him pursue a professional opportunity at home. "I would like to try play for the Lions or something along those lines. This should open the door. When I get back, I will have conversations with a couple of the teams and see if there is willingness to train."

As he looks back on the whirlwind week, Glass remains grateful and amused. "It was a cool experience," he said. For someone who simply reached out; took a chance; trained with strangers whose names he couldn't pronounce; explored deep family history; and represented a country that once shaped his ancestors' fate, his achievement is unusual and deeply meaningful.

## Israel supporters join protest for freedom of religion

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address the committee formally on their concerns. Beyond opposing the regulatory framework, demonstrators demanded the immediate dismissal of CRL Rights Commission Chairperson Thoko Mkhwanazi-Xaluba over previous statements critics believe demonstrate an anti-faith bias.

For the South African Jewish community, one of the most significant aspects of the event was the open display of Israeli flags throughout the procession. It was a powerful illustration of the connection and solidarity between the Christian Zionist community and the Jewish community in the country.

Adam Kepkey, a march participant, said the presence of the Israeli flag wasn't accidental, it symbolised a shared faith heritage and the emphasis placed on historical roots in Israel. This expression of philosemitism and solidarity serves as a strong public signal of Christian support for the Jewish state, particularly in the face of the South African government's increasingly critical foreign policy towards Israel.

Kepkey highlighted the appreciation the Christian community holds for the Jewish people globally. He pointed to the Jewish community's significant contribution to nations in various fields, including science, agriculture, and technology. He also cited the historically disproportionate number of Nobel Prizes awarded to Jewish individuals as evidence that this small community has consistently acted as a "blessing to the nations".

"Wherever Jewish people have gone, they come to build, they come to contribute," Kepkey said, concluding with a message of support for the Jewish state. "We want to say that we appreciate the Jewish people in South Africa, all over the world, and in Israel. We pray for them, we stand with them, and Israel will never be destroyed. Israel forever!"

SAFI's presence at the march was a measured response to protect the interests of the Jewish community. Its involvement reinforces the importance of protection for religious freedom for all South Africans, regardless of denomination. When questioned about future participation in the campaign, Yakobi said SAFI would assess its involvement in anti-regulation events on a project-to-project basis.

He also reassured the South African Jewish community about the safety of their constitutional rights in the current political climate. The government of South Africa isn't representative of the majority of the population when it comes to the principles of religious freedom and freedom of association, Yakobi said, which remain protected constitutional rights. The collective effort at the march, unifying diverse communities in defence of these fundamental freedoms, demonstrates that civil society is robustly defending these rights.

## 'The cheetah' finds her stride on world stage

CLAUDIA GROSS

Mila Ben David, who grew up in South Africa, has become Israel's newest world champion, having won the title of 2025 World Jiu-Jitsu Champion in Bangkok, Thailand. Ben David, 15, won gold in the under-16 age category for Israel despite living in Johannesburg.

Ben David, who was born in Madrid to an Israeli father and Spanish mother, and moved to South Africa when she was five, has a long list of achievements. In 2019, she won a gold medal at the Jiu-Jitsu championship in the United States, and in 2020 won a silver medal at the European Championship in Ireland. She has won the South African Jiu-Jitsu title seven times, and earned gold four times at the African continental Jiu-Jitsu Championships.

She started school at King David Linksfield in Grade 1 and remained there until Grade 6 before transferring to ESCA School an elite sporting academy and school at the Wanderers Sports Club in Illovo. The move allowed her to balance competitive training with academic demands. She obtained permanent residence in South Africa in January 2024, and still considers the country central to her development.

Today, she represents Israel in international competition, but her pathway has been shaped in equal measure by her South African upbringing, Spanish birth, and Israeli heritage.

Although she lives in Johannesburg, she competes for Israel as she has dual nationality. Whenever she visits Israel, she trains with the Israeli national jiu-jitsu team. During a visit in September, she spent two weeks training with the squad. She said that this arrangement is common in martial arts.

"It felt nice because I'm part Israeli because my dad is from there," Ben David said about competing under the Israeli flag. "I felt like I was there with family and my teammates, coaches, and close friends."

She has also won seven South African titles in submission wrestling; five Gauteng judo titles; two South African national judo titles; and seven South African freestyle wrestling titles. In 2022, she was named Gauteng sport woman achiever of the year. In 2023, she became the Youth Jiu-Jitsu World Champion in Abu Dhabi. In 2024, she won the Judo South Africa trials for the Commonwealth pathway and was named youth grappler of the year by Submission Kings. She received the Submission Kings female grappler of the year award in 2025.

Her nickname, "The Cheetah", emerged early in her career. It's her favourite animal, she said, and it reflects the speed and instinctive movement that characterises her style. "I'm pretty fast if you think about it, like thinking and doing the technique," she said. "So, it matches my personality in a way."

Speed wasn't the only factor that shaped her development. When she began competing in South Africa, she was encouraged to fight boys because there weren't enough girls in her division. The move was unusual, but it became one of her biggest advantages.

"It was a good way to challenge myself," she said.

Mixed competition strengthened her technique, sharpened her

reactions, and encouraged her to stay adaptable. These habits became part of her foundation in both judo and jiu-jitsu. She continues to train in both disciplines.

"I like them both, but if I had to pick, I would pick jiu-jitsu," she said. "Judo helps with my jiu-jitsu, and jiu-jitsu helps with my judo."

Her training programme has expanded significantly over the past few years. Preparing for the world championships required morning sessions before school, evening sessions after school, physiotherapy, strength work, and careful recovery.

"I used to train every day, but now I've been training in the mornings and the evenings," she said. "Going to the gym and lifting weights helps. At school, we have time to do homework during free periods. That helps."

She said she aims for consistency rather than intensity for its own sake. Her long-term goals reflect this mindset. "I want to keep working hard and stay consistent," she said.

Her performance in Thailand showed the effect of her expanded training. The final match left a strong impression on her. She was facing an opponent with a strong guard and a reputation for being difficult to break down.

"I managed to pass her guard at the end and dominate for the rest of the match, which surprised me," she said. "I managed to submit her and then I realised there were only three seconds left." The match lasted only three minutes, leaving limited opportunity for submission attempts. The result made her emotional. "I felt really courageous. It was emotional. Having my team, my coaches, and my parents there made me happy. All the dedication I put in through the year paid off."

Her psychological growth has been just as important as her physical training. She said she felt extremely nervous at her first competitions, but repeated exposure changed her relationship with pressure. Losses didn't discourage her, they pushed her forward.

"Some kids get scared and when they lose, they stop doing the sport," she said. "I also lost in competitions, but it motivated me to keep working hard so I could keep succeeding in future competitions. You have to learn to overcome challenges in the correct way. There will be hard times, but you need to keep going and not let them knock you over."

She keeps her fight-day routine simple. She warms up, talks to her coaches and teammates, listens to music, and speaks briefly with her parents. She eats a banana or blueberries to stay energised without feeling heavy.

Her role model is Ffion Davies, a multiple time world champion. "I have met her twice," she said. "She is a nice person, and really good at the sport. I look up to her."

The pathway from Madrid to Johannesburg to the international stage has shaped Ben David into a versatile competitor with a broad skill set and a grounded approach to success. Her achievements have come from a mix of early challenges, steady support, and the determination she continues to show. The cheetah remains her symbol not only for speed, but for the instinctive balance between patience and action that defines her story.

Ben David hopes to continue competing at international level, but the demands of travelling and training in a niche sport make it difficult to secure the support she needs.



Mila Ben David shows off her gold medal in Bangkok

# Kinus attendees show power of Chabad forces

OPINION

RABBI YOSSY GOLDMAN



It was my distinct pleasure and privilege to be in New York this week for the Annual Kinus HaShluchim, the international conference of Chabad rabbis.

A pleasure because I always look forward to meeting and reconnecting with old friends and colleagues; and a privilege because we're always reminded that we're part of "the Rebbe's Army", spanning the globe and educating and inspiring Jews in more than 100 countries around the world and in all 50 states of the United States. About 6 500 Chabad rabbis were in attendance at the culminating banquet together with many supporters and partners.

Chabad's influence continues to grow exponentially. After 7 October 2023, there has been a global igniting of Jewish hearts and souls, with millions of previously disengaged and unaffiliated Jews feeling an awakening of their Jewish identity. The Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA) commissioned a study of this upward trend in the American Jewish community in 2024, dubbing the phenomenon "the surge".

The survey found that it is at a Chabad centre in places near and far where Jews, especially those previously described as disengaged, have found a place to observe, celebrate, and grow in Judaism.



South Africa was well-represented, with many in attendance from Johannesburg and Cape Town. We even had our own South African table at the gala banquet.

Everyone, even rabbis, need refreshing and rejuvenating to keep inspired in our sacred work. In a perfect world, we would just continue to run on our built-in spiritual batteries, but not everyone is the "Energizer Bunny" who just keeps on going. We're human, and the reality is that we all can get tired and in need of invigoration. We may not suffer from "burn out", G-d forbid, but we all need a spiritual boost now and then. Maybe rabbits don't, but rabbis do. It's only normal.

In particular, when I attend the Kinus, I always feel part of something greater and a partner in the Rebbe's vision for the world. We may be prominent to one degree or another in our respective communities, but the Kinus is a great equaliser. And though we may be just another soldier in the Rebbe's Army, knowing that we have battalions of friends and colleagues whom we are working alongside for a common global cause is tremendously vitalising.

I'm also always reminded of the higher purpose to it all. What brought me to South Africa from my birthplace in Brooklyn in the first place? Rochel and I had no family here. It was the Rebbe's mission. We had quite a few offers from communities around the US and internationally. We put the range of options to the Rebbe, and he chose South Africa for us. We then knew what our life's soul mission was to be. It wasn't a two-year *shlichut*, but a mission for life on the other side of the world. Please G-d, March 2026 will mark 50 years in South Africa and, thank G-d, we've never looked back.

Practically speaking, the Kinus is a professional conference with plenaries, presentations, and workshops on the full range of rabbinical work, from halacha, philosophy, to practical rabbinics, including a track just on fundraising. The Friday visit to the Rebbe's ohel is probably the most inspirational part of the four-day event. The "family photo" with 5 000 of my best friends is a unique experience; and the gala banquet on Sunday night really is a most befitting grand finale.

Back in 2002, I was invited to deliver the keynote address. Today, the format has changed dramatically. It has been streamlined, with almost no speeches. It's modern, slick, and effective.

Looking at the iconic annual photo of thousands of rabbis in front of the Rebbe's shul and Chabad headquarters at 770 Eastern Parkway in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, one can see clearly that Chabad is the biggest Jewish army in the world other than the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). Though there were more than 4 200 rabbis in the picture, not every *shaliach* is able to come every year. Another few thousand couldn't attend for one reason or another.

According to the JFNA's findings, "Close to half of those people who are part of this 'surge', showing up more in some way [to Jewish life], are doing it through Chabad."

My dear late friend and brother-in-law, Rabbi Koshe Kotlarsky, developed the Kinus into the incredible and unique phenomenon it is today. Now his son and successor, Rabbi Mendy Kotlarsky, chaired the banquet.

At the banquet, Rabbi Yaakov Raskin, *shaliach* in Jamaica, shared his frightening experience when Hurricane Melissa hit the island with unprecedented and devastating force. He told of stuffing his doors with beds, trying to stave off the vicious storm winds and relentless rain, and his gratitude for the divine protection that kept him and his family safe.

"Even as the walls shook, I knew I wasn't alone," he said. "I remembered the Rebbe's words: A Jew does not find himself in a situation. A Jew makes a situation."

Then we heard from young Zalmy Feldman, a little boy and *shaliach* from Nes Tziona in Israel who contracted a terrible infection and, tragically, lost both his legs. He chatted by livestream to Rabbi Liraz Zeira, a campus *shaliach* in Jerusalem who was on chaplaincy duty in the IDF in Syria recently when he stepped on a grenade and he, too, lost both his legs. The unwavering commitment and positive attitude of these two holy souls were beyond inspirational. I don't think there was a dry eye in the house when young Zalmy strode onto the stage confidently on his prosthetic legs.

Zalmy's words were absolutely humbling to everyone in the audience. "So I go. I walk on. Sometimes, I fall; sometimes, I get hurt. But I get up and I keep on walking. That's how the Rebbe's emissary walks!"

Israel's ambassador to the United Nations, Danny Danon, was in attendance along with many hundreds of prominent philanthropists, community leaders, friends, supporters, and admirers of the Rebbe's *shluchim*.

In a particularly moving moment, the banquet concluded with a Siyum of a new Torah scroll, dedicated to the memory of Rabbi Moshe Kotlarsky. The Sefer Torah was completed by the scribe, assisted by respected philanthropist George Rohr.

And as the letters were written, the Kinus culminated with the annual "international roll call", going through the continents and mapping the Chabad presence across the globe.

As the final letters of the Torah were inked in, the room broke out into spontaneous dancing, generating joy that radiated across oceans and continents, uniting Jews all over in a common mission and celebration.

• Rabbi Yossy Goldman is life rabbi emeritus of Sydenham Shul in Johannesburg, and president of the South African Rabbinical Association.

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

## A credible, united Jewish voice

As we approach the South African Jewish Board of Deputies' (SAJBD's) national executive conference next weekend, I find myself reflecting on the remarkable origins of the Board.

Established in 1912 through the amalgamation of the Jewish Board of Deputies for the Transvaal and Natal, founded in 1903; and its Cape counterpart, in 1904, the SAJBD emerged at a time when our community sought a unified platform to articulate its concerns.

The first meeting of the then Transvaal body took place under the auspices of the then head of government, Lord Alfred Milner. In giving government approval for the creation of the Board, he stated that it should protect special Jewish interests and voice Jewish opinion, just as other similar religious, commercial, or cultural groups were created to do. The governor stated that the Board would be of great benefit to the government, as it could now engage with a single coherent Jewish voice, stating that up to that point, when seeking guidance on Jewish-related interests, it had been exceedingly difficult to find a single authority, and indeed at times, the advice he had been given had been contradictory.

The approval specifically identified the need for a singular Jewish voice to represent the community. What began as a government-granted mandate has evolved into something far more powerful: a democratic legitimacy earned through our inclusive structure of affiliates, constituents, and co-opted leaders reflecting the rich diversity of South African Jewry.

The SAJBD's history has always mirrored the societal, cultural, and historical trends shaping our country and our community. To remain relevant, we must continually adapt, welcoming

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

### ABOVE BOARD

Karen Milner



new affiliates, embracing varied perspectives, and ensuring that our leadership represents the spectrum of views. Of course, this multiplicity can make consensus challenging, yet it's precisely what lends weight and legitimacy to the unified voice we ultimately present, both within our community and to the wider society.

It's in this spirit that delegates from across our regions will gather next weekend to debate strategy, structures, and responses to the pressing challenges we face today. History reminds us that until the 1930s, the Board operated somewhat sporadically. But with the alarming surge in antisemitism during that decade, its role became indispensable, transforming forever how we defend Jewish rights and engage with the world.

I have felt a similar shift in the period that followed 7 October 2023. The demands on our community, and on the SAJBD, have grown more urgent than ever before. Yet just as previous generations adapted to secure our place, so too must we refine and strengthen our structures today. Only then can we maintain the credible, singular voice that has sustained South African Jewry for more than a century, a voice that defends our rights, fosters connection, and ensures that we remain a vibrant part of this nation.

I look forward to the discussions ahead and to emerging even stronger together.

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# The month where our sanity gives up

Farmer Pete, it seems, feels very strongly about eggs. Or chickens. Or perhaps the fragile balance between the two. Which is why, according to the *New York Post*, he opened fire in a bar after an argument about how many eggs a chicken can lay.

The article was unclear whether the debate referred to eggs per day, week, month, or over the lifetime of the chicken. It didn't clarify whether Farmer Pete believed the chicken had rights, if the chicken was casual labour, or working under the pressure of unrealistic key performance indicators. It also didn't say which side of the argument he was on. Instead, it focused, as American media tends to, on the fight, the firearms, and the arrests that followed.

But the detail hardly matters. What matters is this: it's November, and people around the world are losing their minds.

If you haven't noticed it, South Africa isn't immune. In fact, we seem to experience November more intensely than most countries, as if the national mood has been slow-cooked over the year and is now bubbling over like a forgotten pot of Friday-night chicken soup.

Everyone I know is exhausted. Not regular exhausted, November exhausted. That special form of fatigue where even the most functional among us begin slurring our words, forgetting our children's names, and bursting into tears during school concerts for no logical reason at all.

It's the month where WhatsApp groups multiply. Suddenly there's a class concert; an end-of-year assembly; a teacher's gift collection; a braai; a braai-planning committee; a "Farewell 2025" video montage; and three unrelated

reminders to bring muffins.

Every company you've ever encountered, plus several you didn't know existed, decides to squeeze in one more networking breakfast, strategy session, year-end function, or "quick" planning meeting.

Add to that the dinners. The reunions. The shul functions. The charity



evenings. The sudden need for new shoes for every child because their old pair has mysteriously "vanished". The traffic is a mess. The cold front that wasn't predicted. And the electricity bill that is certainly wrong, because there's no world in which that number is justified.

And we haven't even started talking about the matrices; the varsity students; the office staff hanging by threads; the parents trying to remember who still needs a lift home; and the teachers - heroes, really - who are pushing through the final stretch with nothing but caffeine and the promise of December.

It's no wonder that Farmer Pete snapped. I'm not excusing it, but I'm saying, "I understand." Because November is the month where even the most patient among us discover that our tolerance has expired. The emotional warranty has run out. The wheels on the proverbial trolley have fallen off, and one is squeaking in protest.

November is the month where we all silently yearn for just one day without obligations. A day where nobody asks us for anything. A day where we don't have to clap politely at a school performance, smile at a work function, or attend yet another brainstorming session titled "Vision 2026".

Despite the madness, November also reminds us that we made it through. Through the bills; the politics; the crises; the headlines; the lost homework; the broken appliances; the unanswered emails; and the days that were simply too much.

We're battered, a bit wobbly, possibly crying in the car, but we're here.

And in a few weeks, December will soften us again. We'll exhale. We'll sleep a little more. We'll laugh about how close we came to becoming Farmer Pete, and then finally, we will have no opinion whatsoever about how many eggs a chicken should lay.

## INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



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