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Jewish Report

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SA's response to Iran reeks of hypocrisy

NICOLA MILTZ

South Africa's response to the unfolding bloodshed in Iran has been devoid of condemnation, moral urgency, or any concrete diplomatic action. This as reports point to one of the deadliest crackdowns on civilian protest in the Islamic Republic's history.

This week, South Africa had a clear opportunity to act on its human rights rhetoric. It failed. By refusing to back an urgent, emergency United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) session on Iran's "alarming violence", Pretoria opted for deafening silence. The emergency session will take place on Friday 23 January.

Across Iran, mass anti-government demonstrations have been met with sweeping, brutal repression to suppress dissent and prevent information from leaving the country. Security forces, under the authority of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, have used lethal force against protesters, imposed extensive internet blackouts, carried out mass arrests, and tightened media controls.

The number of civilians killed by the regime is in the thousands, estimated to be between 5 000 and 15 000. Precise figures remain contested and difficult to verify.

Opposition groups and international monitors estimate that tens of thousands of protesters have been arrested and thousands more injured. The scale of the repression has prompted renewed scrutiny of the international community's response, including that of South Africa.

Though Pretoria has issued statements expressing "concern" over the situation, it hasn't condemned the Iranian government's actions or called for accountability through international mechanisms.

This measured approach stands in contrast to South Africa's rapid and assertive legal action against Israel, in which the government initiated

proceedings at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) following the 7 October 2023 Hamas attack on Israeli civilians. That case was launched within weeks of the massacre in Israel, in which more than 1 200 people were killed and hundreds taken hostage.

By comparison, South Africa's reaction to the mass killing of Iranian protesters has been cautious and restrained, despite the scale of the violence and the targeting of civilians by state forces.

On 15 January, the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (Dirco) said it was "following the developments in Iran with concern", adding that the reports of unrest and loss of life were troubling. The statement urged "maximum restraint", and affirmed the universal right to peaceful protest,

freedom of expression, and freedom of association.

The Democratic Alliance (DA) has challenged this muted position, formally writing to Dirco Minister Ronald Lamola on 14 January, calling on him to report Iran to the UNHRC.

The party said South Africa's Constitution obliged the government to act against autocratic regimes that violently suppress civilian protest, and argued that the UNHRC was the appropriate forum for South Africa to give effect to its stated commitment to human rights.

The DA also pointed to Iran's recent accession to BRICS+ (the economic bloc including Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates,

and Indonesia) and the African National Congress's close political relationship with Tehran, warning that these ties appear to be influencing South Africa's foreign policy stance despite being incompatible with constitutional values.

Drawing historical parallels, the DA compared the Iranian crackdown to events such as the Sharpeville massacre in 1960 and the Soweto uprising in 1976, when peaceful protests in South Africa were met with state violence and the international community sided with the oppressed rather than the ruling regime.

Sara Gon, a fellow at the South African Institute of Race Relations, said South Africa's foreign policy had long reflected a tendency to align with governments perceived as anti-Western, regardless of their human rights records or strategic value to South Africa.

"The government has a proclivity for relationships with countries that are essentially anti-American, irrespective of whether they offer any benefit to South Africans," she said. "This is the essence of its relationship with Iran. We don't buy energy from it or get anything of consequence for South Africa."

Gon said Iran's support for Hamas and Hezbollah hadn't influenced South Africa's stance, despite widespread international concern about the groups' activities.

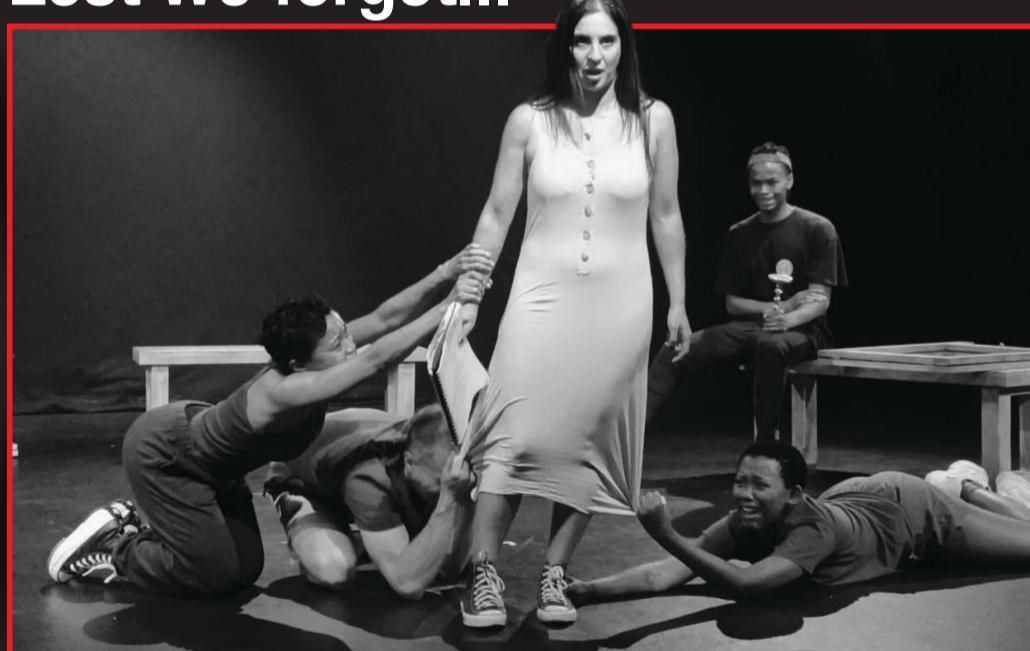
"South Africa insists that it is non-aligned, but in practice that means it's not aligned to the US or its allies," she said. "It expressed concern about what's happening in Iran, but didn't condemn it."

Hussein Solomon, political studies professor at the University of the Free State, said South Africa's restrained response fitted a broader pattern of selective engagement on human rights issues.

"South Africa has always adopted a muted response when it comes to its friends and allies," he said. "Human rights has always been selective, and this is something the US has repeatedly called South Africa out on."

Continued on page 3>>

Lest we forget...



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Mourner's Kaddish for Bondi Beach victims recited in Australian Parliament as tougher hate crime laws pass

GRACE GILSON – JTA

A Jewish member of Australian Parliament recited the Mourner's Kaddish in an address on Monday, 19 January, to honour the victims of the Chanukah massacre on Bondi Beach.

The address, delivered by Jewish parliamentarian and former attorney general Mark Dreyfus, came more than a month after two gunmen motivated by what authorities said was "Islamic State ideology" opened fire on a celebration in Sydney, killing 15 and injuring dozens more. Most of the victims were Jewish, and Dreyfus read all of their names aloud.

Dreyfus, who wore a kippah for the presentation, then commended the "acts

of extraordinary courage" by bystanders and emergency workers during the attack, naming Ahmed al-Ahmed, the Muslim man who received widespread support from the Jewish community after he was shot while disarming one of the attackers. He also told the Australian House of Representatives that the country's "response cannot be confined to grief", exhorting his fellow legislators to take action around "upholding our laws against hate".

Then he invited everyone present to rise for the Mourner's Kaddish, recited in Jewish communities in memory of the dead.

"You don't have to be Jewish to feel this in your chest, an attack like this hurts all of us," Dreyfus said, describing the prayer as "a prayer about life, dignity, and hope for peace at times of profound loss".

The public recitation was redolent of the decision of the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* to publish the Hebrew text of the prayer on its front page following the murder of 11 Jews in its synagogue there in 2018.

Late on Tuesday, Australia's Parliament passed anti-hate speech and gun reform Bills initiated in the wake of the attack. The gun reform Bill included new checks on firearm-licence applications and a national gun buy-back programme, while the anti-hate speech Bill banned hate groups and imposed penalties for preachers who promote hate.

The hate speech component won support from liberal legislators who said they had free-speech concerns after it was weakened from its initial version.

"The terrorists at Bondi Beach had hatred



Mark Dreyfus speaks in Parliament House on 19 January in Canberra, Australia

in their hearts and guns in their hands," wrote Prime Minister Anthony Albanese in a post on X. "Today, we passed new laws that deal with both. Combatting antisemitism and cracking down on guns."

66

You don't have to be Jewish to feel this in your chest, an attack like this hurts all of us.

The new laws come as Australia grapples with another searing antisemitic incident. Late in the day on Monday, five Jewish

teenagers in Melbourne were chased for several minutes by a car whose occupants chanted "Heil Hitler" and performed Nazi salutes at them.

The boys, aged 15 and 16 and easily identifiable as Orthodox Jews, were walking home from Adass High School when the incident occurred in the proximity of Adass Israel Synagogue, which was firebombed in December 2024. No arrests were immediately made.

"The antisemitic hate incident last night in St Kilda targeting young Jewish boys has no place in our country," Albanese said, according to *The Australian*. "At a time when Australians are joining with the Jewish community in sorrow and solidarity, it's beyond disgusting to see these cowards shouting Nazi slogans at young people."

Torah Thought

Rabbi Greg Alexander
Cape Town Progressive
Jewish Congregation



trees that I have helped to tend – Temple Israel; the Cape Town Jewish community; and South African Jewry – continue to flourish with the loving care of all its gardeners. May you, reader, with G-d's help, be one of those, and on our next visit, may we have the merit of walking around these gardens admiring the work of your hands.

Shabbat shalom.

Secret lives of trees

So much happens beyond what we can see. If you look up in the sky tonight, you will see just a sliver of a moon. Rosh Chodesh Sh'vat – the new moon, marking the beginning of the month of Sh'vat – fell on Monday, 19 January. It's the month when we will celebrate Tu B'Shvat, the festival of trees. While it's mid-summer here in South Africa, in the northern hemisphere, it's bitterly cold, the darkest time of year. Everything seems frozen and dead. Why, then, would it be a time to celebrate a festival of trees?

Because it's exactly now that, invisibly to us, the sap begins to rise in the trees, and buds appear. Most famously the *shkeidiyah* (almond tree) is the first to put out its blossoms. The rains that have fed the earth over winter begin to rise into the veins of the trees.

Our tradition likens the Torah to a Tree of Life, just like we sing when we put the Torah away, "Eitz chayim hi" (It's a Tree of Life to those who hold fast to her.) (Prov 3:18). Trees

are everywhere in the Bible, from the trees in the Garden of Eden to Psalms – *Tzaddik katamar yifrach* (The righteous shall flourish like a date palm) (Ps 92:13). Even we are compared to trees – *ki ha'adam eitz ha-sadeh* (because a human being is a

tree of the field) (Deut 20:19), an image that is developed by the kabbalistic tree.

Many readers here might have already heard that I'm going to start work at Alyth Gardens synagogue in London from July. I have enjoyed writing for the SA Jewish Report for the past 20 years, and have been blessed to spend those two decades working for the community as a rav in Cape Town. Rabbi Andi and I have watched our children grow up as the synagogue grew with us and around us – the fruits of the tending and nurturing of the many lay leaders, rabbis, synagogue teams, and congregants who have stepped up to nourish this remarkable community. And the incredible fruits for me have been the chance to stand by the sides of my congregants at their baby-blessings, weddings, Bnei Mitzvah, and funerals, to hold each other in hard and celebratory times. Fortunately, my work extended beyond the walls of my shul to the wider Jewish community of Cape Town and the rest of the country. So much tending, nurturing, and growing.

As I move on to this new challenge, I'm looking forward to seeing how those

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Editor Peta Krost – editor@sajewishreport.co.za • Sub-editor Julie Leibowitz • Senior Journalist Claudia Gross

Junior Reporter Lee Tankle • Digital Media Coordinator Gilana Lab • Photographer Ilan Ossendryver

Proofreader Kim Hatchuel/A-Proofed – kim@a-proofed.co.za • Advertising Britt Landsman: 082 292 9520 – britt@sajewishreport.co.za

Distribution Sandy Furman – admin@sajewishreport.co.za

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Protesters stand up to bullying of Cape Union Mart

TALI FEINBERG

The tide could be turning against antisemitism in Cape Town, demonstrated by a group of young South Africans who came out this past weekend to stand up to extremists protesting outside Cape Union Mart at the Victoria & Alfred (V&A) Waterfront. They protested silently and stoically as slurs were hurled at them and Hezbollah flags were waved.

Thom Thamaga, senior pastor of Without Walls Christian Family Church in Khayelitsha, brought together young people from faith communities and civil society to counter-protest. "Many were Christians who stand with Israel," Thamaga told the *SA Jewish Report*. "Others were ordinary South Africans who differ on political details but are deeply troubled by the normalisation of intimidation and extremism in public protest."

For more than two years, extremists have harassed shoppers and defamed Jews in protests outside local Cape Union Mart stores. The Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC) and its supporters falsely claim that Cape Union Mart Executive Chairperson Philip Krawitz supports Israel's military and was complicit in its Gaza war, lies they have perpetuated despite the truth being clearly conveyed to them. Krawitz has since sued several individuals and the PSC, and the case will be heard in February.

The group of young protesters stood silently in the face of open intimidation, holding their posters criticising extremist violence. "What unfolded was a counter-protest on multiple fronts," Thamaga says. "Different groups highlighted related concerns, including the threat posed by radical ideology and the persecution of minorities across the Middle East and Africa. Others expressed solidarity with the Iranian people, drawing attention to the world's selective silence."

He organised the counter-protest because he says what has been happening outside Cape Union Mart "has moved beyond legitimate protest into harassment, intimidation, and economic targeting".

South Africa has "a painful history of coercion and intimidation", and "we recognise those patterns when they re-emerge", Thamaga says. Repeated demonstrations aimed at "pressuring a business, intimidating staff and customers, and publicly vilifying people by association, cross a serious line".

Staying silent "would amount to complicity", he says. The counter-protest was necessary to say that South Africa mustn't normalise "intimidation, antisemitism, or the abuse of protest culture to bully businesses or communities".

The counter-protesters also made it clear that "supporting Israel's right to exist and to defend itself isn't a crime", and that disagreement over geopolitics "doesn't justify targeting Jewish people or businesses".

The counter-protest also showed that protest culture shouldn't be allowed to be "captured" by "extremist ideologies, militant symbolism, or selective outrage" that ignores persecution "when it doesn't fit a preferred political narrative", he says.

South Africans expressed agreement in December 2025, when ordinary people and the South African National Bioinformatics Institute stood up to the PSC.



Counter-protesters outside Cape Union Mart at the V&A Waterfront

which wanted a Kirstenbosch concert by local musician David Scott – known as The Kiffness – cancelled, because Scott is critical of radical Islam and terrorism. On social media, hundreds of ordinary South Africans condemned anti-Israel extremists' hatred and hypocrisy, signalling that they wouldn't tolerate such radicalism.

South Africans also criticised extremists for waving the Hezbollah flag, and the V&A Waterfront for allowing it. One woman, speaking anonymously for her own security, rhetorically addressed Waterfront management, saying, "There has now been two-plus years of this [hated] outside one of your most loyal anchor tenants, being targeted as a Jew, and terrorist flags being openly waved."

She pointed out that Hezbollah is proscribed as a terrorist organisation in the United States; United Kingdom; multiple European countries; Canada; Japan; Malaysia; New Zealand; Argentina; Saudi Arabia; the United Arab Emirates; and Bahrain. "Yet [Waterfront] visitors from these very countries are being confronted by this flag. What will it take to stop this insanity?"

Thamaga says the counter-protesters felt "deeply disturbed" at seeing the Hezbollah flag. Waving such a flag in a public space is "intimidation and provocation", he says. That moment "confirmed that these protests are increasingly about radical ideology and the legitimisation of terrorist movements".

In August 2025, the Western Cape High Court ordered protesters to stop harassing customers outside Cape Union Mart stores and preventing shoppers from going into the stores. The V&A Waterfront has since ensured that extremists protest only in a designated area opposite the store. However, many observers feel that this isn't enough.

A Jewish community member who posts under the account @that_jew_from_southafrica, also speaking anonymously for her own safety, called on the shopping centre to stop the extremist protests "before you have blood on your hands".

Addressing the fact that children were seen waving Hezbollah flags, she asked how centre management could allow it. The extremists "spew vile, hateful rhetoric, breaking several rules of the V&A Waterfront's code of conduct", she says.

South African Zionist Federation spokesperson Rolene

Marks says flying the Hezbollah flag "is an endorsement of terror. When this is directed at Jewish-owned businesses, it becomes targeted intimidation."

She says extremists know that Hezbollah isn't designated a terrorist organisation in South Africa, and exploit this. But that legal technicality "doesn't make the act morally defensible. It exposes a profound ethical bankruptcy." She commends ordinary South Africans who say, "Not in our name."

However, "a society that allows terrorist flags in its most prominent public spaces cannot claim to oppose extremism", Marks says. "Where is the City of Cape Town? Where is the South African Police Service? Where is Waterfront management?"

"We welcome the support of South Africans who peacefully stood up to extremist protests," says Cape South African Jewish Board of Deputies (Cape SAJBD) Executive Director Daniel Bloch. "We encourage continued support for this proudly South African business, which has been unfairly targeted for more than two years."

The Cape SAJBD is "deeply concerned" by the "ongoing intimidation" of shoppers, including the open display of a Hezbollah flag. Hezbollah's flag is a symbol of "terrorism against Jews and Israelis; impacting Jewish, Christian, Druze, and Muslim communities alike", Bloch says.

That a "rag-tag but vocal group is permitted, weekend after weekend, to wave such symbols in a public, family-friendly space is unacceptable", he says. "We will continue to raise these concerns with the relevant authorities. This



Photos courtesy EndJewHatred campaign

behaviour mustn't be normalised."

Says Simone Sulcas, the legal advisor of Cape Union Mart Group, "We respect the right to peaceful protest," and "urge all groups to exercise this democratic freedom lawfully and responsibly." Disruptive actions "undermine public safety and the rights of shoppers and businesses" and have an impact on the Waterfront as an internationally recognised tourist attraction.

The #EndJewHatred campaign which has 115 000

followers on Instagram, shared videos of the counter-protesters, saying that their message was "stark and urgent" because the "massacre of Christians [by jihadists] cannot be ignored or excused – [it is] the direct result of extremist ideologies that glorify violence and dehumanisation".

To the South African Jewish community, Thamaga says, "You aren't alone. Many South Africans stand with you and in defence of your right to live, work, and worship without fear or intimidation."

The *SA Jewish Report* reached out to V&A Waterfront management, but didn't receive a response by the time of publication.

SA's response to Iran reeks of hypocrisy

>>Continued from page 1

Solomon said consistency was critical if South Africa wished to maintain credibility in international fora.

"If you take a stance in terms of human rights, for example, taking Israel to the ICJ, you need to be consistent," he said. "Whether it's the situation in Sudan, northern Ethiopia, or on the streets of Tehran."

"Selective condemnation is problematic because it weakens the credibility of South Africa's foreign policy pronouncements beyond its borders," Solomon said.

The South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) said the government's response to Iran reflected a departure from the universal human rights principles that once defined South Africa's international standing.

"Once, South Africa championed human rights as indivisible and absolute," the organisation said. "Today, they are applied selectively, depending on political alignment."

The SAZF said South Africa's continued engagement with authoritarian governments, including Iran, risked aligning the country with regimes rather than civilian populations affected by repression.

What began as widespread economic protests last year escalated into sustained unrest in major cities including Tehran, Isfahan, Mashhad, and Shiraz. The demonstrations were reportedly triggered on

28 December by shopkeepers in downtown Tehran, and quickly spread nationwide. Independent reporting has been severely restricted amid an ongoing digital blackout. Families of victims have reported intimidation, while lawyers, activists, and journalists have been detained.

Iranian officials have continued to promise harsh punishment for those arrested, repeatedly referring to protesters as "rioters" and accusing them of acting on behalf of foreign powers. Authorities have blamed the US and Israel for allegedly funding and arming the protests, claims that have been widely disputed.

In an unusual admission, Khamenei said on Saturday, 17 January, that "several thousand" had been killed during the unrest, while the theocratic establishment maintains that the deaths were caused by agents affiliated with foreign powers rather than state forces. Tens of thousands of people are believed to have been arrested, with Iranian authorities continuing to announce new detentions almost daily.

As unrest continues in Iran and reports of mass arrests mount, scrutiny of South Africa's foreign policy posture is likely to intensify. For critics, the central issue is not whether South Africa has spoken, but whether its response matches the gravity of events unfolding on the streets of Iran.

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Presidential order, naval defiance: Iran's role triggers inquiry

CLAUDIA GROSS

A defence inquiry has been launched into whether Defence Minister Angie Motshekga and senior military officials defied a direct instruction from President Cyril Ramaphosa to exclude Iranian warships from a multinational naval exercise off Cape Town, reigniting questions about Iran's influence within South Africa's government and the erosion of civilian control over the military.

The controversy centres on the Will for Peace exercise, held in South African waters between 9 and 16 January and involving naval forces from South Africa, China, Russia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates. Despite Ramaphosa's reported instruction that Iran be restricted to observer status, Iranian warships were seen manoeuvring alongside other navies in False Bay, triggering a political backlash and international concern.

Opposition parties and analysts say the episode raises serious constitutional concerns. The president is commander-in-chief of the defence force, and any failure to execute a lawful instruction strikes at the heart of civilian oversight.

The founder and former leader of the Democratic Alliance (DA), Tony Leon, said the issue wasn't merely diplomatic but constitutional. "It just heightens the dysfunctionality of the government and the fact that he's not in control of the military," he said.

Leon warned that while South Africa's limited military capacity reduced the risk of an outright breakdown, the symbolism was serious. "In another country, alarm bells would ring at such a moment that the military is unconstrained and not being reined in by civilian commanders."

Motshekga has ordered a formal board of inquiry to determine whether the president's directive was "misrepresented or ignored". She has denied defying Ramaphosa,

insisting that the instruction was communicated and that any failure would be uncovered by the inquiry. The investigation will examine how the instruction was handled within the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) and whether it was implemented.

The DA has demanded answers in Parliament, arguing that the episode suggests either a breakdown in command or a willingness within the defence establishment to sidestep executive authority. Darren Bergman, DA MP for planning, monitoring and evaluation in the office of the presidency, said the issue had far-reaching diplomatic consequences. "The involvement of Iran against the instruction by the South African president was a serious threat to our international standing, which is not on a cemented footing with the likes of the United States," he said.

It couldn't be dismissed as miscommunication, Bergman said. "Communication in the military is key, and if our generals and minister cannot take simple instruction from the commander-in-chief then one or two heads need to make way for those that can and will."

The controversy has also renewed scrutiny of South Africa's relationship with Iran. Iranian participation in the exercise came amid heightened global attention on Tehran's human rights record and growing protests inside that country. Critics argue that Iran's inclusion reflects a pattern in which South Africa's foreign policy increasingly aligns with authoritarian states despite official claims of non-alignment.

The South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) condemned the government's decision to host the exercise, describing it as a "damning indictment" of the

African National Congress's (ANC's) stated commitment to human rights. The SAZF said South Africa was hosting joint naval drills while Iran was violently suppressing nationwide protests, accusing the government of providing logistical and political cover to an oppressive regime.

In its statement, the SAZF said the decision revealed "the ANC's true

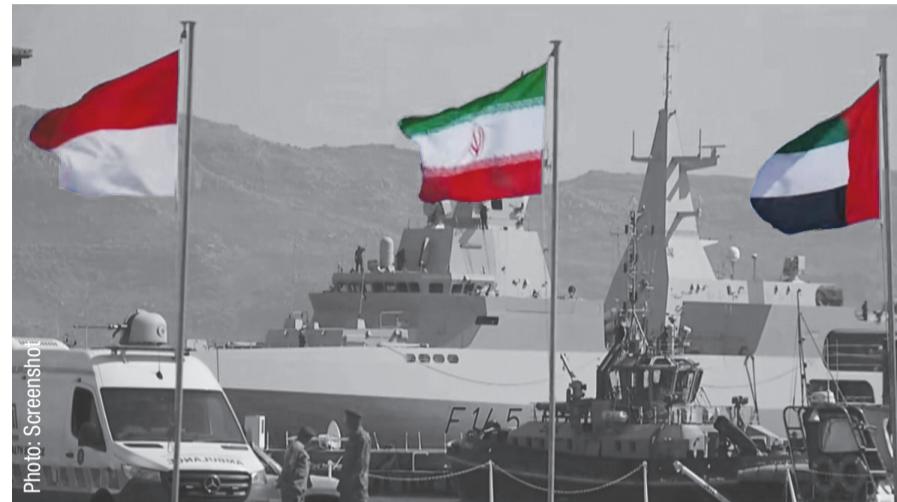
exercise, with the US embassy in Pretoria publicly expressing concern over Iran's participation and warning that the drills undermined South Africa's stated policy of non-alignment. In Washington, Republican Senator Jim Risch, the chairperson of the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee, described South Africa's military engagement with Iran, Russia, and China as

and maritime safety rather than combat training. Navy leadership has insisted that participation in multinational exercises doesn't imply political alignment.

However, confusion over Iran's role has been compounded by inconsistent public messaging. On 13 January, the SANDF posted on Facebook a list of vessels participating in the sea phase of the exercise, and explicitly included the Iranian corvette *Naghdi* alongside ships from South Africa, Russia, China, and the United Arab Emirates, which contradicts repeated statements from government sources that Tehran's vessels wouldn't take part in active manoeuvres. That post was subsequently deleted without explanation, prompting speculation that the defence force removed evidence of Iran's involvement after the fact.

Around the same time, a journalist from the South African Broadcasting Corporation posted on X that Iran had been downgraded to observer status or withdrawn, but no official clarification was issued to reconcile that claim with the deleted SANDF communication listing *Naghdi* as an active participant. The Department of Defence later released a statement saying that Ramaphosa's directive had been "clearly communicated to all parties", and would be investigated to see if it was "misrepresented and/or ignored", but it didn't address why the original SANDF post was removed or explain the conflicting accounts of Iran's actual participation, which deepens uncertainty about whose account reflects reality.

The board of inquiry is expected to provide a report shortly. Its findings will determine whether disciplinary action follows and whether Parliament escalates its oversight role. Until then, the presence of Iranian warships in False Bay remains a potent symbol of unresolved questions about who exercises authority in South Africa and how far Iran's influence now extends within the state.



In Simon's Town during the Will for Peace naval warship exercise

allegiances" and exposed what it called "the utter hollowness of its rhetoric on human rights". It described Iran's leadership as "a merciless oppressor that executes protesters, imprisons women for daring to defy compulsory veiling, muzzles journalists, and unleashes brutality on minorities", and said South Africa was hosting the exercise while Iranians were "braving the certainty of arrest, torture, or death" in nationwide protests.

The SAZF also challenged the silence of other parties in the Government of National Unity, asking, "How can parties committed to constitutionalism, human rights, and pragmatic foreign policy tolerate this alignment with tyrants?" and warning that failure to speak out risked "complicity in this moral failure".

International reaction has been swift. The US criticised South Africa's hosting of the

"open hostility" toward the US, cautioning that such actions risk damaging diplomatic relations at a time when South Africa's continued access to preferential trade benefits under the African Growth and Opportunity Act is under scrutiny.

Security analyst and professor at the University of Cambridge, Glen Segell, said the episode pointed to a deeper problem of authority. "What's even more concerning is the uncertainty surrounding who authorised this, raising questions about who is truly in charge in South Africa," he said, pointing out that Iran's presence served Tehran's strategic aims by signalling power projection and strengthening ties with Russia and China.

Within the defence establishment, senior naval officials have defended the exercise as operationally necessary, stressing that it focused on seamanship, navigation,

Why Somaliland should be recognised by the world

OPINION

More than 30 years ago, Somaliland declared itself independent from Somalia. It has been functioning as a country with all the elements and practices of an ordinary state such as defined borders, a flag, citizens, government, and identity and passport documents which are used throughout the world. It has a tax system, which it uses to provide quality service delivery. Though Somaliland is able to issue passports which are used throughout the world, the world hasn't come to terms with the recognition of Somaliland.

Somaliland is far from being like virtual states such as Palestine, Catalonia, or Western Sahara, which don't function like real states. Somaliland has a hybrid three-tier system combining formal government branches, and a three-party political system closely monitored by the state, with the electorate voting for candidates among the three parties.

Even without formal diplomatic recognition, Somaliland has had strong economic, cultural, and political ties with progressive economies such as Ethiopia, the United Arab Emirates, Israel, and others.

Is Somaliland a hopeless state like the collapsed state of Somalia? Definitely not. It has created a solid, resilient, and self-reliant economic model in which it exports livestock and diaspora remittances that strengthen its small but vibrant economy. What should be noticed and appreciated by the world is that Somaliland has never experienced any terrorist attacks, unlike Somalia, which is prone to them.

Taiwan, which considers itself an independent state with a similar experience and challenges to Somaliland, has been the biggest financial contributor to Somaliland's success. It has helped fund elections to encourage democracy in the country. It even goes as far as funding humanitarian aid and infrastructural development.

In a rather rare but strategic act of diplomacy, towards the end of the year, Israel took the world by surprise when it became the first United Nations member state to recognise Somaliland, a country on the Horn of Africa. As

expected, this move was condemned by some countries, who deemed it controversial. But Somaliland views Israel's recognition as a political and diplomatic milestone because it seeks international acknowledgement to make life easier for its people.

The recognition of Somaliland aligns with Israel's longstanding security doctrine. It is aimed at securing a long-term presence along a strategic coastline in the Horn of Africa; and providing access to areas dominated by the Houthis in Yemen, who have posed a significant challenge to Israel's security, particularly during the recent war between Israel and Hamas. The formal establishment of diplomatic relations between Israel and Somaliland should therefore be seen as a strategic move within Israel's broader counterterrorism campaign.

Security is a key mutual interest for Somaliland. Unlike Mogadishu, where militant group Al-Shabaab has thrived amid Somalia's political disunity, Somaliland has largely remained free from the terror episodes that have plagued the region. Though it remains uncertain whether Al-Shabaab may in future attempt to expand its operations into the relatively peaceful Somaliland, one reason it hasn't succeeded thus far is a strong sense of patriotism and collective commitment to maintaining a functional state. As a result, Al-Shabaab has been unable to exploit social or political grievances for recruitment or attacks as it has done elsewhere.

Securing borders against such bloodthirsty terrorists therefore remains a shared concern for both Somaliland and Israel.

Some in Somalia believe that Somaliland will become a destination for Palestinians who will be dumped from Gaza. But, is it even possible to achieve such a colossal goal? Israel, since its formation, has been striving to establish

and strengthen relations with as many countries as possible. The Israel-Palestine conflict has been shaping and shifting African and Asian relations with Israel. In the past, especially during and after the 1973 Yom Kippur war, many African countries severed ties with Israel, isolating the country, but Israeli political actors pursued diplomatic efforts to maintain the relationship with African countries, going as far as being recognised as an observer at the African Union (AU).

Rumours about the displacement of Palestinians advanced by Somalia have been dismissed by both Somaliland and Israel, who have signed a memorandum of understanding.

The allegations have been vehemently denied by Somaliland President Abdirahman Mohamed Abdullahi, the country's sixth president. The Somaliland Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated on its official X account: "The Government of the Republic of Somaliland firmly rejects false claims made by the President of Somalia alleging the resettlement of Palestinians or the establishment of military bases in Somaliland."

The AU and its member states need to engage seriously with the question of Somaliland's independence. The AU frequently speaks about the restoration or preservation of colonial borders, yet it often overlooks the fact that Somaliland has always been separate from Somalia. It was a British colony - British Somaliland - before Somalia laid claim to it. In 1991, Somaliland declared its independence from Somalia, and has since governed itself, with Hargeisa as its capital. Somaliland isn't a creation of Israel; it's a product of the 1884 colonial partitioning of Africa during the Berlin Conference.

This isn't the only political or historical scenario in which colonial boundaries have created lasting divisions. A similar situation exists in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), where a group in the eastern part of the country known as the Banyarwanda have remained stateless while seeking integration within the DRC. The confusion stems from the fact that the Banyarwanda are descendants of present-day Rwandans, a reality not considered during the arbitrary partitioning of African borders. This, too, is an issue that demands serious attention from AU leaders.

• Kenneth Kgwadi is a political writer and research fellow at the Middle East Africa Research Institute (MEA).



KENNETH KGWADI

Antisemitic film's SA blocking a victory for Board

LEE TANKLE

South Africa's Film and Publications Board (FPB) has refused to classify the documentary *Hebrews to Negroes – Wake Up Black America* because it contains antisemitic and harmful content.

The ruling this week follows a formal complaint from the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) that argued that the film propagates racist stereotypes and antisemitic tropes which amounted to unlawful hate speech based on religion and ethnicity.

The SAJBD was alerted to the film in June 2023 when it was screened at the Soweto Theatre. The Board was alerted by its counterparts in the United States, where the film's producers live. They have been involved in distributing anti-Jewish conspiracies, films, and social media for many years.

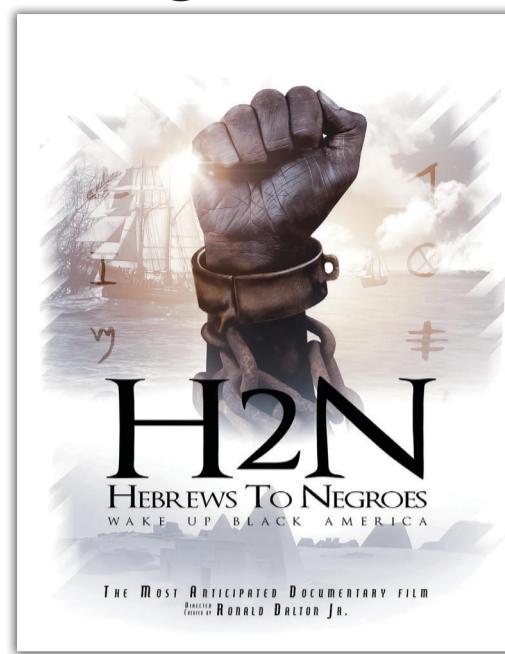
"The film had a broad range of antisemitic tropes and conspiracy theories which the producers shared on various social media platforms," said SAJBD National Director Wendy Kahn. "The organisers made it clear they intended to screen this hateful movie in commercial theatres around South Africa, spreading this venom about Jews."

The 2018 film, directed, written, and produced by Ronald Dalton Jr, is based on a book of the same name also written by Dalton. It promotes the belief that some people of colour, including black Americans, are the true descendants of the biblical Israelites. One of its core ideas is that the Jews of today aren't Jews, but they have culturally appropriated the religious heritage of black people and covered it up.

The film includes claims of an international Jewish conspiracy that aims to oppress and defraud black people. It quotes *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and Henry Ford's *The International Jew*; Holocaust denialism; attacks on Zionism; and conspiracy theories about the Rothschild family. The film also includes quotes attributed to Adolf Hitler that appear to be fabricated.

"The film uses demonic imagery, likening Jews past and present to the devil. It claims that Jews were responsible for the transatlantic slave trade and refers to the Holocaust as one of the "major falsehoods" that Jews have foisted on humanity. It also rehashes various classic *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*-inspired tropes about Jews controlling the banks, education system, and mass media," Kahn said.

"The film depicts Jews as a nation of liars who, as a



matter of deliberate strategy, have falsified history and concealed their real identity to conceal their nature and protect their status and power," she said.

In November 2022, major American Jewish organisations including the Anti-Defamation League; American Jewish Committee; and Jewish Federations of North America petitioned Amazon to stop distributing the *Hebrews to Negroes* book and film on its platform. Amazon Chief Executive Andy Jassy refused to remove the film or book from its website. The book had become a number one best seller in Amazon's "religion and spirituality" category.

The SAJBD filed a complaint with the FPB in 2023, raising the hateful content in the film and requesting that it decline classification as the film amounted to unlawful incitement to hatred based on both religion and ethnicity. The Board, together with its legal team headed by then SAJBD Gauteng Council Chairperson Harold Jacobs, presented its case at the FPB on 26 June 2024.

"The maker of the film, Ronald Dalton Jr, was there in person to respond to our complaint against his film," said Kahn. "After our lawyers presented on our behalf, we had to endure more than three hours of him purporting to explain away and justify the various vile sentiments about Jews that his film contained, during which he simply doubled down on the kind of antisemitic tropes that it propagated."

"It was deeply upsetting to sit face to face with someone with such warped and dehumanising views on Jews," said Kahn. "Throughout the process, Dalton continually lashed out at the SAJBD with his invective, just as he had been doing prior to this on his social media."

Two years later, the FPB has finally affirmed the SAJBD's complaint and issued a refused-classification ruling regarding the film, and distributors have been requested to remove the film from all platforms in South Africa.

"The producers of the film inundated the Film and Publications Board with videos and documents of their venomous beliefs, and it needed to consider them carefully. Though it has been a lengthy process, we believe it was worth waiting for this important outcome," Kahn said.

"World Jewry knows only too well that words have meaning and over the past two years, we have seen hate speech result in hideous violent attacks on Jewish people from America to Australia and many in between," said Kahn.

"Justice Sisi Khampepe in the SAJBD's Masuku case quoted from Proverbs, namely "Life and death are in the power of the tongue." We are fortunate in South Africa to have advanced hate crimes and hate-speech legislation protecting us from all forms of threatening or demeaning rhetoric."

The FPB was approached for comment, but was unable to send it before the *SA Jewish Report's* publication deadline.

Anti-Israel colouring-in book blocked in France, Germany

CLAUDIA GROSS

Police searches of bookshops, removals from shelves, and an escalating European debate over children's publishing have placed a controversial colouring-in book at the centre of renewed scrutiny. *From the River to the Sea*, published by South Africa-based Social Bandit Media, has been declared illegal for importation and distribution in France, months after it was removed by a major German bookstore chain.

French authorities confirmed this month that the book couldn't be sold or distributed, following a police search of the independent Paris bookstore Violette and Co. According to the publisher, five police officers accompanied by a prosecutor, entered the shop and conducted a search aimed at confiscating copies of the book. The book wasn't found on the premises at the time.

The move has followed earlier action in Germany, where the Hugendubel bookstore chain removed the title from its catalogue after it was brought to its attention.

In a statement to the German newspaper *Jüdische Allgemeine*, Hugendubel said the book was "removed immediately upon learning of its existence", adding that it regretted that the title had been stocked and that it distanced itself from the opinions expressed in it.

The book, marketed as a children's colouring-in and educational tool, has drawn sharp criticism from Jewish organisations which argue that it presents a one-sided narrative of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and crosses the line into ideological indoctrination aimed at young children.

The South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) welcomed the French ban, describing the book as harmful. "What's sold as innocent education is blatant propaganda targeting kids as young as six," said SAZF National Spokesperson Rolene Marks. The book "libellously brands Israel an 'apartheid' state; strips Palestinians of any agency or accountability; glorifies 'martyrs' as heroes; and normalises violence at religious sites," she said.

Marks said France's decision reflected the responsibility of democratic societies to protect children. "France drew the right line. Democracies must shield children from violence-glorifying radicalisation, no matter how cutely packaged."

Social Bandit Media has rejected the accusations, arguing that the book has been unfairly targeted through political pressure. In posts on its Instagram account, the publisher said the actions in France followed "ongoing pressure dating back to the summer of 2025, when pressure groups and far-right forces accused

it of antisemitism, accusations that are completely unfounded".

The publisher also framed the French intervention as an attack on artistic freedom, saying that "any attack on these freedoms constitutes an act of censorship". It has announced that, because the book has been deemed illegal in France, it will make a French-language edition available as a free download.

The French case has attracted international media attention. Reports in *Middle East Eye* and *Maktoob Media* noted that the search of Violette and Co was carried out in the presence of armed police officers and temporarily prevented customers from entering the shop. The publisher described the incident as "unprecedented and disproportionate", while French authorities have not publicly detailed the legal basis beyond the decision that the book couldn't be sold.

In Germany, the controversy centred on the book's title and content. Hugendubel said the book "spreads conspiracy myths about Israel" and shows a clear anti-Israel bias, portraying Palestinians as peaceful while depicting Israeli soldiers as aggressive, without addressing Palestinian terrorism. The chain said it would make "every effort to ensure that such an incident doesn't happen again".

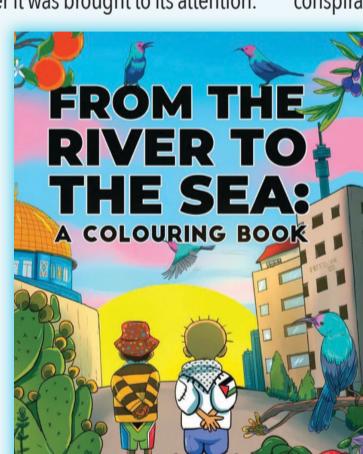
The book has previously been the subject of debate in South Africa. A 2025 article in the *SA Jewish Report* examined criticism that the colouring-in book erased Jewish historical ties to Israel, and presented the conflict through a single ideological lens.

Adding to the South African dimension, the book's illustrator is South African. The same illustrator has also worked with Social Bandit Media on another colouring-in publication, *Malcolm X in Gaza*, which the publisher describes as an educational project linking global civil-rights struggles with the Palestinian cause.

Social Bandit Media has reported that *From the River to the Sea* has been widely distributed outside Europe, claiming that at least 22 000 copies have been sold in countries including South Africa; the United States; the United Kingdom; Switzerland; the Netherlands; India; and Pakistan. It argues that the continued restrictions in France amount to a violation of freedom of artistic creation and democratic principles.

For Jewish organisations, however, the issue isn't censorship but child protection. As Marks put it, "This isn't debate. It's ideological grooming and early hatred indoctrination, leaving zero space for peace or coexistence."

As European authorities continue to assess the boundaries of lawful expression in children's publishing, the fate of *From the River to the Sea* has become a flashpoint in a much broader argument about education, propaganda, and the responsibilities of publishers, booksellers, and states.



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Jewish Report

Hypocrisy on steroids

Thousands of civilians being mowed down in the street by the national guard. Thousands being detained without trial and, in some cases, simply disappearing. Communication with the outside world has been shut off.

This is Iran. Undoubtedly, it's a country in crisis whose people don't want the government of the day to continue in power. The world can't just look on.

The photographs of what's happening there are reminiscent of atrocities in South Africa during apartheid. The Boipatong massacre; Soweto uprising; Sharpeville massacre, Bisho massacre, or even the more recent massacre in Marikana.

As South Africans, we understand this horror, and most of us would have expected that ANC leaders, who were the freedom fighters of the time often at the wrong end of the gun barrel, would be aghast at what's happening in Iran. Surely these images have shocked these leaders, many of whom fought so hard for freedom and democracy, into taking serious action?

Not at all, apparently. Instead, the ANC leadership looks on from the sidelines and quietly and belatedly calls for calm and dialogue in Iran. They are not calling for sanctions, interventions, or an international commission of inquiry. They are certainly not considering taking their friends, the regime behind the Islamic Republic of Iran, to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for inhumane treatment of its own people.

Funny how our leaders were so quick to do that to Israel, in fact they did so shortly after the war against Hamas began, but somehow the barbarism of Iran isn't bothering them enough. For South Africa, it was far more important to stop Israel from retaliating against a terrorist organisation that stormed the border; murdered 1 200 innocent men, women, and children; and brutalised thousands more.

The ANC doesn't even seem to be shocked at what's happening at the hands of Iran. No, ANC leaders are simply following the developments "with concern". Wow, that's big of them! They claim to be concerned about "loss of life" and even go as far as calling on all parties – I guess this means desperate civilian protesters as well – to "exercise maximum restraint". Really! Thousands have been murdered in the streets. Restraint at this point is a little late. At this point, surely, we should be demanding a whole lot more than that?

Surely, we should insist that the brutal Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps throw down its arms and for the regime to reinstate communication. Considering our leaders' case against Israel at the ICJ, they should be taking Iran there forthwith. Their history of fighting for human rights would make that obvious, right?

Well, not exactly. It seems clear that our ruling party is selective with whose human rights it demands and supports. It seems our leaders get very angry with people who don't unquestionably support its friends. I have to say, I think it must have taken a great effort on the part of the ANC even to call for restraint from its big buddies in Iran.

And while Iranian bullies are mowing down their own people, we have Iranian warships in our very own waters, participating in a joint event with Russia, China, the United Arab Emirates, and South Africa, under our auspices.

Granted, President Cyril Ramaphosa publicly called for the Iranian warships to be withdrawn from the joint exercise, but it seems there was far more fear of upsetting the Iranian leaders than our own national president. So, Iran went ahead with the other countries in the Will for Peace exercise from 9 to 12 January off the coast of Simon's Town.

Sure, opposition parties are demanding the firing of Defence Minister Angie Motshekga, but so far, not much has happened other than yet another board of inquiry being established. What are they planning to investigate, and who is behind it, you may ask? The defence minister herself is prompting the board to investigate whether the president's instructions were ignored. I have to say, I cannot imagine a better waste of money we don't have.

What was the instruction, and what was the result? Simple, right? So, what are we investigating and with what money?

Perhaps they will take it from the ICJ budget, or would that upset the Iranian government?

I'm sorry, but when people believe it's acceptable to ignore an order by the national president and get away with it, we are in trouble. And when it somehow involves Iran, this spells far deeper trouble for our country.

This week, there was a call from members of the United Nations Human Rights Council for an urgent session on the Iran massacre to be held on Friday. Unsurprisingly, South Africa is one of 11 countries that have refused to endorse it. The country is bedfellows in this with Qatar, China, Pakistan, and Iraq, among others.

So, can we assume that our government, which may I remind you claims that it's a nation of human rights activists, doesn't think ordinary Iranians fighting for their rights deserve those rights? Is that because they aren't opposed by Israel, perhaps? Or is it simply because the government won't go against Iran because it's indebted to Iran?

Having said that, where are those same big mouths – sorry I mean human rights activists – on social media who are constantly going on about how terrible Israel is and the horrific things it's doing in Gaza? Why are these people who purport to worry so much about the downtrodden and the underdog not shouting out against Iran?

Their hypocrisy is as bad as the ruling party's, and as evident. Suddenly, not a peep from them about Iran. What do they owe Iran, or do they think treating Iranians like this is acceptable? Or is it possible that their beef was never about human rights, but simply about the fact that Israel was involved?

Shabbat shalom!

Peta Krost

Editor



Trump's Gaza plan: can the arsonists become firefighters?

OPINION

United States President Donald Trump deserves credit for his diplomatic boldness. His 20-point plan to end the Gaza conflict secured a ceasefire; freed the remaining living hostages; and brought adversaries to the negotiating table, achievements that eluded previous administrations. But as phase two of the plan unfolds with the formation of the Board of Peace and Gaza Executive Board, a troubling pattern emerges: Trump is empowering the very actors who enabled Hamas's reign of terror to oversee and even determine Gaza's future.

The president's instinct to be inclusive and "make a deal" is commendable. Yet inclusivity without discernment risks undermining the plan's stated objectives: Hamas's demilitarisation and delegitimisation; Gaza's reconstruction as a terror-free zone; and lasting regional stability. By appointing representatives from Turkey, Qatar, and other actors with Muslim Brotherhood ideological roots to critical oversight roles, Trump may inadvertently be handing victory to the forces that sustained Hamas for decades.

Consider the composition of the Gaza Executive Board. Turkish Foreign Affairs Minister Hakan Fidan sits alongside Qatari diplomat Ali Al Thawadi, both representing governments that have systematically supported Hamas's infrastructure, ideology, and operations. Turkey, under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, has provided a safe haven for Hamas leaders, with Ankara hosting the organisation's political bureau members even as they coordinated terror operations against Israel. Erdogan himself has publicly praised Hamas, declaring its members "not terrorists but liberators". His government channels financial support to Hamas through various mechanisms, while Al Jazeera Arabic – Qatar's state media megaphone – has served as Hamas's primary propaganda platform, glorifying terrorism and spreading antisemitic incitement across the Arab and Muslim world.

BOARD OF PEACE Some of the Executive Board Members



Qatar's record is equally damning. After the 7 October 2023 massacre, Doha continued hosting Hamas's top leadership in luxury, providing them with security, diplomatic cover, and access to international fora. While Qatar positioned itself as an indispensable mediator, it simultaneously bankrolled Hamas's military capabilities and political apparatus. Now, with the inclusion of a Qatari representative on the Gaza Executive Board, the very nation that kept Hamas's command structure safe is being rewarded with a seat at the table to shape Gaza's future governance and international legitimacy.

Both Turkey and Qatar have embraced the Muslim Brotherhood's ideology and protected its networks across the region. Hamas itself emerged as the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, sharing its commitment to political Islam and rejection of Jewish sovereignty in Israel. The Brotherhood's influence extends through educational institutions, civil society organisations, and political movements that have systematically undermined secular governance and peaceful coexistence throughout the Middle East. Appointing representatives from Brotherhood-aligned governments to oversee Gaza's "deradicalisation" is akin to asking the arsonists to rebuild the house they burned down.

The contradictions are glaring. Point 10 of Trump's plan explicitly calls for "demilitarisation of Gaza and removal of all weapons and military infrastructure". Yet Turkey has military ambitions in Gaza itself, with reports indicating that Ankara has prepared a brigade of at least 2 000 soldiers to deploy as part of the stabilisation force. As I noted in recent interviews, "If Turkey is allowed to enter Gaza with several thousand armed men, you can guarantee that this Muslim Brotherhood country will destabilise Gaza and dismantle the very 20-point plan that President Trump has bet the farm on."

Israel has rightly rejected any Turkish military presence

DR DAN DIKER



in Gaza. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office issued a statement clarifying that the Gaza Executive Board's composition "was not coordinated with Israel and contradicts its policy". Israeli Diaspora Affairs Minister Amichai Chikli stated bluntly that Turkish involvement would undermine the plan's core security objectives. These concerns aren't paranoia, but based on Turkey's track record in Syria, where Ankara has used its military presence to advance Islamist proxies and extend its regional influence at the expense of stability.

Beyond Turkey and Qatar, other board members raise questions about their commitment to Israel's security and the plan's success. Steve Witkoff, Trump's special envoy and a real estate developer, maintains extensive business interests across the Middle East that appear to create conflicts of interest in reconstruction decisions.

The inclusion of Palestinian representation on the technocratic National Committee for the Administration of Gaza (NCAG) is problematic. Ali Shaath, a former Palestinian Authority official with administrative experience, will lead the NCAG. This may appear a pragmatic and professional choice. However, he essentially represents Palestinian Authority interests. Moreover, he will operate under the oversight of board members whose governments spent years empowering the very terror organisation he is supposed to help displace.

Trump's first term demonstrated his understanding of Middle East realities. He recognised Jerusalem as Israel's capital; brokered the Abraham Accords; and supported Israel's right to defensible borders. His administration recently designated the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organisation. Yet by embracing Qatar and Turkey as key partners in the Gaza plan despite their Hamas ties, the president risks legitimising actors whose regional ambitions directly threaten American and Israeli security interests.

The lesson of the failed Oslo Accords should be clear. The Palestine Liberation Organization and Hamas's commitment to Israel's destruction isn't negotiable rhetoric but a theological conviction rooted in Muslim Brotherhood ideology. Demilitarisation without deradicalisation is meaningless. Reconstruction without ideological reform will simply rebuild the infrastructure for the next war. And governance by actors sympathetic to Islamist ideology will ensure that Hamas reconstitutes itself under different banners.

Israel's concern is existential, not tactical. The post-7 October reality demands moral clarity about who enabled the massacre and who can be trusted to prevent its recurrence. American backing for Israel's right to enforce the plan's implementation is essential. Without it, the 20-point plan becomes merely a hostage-release deal, leaving Hamas weakened but intact, ready to rebuild its capabilities while its regional sponsors provide cover through their seats on the Board of Peace.

The stakes couldn't be higher. If Trump's peace plan succeeds in demilitarising and deradicalising Gaza, it will mark a historic achievement in the long war against jihadist terrorism. If it fails because the president empowered Hamas's enablers in the name of inclusivity, 7 October will not be the last massacre. Israel and the West will face future attacks orchestrated by reconstituted terror networks.

The course now being set is intertwined with American interests in the Middle East. Supporting Israel as the regional strong horse, which can project stability to all of its neighbours, has a direct impact on American interests and ensures regional stability. Allowing the leaders of subversive political Islam to infiltrate the governance mechanisms guarantees that the long-term goals of the plan are doomed to failure.

Trump has the leverage. He can demand that board members demonstrate their commitment to Hamas's elimination through actions, not words. He can insist on transparency and accountability that prevent Turkey and Qatar from using their seats to protect Islamist interests. Most importantly, he must give Israel the unconditional backing it needs to enforce the plan's implementation, with the understanding that Israeli security reinforces American security.

• Dr Dan Diker is the president of the Jerusalem Center for Security and Foreign Affairs.

David – a global Goliath-sized success for Cape animation studio

GILANA LAB

Who would have imagined a South African-produced film about the biblical David and Goliath would be an international box office hit, not least of all during a time of rising antisemitism around the world?

As of early January 2026, *David* has already earned close to \$80 million (R1.3 billion) globally, outperforming *Avatar* and *The SpongeBob Movie* and breaking several records for its genre.

For Brent Dawes, the Cape Town-based, Zimbabwean-born writer and producer, bringing *David* to the screen was essentially a project that began decades ago. “The germination of the idea started with now Sunrise Animation Studios [in Noordhoek] owner Phil Cunningham,” Dawes said. “He had the vision for the project about 37 years ago, when he was canoeing down the Zambezi.”

It was while out there in nature for days on end without seeing people that Cunningham was drawn to his faith. It was, Dawes said, in “seeing the power of a thunderstorm, the charging lion, the sheer scale of creation”.

That moment stayed with him long before the studio existed. “He read the verse, ‘I have found David, son of Jesse, a man after my own heart,’ and thought, ‘If I could tell a story about



David and give people a glimpse into the heart of G-d, an adventurous, exciting creator, not a boring, stuffy headmaster, that would be something special.’”

It took decades before the studio had the capacity to attempt it. “About 10 years ago, Phil said to me, ‘Brent, it’s time to start *David* now. We’ve got enough experience, enough skill,’” Dawes recalls. “That’s when I wrote the first draft.”

Writing a biblical story for a global audience was no small task. “It’s important to so many people around the world,” he said. “It’s not my imagination. It already exists. So, the question was, how do you extract what’s there?”

Dawes travelled to Israel before writing. “I wanted to feel and understand the land,” he said. “I didn’t want to write from my imagination. I went to the places David would have been, did the research, and tried to let the story reveal itself.”

The creative focus quickly became clear. “This isn’t a love story, it’s a story about David and his faith in G-d,” said Dawes.

Music helped bridge the weight of

the story with accessibility. “David is a songwriter, so it wasn’t a forced fit,” Dawes says. “The songs added lightness and joy, and gave space for entertainment without compromising the story.”

Although originally imagined as live action, animation became the obvious choice. “If you tell this story like *Gladiator* or *Braveheart*, it’s automatically no under 18s,” Dawes said. “Animation allowed us to reach families – kids and adults alike.”

That broader reach has been evident in cinemas. “When I watched it with an audience

for the first time since release, most of the people there were adults,” he said. “That was incredibly affirming.”

According to filmmaker Adam Thal, that cross generational appeal lies in the story’s universality.

“The reason *David* has connected so strongly with audiences globally is actually very simple,” Thal said. “At its core, the story of David and Goliath is one everyone understands, a small, underestimated person standing up to something far bigger and scarier than themselves.”

“It’s about facing your fears, believing in who you are, and having the courage to try even when the odds are against you,” he said. “You don’t need to know anything about religion to feel moved by that. It’s something we all experience, at work, in our families, or just trying to find our place in the world.”

What makes the film especially powerful, Thal said, is how naturally its Jewish roots are embedded. “What’s quietly beautiful is that this universal message comes straight from the story of King David, one of the greatest figures in Jewish history.”

“Many viewers may not even realise it,” he said, “but the values driving the story: humility; inner strength; faith; and moral courage, are deeply rooted in Judaism. That’s the magic of it. It’s a Jewish story told so confidently and so naturally that it speaks to everyone, without needing explanation or labels.”

For Thal, the timing is particularly significant. “The film lands at a moment when the world feels darker and more divided,” he said. “It reminds audiences that courage, belief, and moral strength can overcome hatred.”

“What’s powerfully fitting,” he said, “is that this message comes from the story of a Jewish leader at a time when antisemitism is raging out of control.”

Respect for the story’s Jewish origins was a central concern throughout production, Dawes said. However, as a creative venture, it was obviously open to interpretation.

“We were aware that this isn’t just a Christian story,” he said. “We’re not telling a Christian version of David. We’re telling the story as it appears in the Old Testament.”

The team worked closely with Israeli rabbi Tuly Weisz. “We were aware that we didn’t know what we didn’t know,” Dawes said. “We didn’t want accidentally to do something on screen that could be offensive or inaccurate.”

The filmmakers regularly shared drafts of the script and visual research with Weisz, even flying him to Cape Town to consult with the studio. “He helped guide us so we could move forward with confidence,” Dawes said.

That collaboration extended to moments where the biblical text offers little detail. “When



Samuel anoints David, I asked him what would have been said,” Dawes said. “He told me, ‘We don’t actually know, but traditionally this is what is thought,’ and he pointed us to a specific psalm. That became the foundation for that scene.”

Filmmaker Jordy Sanks believes the film’s impact can also be measured by its

unprecedented success.

“It’s impressive,” Sanks said. “The fact that it’s made more than \$22 million (R360.9 million) at the box office in the United States is huge. To put that in context, it’s performing on a level comparable to *The Prince of Egypt*, and that was a much larger scale production.”

He notes the unlikely origins of the film. “This is a humble South African animation



company that took a massive risk, and it’s been heavily successful,” he said. “It’s even beating major IP films [adaptations] on the charts, things like *SpongeBob*. That’s extraordinary when you consider this is the first animated feature ever made about David.”

“For South Africa,” Sanks said, “the last time we saw something break through like this was probably *District 9* back in 2009. So this is a really big moment.”

Sanks believes part of the success lies in accessibility. “There’s a huge family friendly audience, particularly in the United States,” he says. “This is a film parents can take their kids

to without worrying about content, and that matters.”

He also points to the power of music. “Musicals have a proven track record,” he said. “And having someone involved who worked on *The Greatest Showman* gives it mass appeal.”

But beyond numbers and charts, Sanks sees a deeper parallel. “It

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High school 2.0: navigating the social minefield of motherhood

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

Queen bees, exclusive cliques, comparisons, judgemental comments, and sideways glances aren't only the domain of tweens and teens, they have an impact on mothers too. Though many moms consistently support one another, others make those who don't fit the mould feel like they're facing the often-tumultuous social dynamics of adolescence all over again.

"Here I was sitting alone one night after getting my daughter to bed, thinking, 'Maybe I'm not cool enough?' All of a sudden, I was in high school again, feeling totally lost as to what I was doing 'wrong' to be left out."

These words were written by *High School Musical* actress and singer, Ashley Tisdale in a personal essay titled "Breaking Up with My Toxic Mom Group" recently published by American online publication *The Cut*.

The piece went viral, striking a chord with moms around the world. "Motherhood is often described – and increasingly portrayed on social media – as a time of connection, fulfilment, and effortless bonding," says Jade Raubenheimer.

A counsellor and founder of MumisMe, which creates a safe space to navigate early parenthood challenges, Raubenheimer says for some, motherhood can, however, "unexpectedly reawaken feelings of exclusion, self-doubt, and social anxiety. It has a unique way of bringing unresolved social wounds to the surface."

Such feelings are unsurprising, she says. "When we become mothers, we enter a new identity phase that is known as 'matrescence', a term coined by anthropologist Dana Raphael in the 1970s. Just like adolescence, this transition brings vulnerability, uncertainty, and a deep need for belonging." While these characteristics are common among new mothers, they can have an impact on those with children of any age.

"Humans naturally seek safety in groups, especially during periods of identity change," Raubenheimer says. "For many moms, forming tight-knit groups is a way to create predictability and reassurance in an otherwise overwhelming phase." Yet often-unintentionally, these groups become exclusive rather than supportive, and are often centred on similar parenting choices, where those who adopt different styles don't quite fit in and often feel judged. "Importantly, this behaviour is often rooted in insecurity rather than malice. When someone feels unsure, comparison becomes a way to self-soothe: 'If I'm

doing it like them, I must be doing it right."

Tessa Bloom* faced this dynamic when a mom at a new school criticised her for not closely monitoring her teenage child's test schedule. "She said, 'What kind of mother are you that doesn't know what their child is doing?'" Bloom recalls. "I believed my daughter needed independence and to learn by herself. But it's hurtful when you have new mothers coming into the school who face the exclusivity that's often created."

Dealing with toxic moms can be emotionally draining



Bloom, whose kids have already matriculated, describes this and other confrontations with fellow mothers at different schools as "some of the most awful experiences I've ever had to deal with". For example, one mom still refuses to speak to Bloom after they butted heads years ago because Bloom's daughter was selected to a position of leadership that she expected her child to be chosen for. "Her reaction had such a drastic impact on my child, she refused to stand for head girl later on."

An older mom, Bloom doesn't come from Johannesburg, and says she often felt like an outsider. "I was also working a full day, so I was never part of the coffee club or the gym club. It was genuine exclusion, and it seriously affected my kids' social lives." She stresses that such cliques don't only exist within Jewish schools, as she's been exposed to them inside and outside the community.

Moms with younger children often face added complexity as they generally accompany their kids on playdates and are forced to socialise with one another, whether they get along or not. Dani Katz* faced this dilemma when a mom she was previously friendly with began acting strangely. "Someone warned me that

she used to be a bully when younger but to me, she was so nice," Katz said. "Then suddenly, she changed. She stopped greeting me at school, ignoring me in group conversations, blowing hot and cold, some days acknowledging me and other days completely ignoring me even when I greeted her. It was hurtful and confusing."

Though their children were good friends, Katz found herself avoiding arranging playdates. Over time, she realised that the woman was treating other moms the same way. "This went on for months, and eventually I made peace with the fact that she wasn't someone I wanted me or my child to spend time with."

Balancing their own needs with that of their children is a common parenting dilemma, Raubenheimer says. "When navigating toxic or emotionally draining dynamics with other mothers, many women feel torn between protecting their own well-being and doing what feels best for their children. From a therapeutic perspective, these needs are not in opposition – both deserve to be honoured. Setting boundaries isn't a failure of connection, rather a necessary act of self-respect and emotional safety."

This in increasingly important today, where parent WhatsApp groups at various schools, usually dominated by mothers, can amplify difficult social dynamics or create new issues. That's why those who run them monitor them so closely.

Though the group she started to connect and support Jewish moms and kids at a non-denominational private school has largely fostered positive interactions, Amanda Rogaly has had to lay strict ground rules.

She accepts that enforcing rules and deleting posts that could constitute slander sometimes creates discord, especially when it comes to chats around antisemitism or personal grievances. "I've had horrible messages sent to me; I've had moms phone me or swear at me. People get emotional about certain topics and they don't realise, it's nothing personal. It's just the rules of the group. On the other hand, I get wonderful messages thanking me for creating this community."

Ultimately, Raubenheimer says, the goal isn't to fit in at all costs, but to create emotionally safe spaces for ourselves and our children.

* Names have been changed.

Under the palm tree: rediscovering Kibel and Lipshitz

CLAUDIA GROSS

Two South African Jewish artists whose work is internationally acclaimed found themselves briefly working side by side in a small studio in Roeland Street in Cape Town back in the early 1930s.

The are Polish-born painter and printmaker Wolf Kibel, who was partly responsible for introducing Expressionism to South Africa, and Lippy Lipshitz, considered one of the country's foremost modernist sculptors.

Nearly a century later, that encounter at Palm Studios is being revisited in an exhibition at the South African Jewish Museum, bringing focus to a pivotal moment in South African modernism.

Palm Studios: Wolf Kibel and Lippy Lipshitz – A Shared Vision centres on the formative relationship between Kibel and Lipshitz. Both were born in 1903 in Eastern Europe, both were shaped by migration, and both arrived in South Africa carrying the visual language of European modernism. Their meeting in Cape Town resulted in a short but intense period of collaboration that would influence the trajectory of their work in different ways.

Palm Studios took its name from a leaning date palm outside the building. The studio functioned as both a workspace and a site of exchange, where painting and sculpture developed in close conversation. As curator Jay van den Berg writes in his curatorial statement, "It was more than a place of work; it was a site of intellectual and artistic exchange, of arguments and discoveries, of shared rhythms and silences." This sense of dialogue lies at the core of the exhibition.

The project is also an act of recovery. Kibel hasn't been the subject of a comprehensive exhibition since the 1970s, while Lipshitz's work hasn't been surveyed in depth for more than two decades. By returning to the Palm Studios years, the exhibition reframes their practices as interconnected rather than isolated, and restores a chapter that has largely fallen from view.

The exhibition balances Lipshitz's sculptures with his works on paper. Drawings, monotypes, and etchings reveal an experimental sensibility and a sustained engagement with labour, movement, and the human figure. These works demonstrate that his sculptural thinking was closely bound to drawing, and that his modernism extended across media.

Kibel's paintings are marked by restraint and psychological intensity. Influenced by European expressionism, his work from this period is inward looking and finely

controlled. Despite clear links to international modernist currents, his visual language remained distinct. Created during years of illness and financial precarity, the works convey a quiet concentration that deepened toward the end of his life.

Migration and diaspora are central to the exhibition's framing. Kibel travelled from Poland to Vienna, Israel, and eventually South Africa. Lipshitz moved between Lithuania, Paris, and Cape Town. Their shared Jewish backgrounds and experiences of displacement shaped a modernism that was international in outlook yet rooted in cultural memory.

The exhibition situates Palm Studios within the cultural landscape of 1930s Cape Town. At a time when conservative genres dominated local institutions, Palm Studios emerged as a rare enclave of experimentation. Kibel and Lipshitz taught students there, debated music and literature, and sustained a small but influential modernist community. Van den Berg describes the studio as "a crucible of modernist experiment and of diasporic exchange", underscoring its role within a wider cultural network.

The paths of the two artists soon diverged. Kibel died in 1938 at the age of 35, leaving behind a compact but powerful body of work. Lipshitz lived until 1980, and continued to shape South African sculpture as an artist, teacher, and advocate for



modernism

Works in the exhibition are drawn from public and private collections in South Africa and abroad, including pieces not shown publicly for decades. They are presented in dialogue rather than isolation, allowing relationships between painting and sculpture to emerge.

Rather than offering closure, *A Shared Vision* reopens a conversation interrupted by illness, early death, and historical neglect. By returning to Palm Studios, the exhibition restores a shared modernist vision shaped by collaboration, migration, and the enduring power of artistic exchange.

• The exhibition is on now until the end of April. For more information on curated tours and times, visit <https://www.sajewishmuseum.co.za/>

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Shrinking networks leave Jewish 20-somethings isolated

LEE TANKLE

In a small community like South Africa's, you'd imagine that Jewish 20-somethings would easily find one another. Yet for many young adults, the opposite is true.

Once school, youth movements, and university fades into the background, meeting other Jews becomes surprisingly difficult, and, for some, deeply isolating.

Part of the challenge is that the community's traditional "meeting points" – youth movements; university socials through the South African Union of Jewish Students; even shul-based young adult groups – don't appeal to 20-somethings, mainly because they are too old for them.

"Once I finished varsity, I felt that there was nowhere really to go to meet new people, so if you didn't already have an established group of friends, you were kind of stuck with no-one," said one anonymous 25-year-old woman.

She said that even when she tried going to events that were held through organisations like Aish20s, it could be difficult to make friends, as many people went with a set group of friends.

Paul Bacher, who runs Wholesome Spaces, a community organisation set up for people in their 30s and above to meet people, said he had many 20-somethings come to him saying that it was becoming increasingly difficult to meet people.

The challenge isn't unique to South Africa, he said. Young Jews worldwide are struggling to meet one another in natural, meaningful ways as social patterns shift and communities become more dispersed.

In South Africa, he said, it's even more difficult – a shrinking Jewish population means a smaller pool of peers and fewer opportunities to connect.

"Traditionally, young Jews here tend to meet each other at university or through Jewish youth

movements and camps like Bnei Akiva. Once they leave those environments, the structured social frameworks fall away, and it becomes harder to meet new people organically and comfortably," he said. "Many young adults have told me that they feel this quite deeply, especially those who want to build strong Jewish friendships or who are hoping to meet a partner within the community."

Over the years, there have been attempts to try to create a platform for young Jewish people to meet in a casual setting. In 2023, a group of 20-somethings

like shiurim or shul-based gatherings," said Jessica Katz, one of the founders of Gather.

"We wanted to offer something different: fun, social events without a religious undertone and without the overwhelming noise. That's why we've hosted activities like a bowling pool at Xtreme Bowling; pizza-making at Michelos; and a board-games day at Urban Grind – relaxed environments where people can actually talk, hear each other, and form real connections."

She said Gather's first event was a quiz night at Tiger's Milk, but seeing that not many people could eat the food there, they thought it would be best if they moved it to kosher establishments so that everyone could be included.

"Some people found it a bit boring. It was difficult to make everyone happy. And then, as the events went by, the numbers dwindled a bit," said Katz.

The greatest difficulty with Gather was the fact that some people were coming to events with the sole intention of meeting a romantic partner, which would make a lot of the young women feel uncomfortable, stopping them from coming to events.

"Some people started coming to events not to make friends, but using it as a matchmaking organisation, and it made girls feel uncomfortable, which isn't what we intended," said Katz.

In Cape Town, however, there seems to be a booming social scene with two separate organisations created so that 20-somethings can make more Jewish friends.

The first is the Gardens Shul Young Jewish

Professional Network, run by Dovi Levin. It was initially set up to bring young people to shul for events such as their Friday Night Live, a monthly Shabbat service and social event, Levin said. However, it has grown into something offering padel and similar events that don't happen in a religious setting.

Levin said he realised that there was nowhere for people to meet other Jewish people organically.

"We're building something collectively, and now Cape Town really has everything. It has the run clubs, the tennis clubs, but really, the thing which was missing was [something for] Jewish people between those ages. That's what we're building together. People are taking part, actively wanting to start something and do something special and feel part of it," he said.

Steven Liptz said that he noticed that there was no place for young Jews to meet so he decided to launch ELEVATE, a platform for meaningful connection, learning, and inspiration, in March 2025.

"The local shuls and rabbis have a lot of responsibility and they do a great job, but there was a gap," he said. "Jewish Cape Town is at a crossroads, with real opportunities to influence what the next chapter looks like. ELEVATE can assist with this."

ELEVATE has hosted everyone from top rabbinical speakers and leaders, to former Israeli hostages, to an event with Aleeza Ben Shalom of Netflix fame, in collaboration with the Matchmakers Network.

"The response to our events has been fantastic, and as more people hear about them, I believe the interest will continue to grow. Young people are powerful and influential," said Liptz.

While this may be working in Cape Town, there's still an unmet need in Johannesburg.

"We see the need for more opportunities to be created for people to connect, not necessarily like a dating thing, but for connections in general," said Katz. "So, making friends, maybe business connections, just come meet people, and what opportunities may arise from the people that you meet."



saw that there was nowhere for people their age to meet new friends, so they decided to create Gather, an organisation that would organise monthly events to bring people together and allow them to meet people outside of their circle.

"For young Jews in their 20s, it's been difficult to find spaces to genuinely meet and connect. Most options were either club or party-style events – loud music, crowded rooms, and no real chance for meaningful conversation, or they were strictly religious,

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Holocaust survivors' dilemma over speaking out

LEE TANKLE

"For the survivor who chooses to testify, it's clear: his duty is to bear witness for the dead and for the living. He has no right to deprive future generations of a past that belongs to our collective memory. To forget would be not only dangerous but offensive; to forget the dead would be akin to killing them a second time," Elie Wiesel wrote in his memoir, *Night*, published in 1960.

For some Holocaust survivors, however, being open about their war experience can be extraordinarily difficult and, in some cases, can lead to them

waiting until the winter of their lives to share it.

"We can, of course, imagine that it's not an easy process, and that it's a point that people reach at different stages of their lives," said Jakub Nowakowski, the director of the Cape Town Holocaust & Genocide Centre.

Survivors begin telling their stories for numerous reasons, Nowakowski said. One is that by doing so, it helps them cope with what they went through.

Some feel survivor's guilt, so they start telling their stories because many others didn't survive to tell theirs.

"There's also an understanding

that the Holocaust was such a monumental event in history. However, now there's this sense that it's mystified through denialism," said Nowakowski. "So we need survivors to speak about it otherwise people will forget the real things they went through. Sometimes people feel that by sharing those memories, they can bring back the memories of family members that died."

One such survivor, Iby Knill, who passed away in 2022 in England, took 60 years to share her story of how she fled to Hungary to escape Nazi-occupied Czechoslovakia, but was later deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau.



Relaying horrific experiences during the Holocaust is never easy

She was liberated on a death march on Easter Sunday, 1945.

"I had locked those years away, good memories as well as bad ones, and lived a normal life. I didn't think I would ever talk about it," she said in a podcast. "But then something happened, and I had to stand up and own up to my past. Why did I survive when so many died? I still don't know the answer. Perhaps I survived to bear witness, to tell the tale, hoping that people would listen."

Director and founder of the Durban Holocaust & Genocide Centre, Mary Kluk, said that for a long time, Holocaust survivors didn't have the psychological support to be able to share what they went through, and thus didn't share openly.

"There are many survivors who never shared their stories," said Kluk. "The pain of survival meant beginning a new life and not looking back, not burdening family with your heartache, creating a positive new start. This was a common theme among the survivor community, but thankfully, in later life, as the world became more open and interested, many families were able to hear their stories. Many survivors explain that they suddenly realised that if they didn't share, the world wouldn't know the truth of what had happened to them, and it could happen again, so they began to open up."

Tali Nates, the director of the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre, said many survivors shared their testimonies or parts of their Holocaust experiences with their family or other people at different stages of their lives – soon after the war; after the trial of Adolf Eichmann; or in the 1990s after the film *Schindler's List* came out and Steven Spielberg began the project of collecting Holocaust survivors' testimonies.

"After the Eichmann process and the BBC Holocaust series, people actually started to recognise that, first of all, the fate of the Jews was different from the fate of the other victims of the war and that, actually, survivors are heroes," said Nowakowski. "So we're remembering that it took many

years all over the place including in Israel for people to be willing to or have the time and energy to be interested in those stories."

Nowakowski said Holocaust survivors in Eastern Europe often hid their Jewish identity and stories for decades because antisemitism and violence continued long after the war, making it unsafe and emotionally devastating to reveal lives rebuilt under false identities even to their own children and grandchildren.

"Other survivors, whom we sometimes describe as 'silent survivors', found it difficult to share their experiences with close family members," said Nates. "Some of them could share certain stories only with strangers or people they didn't know well, or through an interview with Holocaust-related projects. Others couldn't share their testimonies at all until their death. For many, the traumatic events they experienced or witnessed were so horrific, they couldn't relive the trauma by talking about it. For others, speaking about their experiences brought back the pain, fear, and vulnerability which they didn't want to experience again or show to their families."

Nates said that her father, Moses Turner, didn't tell his story of how he survived the Holocaust in full, telling only a few stories to her mother. She was able to learn about what her father went through only from stories from other survivors, including her uncle, as well as researchers, archives, photographs, and letters.

"He was a teenager during his traumatic experiences in six camps, and the trauma presented itself in later years with nightmares, fear, and silence," she said. "On the other hand, my uncle, Heinrich, who was four years older during his Holocaust experiences, spoke, wrote, shared, and expressed himself to various audiences. I'm grateful to my uncle for sharing with me the many stories which allowed me to piece together the family's history. My father's silence filled my mind for many years with images, dreams, and fears."

Loneliness of being a parent to your parents

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

Emigration is a constant reality in South Africa, so it's rare to find a group of adult siblings all living in the same country. This means that one of them is often left to care for ageing parents, and being the sole caregiver comes with unique challenges.

Though Beverley Isakow is one of multiple siblings, she is now the only one left in South Africa to care for her 89-year-old mother. Isakow's mom moved in with her and her family more than 20 years ago after her father passed away. Yet over time, Sandringham Gardens became the best option for her particularly because it provided supervision, stimulation, and proximity to her friends. Though her mother is happy there and receives excellent care, Isakow visits and runs errands for her regularly and is the first port of call when problems arise.

"Emotionally and mentally, it's rough at times," she says. "When life gets you down, you think, 'When is the time for me?' If things get stressful, I do feel alone. I can always reach out to my siblings telephonically, but it's not the same. However, they do support her from there as much as they can."

Her pivotal role in her mother's life means that emigration isn't an option for Isakow and her family. "Not that we're thinking of making aliyah, but if we were, I could never leave my mom," she says. "She always says, 'Don't leave me. If you ever go, I'm coming with you,' so there's a bit of guilt involved. 'I love my mom to bits, but it's heavy when you're on your own."

Isakow is grateful for her husband's support and feels lucky to have her mother around still. "I do feel blessed that I was chosen to look after her in her golden years," she says, "so it's never a burden, but obviously, it does have an impact on one's life."

When both her brothers emigrated 30 years ago, Janine Baum decided to remain in South Africa to provide support for her parents, even though she had a Green Card. She had no idea how this decision would play out. Not only did she suffer a stroke last year, she also lost her mother.

"I have this impossible father who wants constant attention and phones me 18 times a day, and I can't say no to him ever," she says. At the age of 83, her father lives in a flat, still works

full-time, has two housekeepers who help care for him, and refuses to go to a retirement village. "I need to manage his doctor's appointments, call his staff, everything is on me," Baum says. "I also run a business."

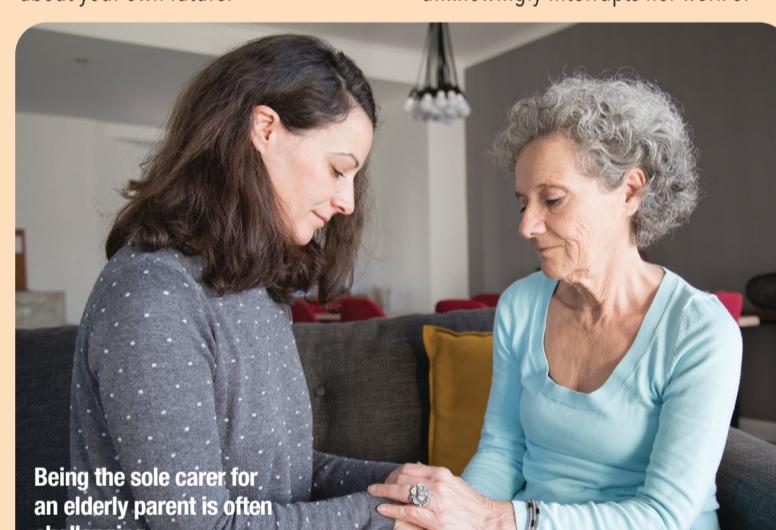
Particularly since her stroke, Baum has relied on her partner. "If it weren't for him, I don't know what would happen. My brothers aren't involved in his day-to-day life, but if I needed them, they would probably come. One said he must go and live there, but he won't.

"It's difficult," she says, "but it's what I chose. At least I have done everything in my power for him." Yet she says, she's learned that you can't live your life for your parents, you need to think about your own future.

where one is forced to mourn the loss of the parent one once knew as well as anticipating further health struggles."

With a flexible but demanding job and only part-time domestic help, Fine is sometimes forced to leave her mother at home alone. "It's a bit scary when I come home, hoping that she's not going to be lying on the floor, which has happened before. Thankfully there have only been external injuries."

Fine says she no longer has a romanticised view of old age and caring for parents. "I'd always thought it was a blessing to be able to look after your parents but right now, I'm not coping," she says. With her mental acuity declining, Fine's mother often unknowingly interrupts her work or



Being the sole carer for an elderly parent is often challenging

Batya Fine* has a 95-year-old mother who has lived with her and her husband for the past five years. With all her brothers living overseas, much of the responsibility for her mother's care lies with her. "My brothers do try to visit annually, but they have their own concerns and families." While they contribute financially, Fine says the costs of supporting her mother add up. "You put your kids through Jewish school, but when 20 years later, you're suddenly picking up those expenses again, it's hard."

There's also the emotional complexity that comes with the role reversal that caring for a parent involves. "Being sole caregiver for an elderly parent forces one to navigate a psychological 'identity crisis' for both individual and parent," says counselling psychologist Lisa Hirschowitz. "Unlike raising a child – where the goal is increasing independence – elderly care involves managing a slow and painful decline. This creates a sense of grief in real time,

wants to chat when she's in a rush.

When Fine recently had an operation, she suggested that her mother temporarily move into a home. "She fell to pieces. I don't want to do it to her, but I'm reaching the point where I don't know how to do this." Yet, Fine says her mother isn't demanding. "She's quite happy to sit on the patio with the dogs and they follow her around. When her time comes, I want her to just go to sleep on my patio. But it's not an easy situation."

Hirschowitz suggests keeping communication open with siblings living overseas. "In order to preserve a sibling relationship and one's mental health while caring for an elderly parent alone, one needs to shift the idea of 'us versus them', to 'us versus the situation,'" she says. "In so doing, one brings about a team mentality rather than having to make all big decisions alone."

*Name has been changed.

Wrenching drama brings family's Holocaust memory to stage

LEE TANKLE

Writing about family is never simple, especially when the story spans generations. For Luc Albinski, bringing his mother and grandmother's lives to the stage was both a creative challenge and a deeply personal act.

Nobody Told Me, running at Theatre on the Square from 28 January to 7 February, tells the story of Albinski's mother, Wanda Helena Albińska, and his grandmother, Dr Halina Rotstein, in a fictionalised account of Rotstein's extraordinary effort to save thousands of lives, including her own daughter's, in the Warsaw Ghetto.

The play follows conversations between Wanda, now in her eighties, and her son, Luc, as he gently presses her to confront a family history she has kept hidden for decades. As they talk, fragments of Wanda's childhood surface, carrying the audience back to 1930s-1940s Warsaw and to her mother, Dr Halina Rotstein, a Jewish physician working at the Czyste Hospital inside the Warsaw Ghetto.

Fiercely principled and often difficult, Halina's uncompromising devotion to medicine set her apart, a trait that earned her near-legendary status among her university peers, who called themselves

"Halina's *talmidim*". Through their yearly gatherings at Café Sztuka, the play charts Poland's shift from interwar optimism to occupation and loss, as the group confronts impossible choices inside the ghetto: patients they cannot save, lines they cannot cross, and the daily struggle to remain humane.

Though the story centres on Halina, it

the courageous director of a Jewish orphanage.

Albinski said that though he had made a documentary and written a book detailing his grandmother's story, during the COVID-19 pandemic, he became inspired to tell the story of his grandmother in a more emotive, fictionalised way since everyone was stuck at home and he felt

United Kingdom; South African playwright Liz Morrison; as well as his own mother.

"Every time I wrote a draft, I got my mom to read it as well," he said, "I was always a little concerned that maybe I was striking some false notes and not really doing her story justice or misreading things because it was obviously 80 years ago since it all happened and I'm far removed from the realities of wartime. So I always checked back with her and asked her what she thought of the play."

He said the initial draft of the play was actually more like a TV mini-series than a play because it had 20 different characters and lots of subplots, and the script was completely unmanageable.

"And then, you know, 85 versions later, it was kind of bashed into shape. It was quite a painful process – killing off a whole bunch of much beloved characters to make it something that was more manageable," he said.

Once the final draft was completed, he searched high and low to find a director who could bring it to life.

"Some of the difficulty was my own kind of sprawling, unmanageably long, and complicated script that put a lot of people off," Albinski said. "But I also think in the current context, particularly while the Gaza war was raging, to be staging a Jewish Holocaust play didn't feel like a crowd pleaser."

He engaged with many directors from South Africa and Poland, and finally found Ilina Perianova, a Bulgarian director, screenwriter, and actress who also has Jewish origins.

"Her grandparents are Jewish, and

she was keen to take it on," he said. "She loved the story. It spoke to her own Jewish history, which is also remarkable. Both her grandparents were in the Soviet army. Her grandfather actually has two knives taken from the bodies of the SS men he killed. So she wanted to engage with the material – very courageous – and obviously helped me shape it into the script it is today."

For Albinski, the hardest part of writing the play was writing the scene where Halina has to say goodbye to young Wanda before she is smuggled out of the ghetto, which also serves as one of the emotional anchors of the play.

"It was difficult writing the goodbye scene between my grandmother and mom, that was a very difficult scene to imagine. It's emotionally wrenching stuff," he said.

Watching the play come to life has been especially emotional for Albinski. "Seeing my personal story embodied by talented actors and transformed through directing, choreography, music, and design, has been moving and wondrous, taking the work far beyond anything I imagined on writing it," he said.

Reflecting on the central theme of the play, he said, "It's a meditation on duty, how people define it, the promises they make, and the sacrifices they are willing to endure. Halina's unwavering duty to her patients comes into conflict with her responsibility to her family, while figures like Andrzej Trojanowski risk their own lives and those of their families to honour promises made to save Jewish children. Under extraordinary circumstances, the play shows how duty can shape and fracture lives."



During rehearsals for *Nobody Told Me*

also weaves in real and fictional figures from her life and the wider wartime world, including her first husband, Stefan, her daughter, Wanda, resistance members such as Dr Andrzej Trojanowski, who took in Wanda after getting smuggled out of the ghetto, and Maria Steckiewicz,

that story needed to reach a wider audience.

He felt ill equipped to write a play, as he had never studied drama and mainly operated in the business world. However, along the way, he received loads of advice from Stephen Brown, a playwright in the

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Hate speech isn't abstract, it's lethal



ABOVE BOARD

Karen Milner

promotes racist stereotypes and unlawfully incites hatred against Jews, while ensuring that the right to freedom of expression doesn't include harmful hate speech. This is a significant victory for the Board, and we are encouraged to see South Africa's institutions and regulatory bodies standing up for our constitutional values and taking a firm stance against antisemitism.

Unfortunately, the first few weeks of the year have been marked by two national tragedies. The severe flooding in Limpopo and Mpumalanga claimed at least 30 lives, displaced thousands of families, destroyed countless homes, decimated businesses in the area, and devastated critical infrastructure such as roads and bridges. Additionally, the national tragedy unfolding on our roads was compounded by the devastating 19 January head-on collision involving an unlicensed minibus taxi transporting schoolchildren which resulted in the deaths of 12 young students aged seven to 12, with several others left critically injured. The Vaal, where this incident occurred, holds special significance for SAJBD, as we have collaborated on so many initiatives in the region. We share in the grief, and extend our deepest condolences to all bereaved families and communities enduring these unimaginable losses.

Finally, a hearty *mazel tov* to all of our 2025 matriculants who have passed their exams so well. *Yasher koach!* I want to make special mention of the village of Gwakwani, where in partnership with the University of Johannesburg, the Board has an ongoing project promoting education. The school has once again outperformed its previous best, and boasts a 95% pass rate with 24 Bachelors passes, which is quite remarkable and stands as a testament to what effective and collaborative initiatives can yield.

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

South Africa is fortunate to possess a robust constitutional framework safeguarding freedom of expression while drawing clear boundaries against hate speech. This delicate balance isn't merely theoretical, it demands vigilant stewardship to ensure that liberty doesn't devolve into license for harm.

In the Jewish community, we know all too well that hate speech often morphs into actions and can escalate into violence. We need look no further than the horror of the Bondi Chanukah Massacre in December 2025 for an example in which inflammatory rhetoric disguised as political or "legitimate critique" can fuel arson attacks, vandalism, threats, and ultimately a horrific tragedy.

For us Jews, hate speech isn't abstract, it has potentially lethal consequences. It's precisely for this reason, that the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) holds as a core mandate the monitoring of such expressions and the referral of transgressions to our constitutional institutions and courts. In fact, we have a proud history of pursuing such cases before the South African Human Rights Commission and the Equality Courts, establishing important legal precedents and strengthening the safeguards against bigotry and racism.

In this context, we are both encouraged and reassured to learn that, following an application made by the SAJBD two years ago, the Film and Publication Board (FPB) refused classification for an antisemitic film called *Hebrews to Negroes*, and ordered its removal from all platforms in South Africa. The film promotes dangerous antisemitic tropes, including the conspiracy theory that Jews are imitators with no legitimate connection to ancient Israel or Judaism; assertions that Jews were heavily responsible for the transatlantic slave trade; and other longstanding slurs such as Jewish control of the media and Holocaust denial.

In refusing classification, the FPB has agreed with the SAJBD in its understanding that the film

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

When it's OK to turn the tables on rules

There are two types of people in the world: those who respect rules and those who don't. My late father took regulations very seriously. My late mother saw them as a challenge. I suspect I received my mother's genes.

There's nowhere that illustrates this divide more vividly than seating at functions.

Last weekend was busy, peppered with a wonderful smorgasbord of simchas: Batmitzvahs, weddings, engagements, and birthday parties. But it was at a wedding that the philosophical chasm between rule-followers and rule-benders revealed itself in all its glory.

According to the seating list, we were meant to sit at table 15. Which was perfectly fine. Except for the minor detail that my brother, who had been away for some time, was seated at table 13. And I wanted to sit with him.

Before you judge me too harshly, it's worth noting that the tables were arranged in long, continuous rows. Table 13, 14, and 15 were less "tables" and more a suggestion. A gentle concept. A numerical vibe. So we sat with my brother and sister-in-law closer to the table 15 end. Technically. Mostly. Fine, at the 15

end.

We were making ourselves fantastically comfortable, settling in for the afternoon, when I noticed her.

The look of a horrified guest caught my eye. She was in administrative overdrive.

The point, after all, isn't the table number. It's the people around it.

Counting. Recounting. Reworking. Adding. Allocating. As a committed rule follower, she had clearly memorised the seating chart, cross-referenced surnames, and perhaps even laminated the list for quick consultation. She knew – absolutely knew – that we had gone rogue.

She didn't want to be that person. You could see it in her eyes. But the distress was bubbling dangerously close to the surface. This wasn't merely a seating issue. This was a breach. A violation. Possibly a slippery slope. She knew in

her heart that we were going to come to build a raft.

Because once one family shifts one seat to the left, what's next? Chaos. Anarchy. People choosing their own chairs.

She hovered. She circled. She adjusted a napkin that didn't need adjusting. Eventually, unable to bear it any longer, she leaned in and whispered, "I think you're actually meant to be at table 15."

I smiled warmly. "Yes," I said, "we are. This is table 15-ish."

This didn't help.

She glanced at the list again, then at us, then at the list. Her internal spreadsheet was crashing. Somewhere deep inside, my late father nodded in sympathy. My late mother would have slipped the waiter a R50 note.

To be fair, I understand the rule-followers. Seating plans exist for a reason. Caterers panic when numbers change. Chairs are counted. Meals are plated. Order must prevail. And in a community that prides itself on organisation – shul boards, committees, subcommittees, WhatsApp groups with constitutions – rules are comforting. They create certainty.

But there's also something deeply human about wanting to sit with your brother. About

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



choosing connection over compliance. About recognising that not every rule is sacred, and not every deviation is a personal affront to civilisation.

Eventually, sanity prevailed. No extra chairs were needed. No-one starved. The bride and groom were blissfully unaware of the near-collapse of social order at tables 13 to 15. The distressed guest relaxed. I suspect she went home and told the story as a cautionary tale.

And I went home thinking about how much of life is spent worrying about lists.

Who's on which table. Who's in which group. Who's meant to be where. We measure, categorise, allocate and judge, often missing the point entirely. The point, after all, isn't the table number. It's the people around it.

My father would probably have told me to move. My mother would have told me how clever I was and how beautiful my wife looked, and said, "Relax, darling – no-one died."

I think both were right. But if I have to choose, I'll always sit closer to table 13.

Rules matter. People matter more.

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MRS G XQUIZ GARLIC
CHOPPED & GARLIC
& GINGER MIX
355G EACH

32⁹⁹

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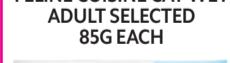
62⁹⁹

MAGALIES NECTAR
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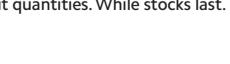
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LAAGER CUISINE
ADULT
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