

south african

■ Volume 30 - Number 10 ■ 19 March 2026 ■ 1 Nissan 5786

Jewish Report

www.sajr.co.za



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extraordinary generosity and kindness.

Wishing our amazing community a
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Letter from our CEO

Reliving Biblical Times

As we move from Purim towards Pesach, we are reminded of how often the story of the Jewish people echoes through generations.

Purim tells of a time when our people faced great danger, yet through courage, faith and unity the outcome was transformed. Soon we will gather around the Seder table and retell the story of Pesach, when a nation of slaves journeyed to freedom.

These are not only stories of the past. They remind us of the enduring Jewish yearning to live in peace and dignity, and of the strength that comes when we stand together as one people. Our tradition teaches that when the Jewish community cares for one another, no one is forgotten. No one goes hungry, no Seder table is empty, and those who feel alone are embraced by the warmth of their community.

When we act with compassion and responsibility toward each other, we bring blessing into our lives and into our world.

At the Chevrah Kadisha we see this spirit every day. With your generosity we are able to provide financial assistance to families in need; offer emotional support to those facing difficult times; care for the elderly and disabled; protect vulnerable children and ensure that even those who might otherwise be alone have a place at the Seder table.

Each of us has the opportunity and the responsibility to respond.

As we approach the Festival of Freedom, may we draw strength from the timeless message of Pesach and through our shared efforts may we continue to build a community filled with dignity, kindness and hope.

Wishing you and your family a joyful and meaningful Pesach



Saul Tomson

Chief Executive Officer

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South African Jewish Report

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From SA roadside rescue to wartime message

NICOLA MILTZ

An incident that unfolded on a remote Eastern Cape road four years ago came full circle this week when a South African police officer reached out to an Israeli father with a simple message of concern. This reignited a story of fear, survival, and extraordinary kindness.

"Hello, sir. I hope and pray you're still well under the situation going on in your country. I'm one of those two policemen in South Africa, Port Elizabeth, who assisted you while you had a tyre problem," wrote Sergeant Sithembale Kholiwe of the Public Order Police unit in a WhatsApp message on Monday, 16 March.

For the father*, now living through the realities of war in Israel, the message was unexpected and deeply emotional.

Responding to Kholiwe's message, he wrote, "My dear brother! Thank you for your thoughts and prayers. This is amazing. We keep remembering you and how grateful we were to meet you. I hope I can return the favour in the future and it will be my honour."

Kholiwe replied, "Thank you, sir, to you also. I'm glad to see you're still doing fine. May G-d be with you."

The father told the *SA Jewish Report*, "It came out of nowhere! Of course we remember them. Every time we tell the story of our wonderful time in South Africa, this is what the kids remember.

"We are in and out of bomb shelters all the time now," he said. "It has been a difficult period. I've received messages from many people around the world, but this one touched me in a way I cannot explain."

This interaction transported the Israeli father back to August 2022 when a dream family holiday nearly turned into a nightmare.

The family of six – the parents and their four children – had arrived in Gqeberha for a three-week road trip, planning to travel along the coast to Cape Town. Their itinerary included a visit to Addo Elephant National Park, with a stopover for their first night at a nearby lodge.

Relying on GPS directions, they were guided off the main N2 route and onto the R335 via Motherwell, a decision that would place them in danger. The tar was uneven and damaged, with potholes. Driving became increasingly difficult. Motorists are advised to avoid the R335 via Motherwell due to safety concerns and poor road conditions.

It wasn't long before they experienced the first blowout. Before they could process what had happened, a second tyre burst.

The father and his 18-year-old son got out of the car to assess the damage, pulling luggage from the boot to reach the spare wheel. Inside the vehicle, his wife and three daughters – aged eight, 12, and 16 – sat anxiously, watching events unfold.

At first, they believed they could manage the situation. Their plan was simple: change one tyre, leave the second flat, and drive slowly for about 20 minutes to reach the lodge.

"As we attempted to change the tyre, the jack snapped," said the father.

With two flat tyres and no working tools, the family was now completely stranded.

Soon their car was surrounded by a small group of onlookers.

The reality of their vulnerability began to sink in.

Seven suitcases lay unpacked on the side of the road. As dusk approached and more strangers began gathering around them, the family grew increasingly uneasy. They hastily packed everything back into the car, abandoning any attempt to fix the vehicle, and stood outside, unsure what to do next.

"I felt helpless," the father told the *SA Jewish Report*. "I didn't know how to protect my family. It was a moment in which anything could happen."

Calls to the rental company brought little comfort as help was at least an hour away.

The tension and fear escalated.

Then flashing blue lights appeared in the distance.

A South African Police Service van approached at speed.



Photo and words: Harold Silber

Outside Shuk Ha'Carmel.

Sirens going off, people running for shelter ... and she stays.

From Jerusalem. Didn't know where the shelter was. "I believe in Hashem," she said.

Curling up on the pavement, holding onto faith.

Siren survival

See stories on pages 3 and 8

In desperation, the father jumped into the road to stop it.

The vehicle drove past, then suddenly braked and reversed.

Inside were Kholiwe and his colleague, Sergeant Mzuxolile Bekwayo.

Within moments of their arrival, the crowd dispersed.

The officers quickly assessed the situation. Bekwayo called his wife, who arrived by vehicle carrying extra tools and a replacement jack.

Working against the fading light, they managed to change one tyre using the spare.

They loaded the mother, the children, and

the suitcases into the police van and one of the officers drove them to the township, racing against time to reach a tyre repair shop before it closed. Bekwayo remained behind with the father, standing guard over the stranded vehicle.

"It was a crazy situation. It was drizzling, I was in shorts and sandals, while my family drove off into the distance. It was like a movie," the father said.

A short time later, the police van returned with the repaired tyre, which they refitted.

"Feeling shaken, I asked the officers to escort us to our lodge," said the father.

The police vehicle led the way along darkening roads until the

Continued on page 9>>

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Israeli couple killed by Iranian cluster bomb as Israel continues assassinating Iranian officials

A couple in their 70s was killed overnight on Tuesday by an Iranian missile, apparently as they tried to reach a bomb shelter during an especially intense barrage of missiles aimed at the Tel Aviv area.

Yaron and Ilana Moshe were killed near their home in Ramat Gan, an upscale suburb. A walker found near their bodies suggested they were on their way to shelter but couldn't move quickly, officials said. Damage from the cluster munitions, which shed smaller bombs as they land, was also reported at other sites including a main train station in Tel Aviv.

The barrage, Iran said, was retaliation for the killing the day before of Ali Larijani, the country's security minister and a close ally of its assassinated supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.



Shortly afterwards, Israel announced it had assassinated another top official, Intelligence Minister Esmail Khatib. The Israeli military said in a statement, "Khatib played a significant role during the recent protests throughout Iran, including the arrest and killing of protesters, and led terrorist activities against Israelis and Americans around the world."

Israel's defense minister, Israel Katz, warned of more "significant surprises" ahead.

A *Wall Street Journal* story published on Wednesday details how Israel says it's choosing its targets, describing an extensive list of sites and people who are in its crosshairs. Israel knew security officers would gather in sports complexes after their offices were destroyed, then bombed the complexes once they were full, for example. According to the story, Iranians say order is beginning to fray on the streets, but the regime appears far from falling. Israel said earlier this week that it had three more weeks of targets to work through.

Israel has also stepped up its campaign in and around Beirut, where it's targeting forces affiliated with Hezbollah.

German antisemitism commissioner quits party over anti-Israel resolution

The antisemitism commissioner for the German state of Brandenburg has resigned from his far-left party over a resolution condemning Israel.

After 11 years in Die Linke (The Left), Andreas Büttner has quit over the position taken by members in Lower Saxony, in former West Germany. But it's also personal: Büttner said he's had enough of what he has described as harassment from within his party.

"It's no longer possible. And I can't go on ... without betraying my own convictions," Büttner wrote in a statement to party leaders. The letter was shared with the dpa, the German press association.

Die Linke is the successor to the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, the ruling communist party of former East Germany, and has a platform critical of capitalism and of NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization). Die Linke notched a better-than-expected finish in last year's national elections, drawing 9% of the vote

despite internal tensions over Israel and Germany's handling of antisemitism.

According to news reports about Büttner's resignation, Brandenburg's party leaders expressed "great regret and respect" and promised to continue fighting antisemitism with him.

The trigger for Büttner's move was a resolution, passed on Sunday, condemning current forms of Zionism, put forward by the party's youth delegation in Lower Saxony. It insisted the resolution was not against Zionism per se, only against "existing political manifestations of Zionism".

But Büttner said the message was unmistakable.

Resolutions that condemn Israel as a "genocidal state" and an "apartheid state" are "no longer acceptable to me", he wrote in his resignation. He criticised the Lower Saxony party for coming perilously close to questioning Israel's right to exist.

The fight against antisemitism should transcend party lines, he added. "All the more shocking for me is what I have had to experience within my own party for years," he wrote, as cited in the *Tagesspiegel* newspaper.

Büttner, a former police officer, has had his differences with his party for some time. Departing from its official stance, Büttner supports the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's definition of antisemitism, which labels some criticism of Israel as eliminationist and thus antisemitic.

In 2025, members of his party tried and failed to have him expelled over his solidarity with Israel.

Büttner also has been targeted by unknown perpetrators, who in 2024 vandalised his car with swastikas and other Nazi symbols, and in January set fire to a building on his property, leaving a Hamas symbol as their calling card.

• All briefs supplied by JTA.

Think before you text

For 40 years, Moshe learned Torah from Hashem. Their lessons were always preceded by a call. Hashem would summon Moshe and then proceed to teach a particular subject. When one examines the layout of a Torah scroll, one notices that it is broken up into smaller sections or paragraphs. Did Hashem call Moshe before teaching him each subsection?

Rashi writes that this was not the case. He called to him only at the beginning of the section, not at each subsection. If so, asks Rashi, what was the purpose of breaking the subject up into smaller

sections? He explains that these pauses gave Moshe time to contemplate the laws he had just learned. If such a methodology was required for the greatest teacher and the greatest student, then how much more so is it when one human being teaches another! A student needs time to reflect on the lesson they have just heard.

This teaching has major implications for education in particular and for the way in which we communicate information in general. Anyone who has studied Torah will notice that whatever subject one is studying, it is always broken

up into smaller sections, be it Tanach, Mishna, Talmud, or Halacha.

But the current state of communication is the furthest thing from the way in which Torah is taught and studied. Whereas Torah study provides opportunities for contemplation and reflection, the same thing cannot be said for 21st-century human interactions. Consider the world before emails. A person would receive a letter. The subject matter might have been extremely unpleasant, such as a demand for immediate payment, failing which, certain penalties would be instituted. The recipient of the letter would be annoyed, irritated, furious. His initial reaction would be to reply with an equally harsh response denying all claims. However, given the speed, or lack thereof, of traditional "snail mail", the knee-jerk response would seldom be what was sent. The recipient would mull over his response. He might even sleep on it. He would draft a first version, then rewrite it, before placing it in an envelope and sending it by post. There was simply no possibility for immediate responses.

But this is no longer the case. The speed at which we communicate today has created a culture in which replies are instant. More often than not, these replies, whether on email or social media are not adequately considered. They are emotionally charged and contain

Torah Thought

Rabbi Matthew Liebenberg, Claremont Wynberg Hebrew Congregation



words of anger. In a few seconds, a business partnership or marriage can be destroyed because the offended party didn't stop and think.

I often wonder why people are so easily offended these days. Perhaps the answer is related to our subject. Before the advent of immediate communication, there was time to think before hurling insults, sharing fake news or airing dirty laundry. There were far fewer avenues available to be offensive. If we would only follow the method that Hashem used to teach Moshe Torah, the world would be a happier place: speak, pause, think, and *only then*, reply.

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East London	18:02	18:52
Jerusalem	17:11	18:27
Tel Aviv	17:30	18:29

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 Human Rights Day commemorates the 1960 Sharpeville massacre, where 69 people were killed while protesting apartheid pass laws. It's a day to reflect on the how far the country has come, and how much work still remains in the fight for equality, justice, and dignity for all.

Why people believe that Tel Aviv is rubble and the PM is dead

LEE TANKLE

Videos showing Tel Aviv flattened into a wasteland of collapsed buildings and burning streets are spreading rapidly online. And in some corners of the internet, people are celebrating the destruction. Strong rumours that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is dead have also contaminated social media.

Except the scenes and rumours aren't real. They are AI-generated fabrications of a destroyed Tel Aviv, and the demise of Bibi. They have been shared widely across social media platforms, mostly without any indicators that they are fake.

"AI deepfakes are now so realistic that people will believe anything they see, and also won't believe their own eyes. Here we're seeing that on steroids, because so many people are predisposed to believe conspiracy theories involving Jews, and there are foreign influence operations deliberately spreading disinformation," said former spokesperson for the State of Israel Eylon Levy.

Internet communications and technology expert and author Arthur Goldstuck argues that many people are eager to believe these videos because they confirm their pre-existing beliefs.

"It's plain old confirmation bias: when the content lines up with a person's worldview, the brain treats it as evidence rather than something to question."

It's also about algorithms.

"Social media rewards emotion and anger, rather than rationality and verification. A dramatic clip of a city in ruins will travel far faster than a sober explanation of what actually happened, and showing buildings standing as they always have," said Goldstuck.

He explained that some fake videos are so convincing because the latest generative AI models are trained on enormous libraries of real imagery and video. They learn patterns in lighting, architecture, smoke, explosions, and camera movement, and so when prompted correctly, the AI reconstructs those patterns into scenes that mimic reality.

"Creators often combine several tools, like one that generates the scene, another that animates it, and another that adds sound effects or even camera shake. The final step is the presentation style: vertical video, shaky footage, compression artefacts, and urgent captions mimic the style of real social media clips," he said.

Middle East commentator Rolene Marks made it clear that, though videos are saying Netanyahu was killed in a strike by Iran, he is alive and well.

"In fact, he made a point of filming himself buying a coffee, and he said the only thing that he's dying for is the coffee, and that he loves his citizens so much," she said.

Technology expert and University of Johannesburg professor Steven Sidley explained that he hadn't even followed the story of Netanyahu being killed because he could tell it was obviously fake. "If he had been killed, we would have heard about it immediately from official Israeli sources," he said.

Marks added, "Sites like TikTok, which are known to be propaganda

generators, make sure that if you are on any WhatsApp groups, just because it says Israel, it's not necessarily verified news. Make sure your news is verified and understand that we are dealing with the absolute masters in creating panic and propaganda, and that is Iran."

Goldstuck argues there are three reasons people make these types of videos: propaganda, attention, and mischief.

"Conflict environments always produce information warfare, and AI makes it far cheaper, quicker, and more convincing. Instead of manipulating a single photo, you can fabricate an entire event," he said.

He also explained that the attention economy we live in is partly to blame. "Viral content translates into followers, engagement and, very often, money, as some platforms run ads alongside viral content. The person posting such content often gets a percentage of the revenue. A shocking video can be highly profitable, given that it's cheap to make and has a greater chance of going viral," he said.

Furthermore, Goldstuck explained that people often make these kinds of videos simply because they can. "Give someone a powerful tool and a global audience, and someone will inevitably use it to cause chaos, just to see how far they can take it."

Levy, who lives in Tel Aviv and was approached by random X users believing that the city is rubble, explained that people are so ready to believe it's been destroyed because they want it to be true.

"You can't understand the 'Tel Aviv is burning' hoax without grasping the glee and bloodlust with which it is being shared. For the past two years, much of the world has jumped down a conspiratorial rabbit hole with no connection to reality," he said.

Goldstuck explained that in highly polarised conflicts, confirmation bias becomes stronger. "If someone already believes a country is an aggressor or deserves punishment, footage appearing to show it suffering can feel emotionally satisfying. That emotional reaction often overrides any attempt to verify whether the

footage is real."

However, this isn't unique to one side, said Goldstuck. "People across the political spectrum fall for misinformation when it flatters their narrative. AI-generated imagery simply gives those narratives a far more persuasive visual form. The danger lies less in the technology itself than in how readily audiences accept what they want to see."

"There are many more people in parts of the world who want Israel destroyed than those who don't, so when videos appear showing Tel Aviv in ruins, many viewers are inclined to believe them," said Sidley. "Images showing the city functioning normally, people eating at restaurants, or going about their daily lives, simply don't spread as widely. The only way to challenge the false claims is to present photographic evidence of Tel Aviv, but even that is often dismissed. Until there is some technological solution to identify or limit such fabrications, it's a no-win situation, and Israelis are often on the receiving end of it."

Sidley explained that there is no defence against this phenomenon, as there is bias everywhere. And the only way to combat this is through digital signatures and blockchain wizardry, but that's a long way off.

"So we must, with respect to this war going on now, just accept the fact that there are millions and millions of people who think that Tel Aviv is lying in ruins, which of course it's not. There's nothing to be done about it."



Even Jerusalem's Old City is running for cover

GILANA LAB

South African *olah* Kim Bash was sitting in her *miklat* (bomb shelter) in Jerusalem's Old City on Tuesday, 17 March when she heard a massive explosion. She thought a missile had hit her home or somewhere dangerously close. She wasn't wrong.

"There was a massive explosion," Bash, who made aliya from Johannesburg 20 years ago, said. "When there's a big boom, my whole house shakes." The sound was immediate, violent, and close enough to rattle the glass doors in her home. "The glass doors vibrate. It's boom, boom, boom. It was really really scary."

Within minutes, she discovered the explosion was the result of falling shrapnel from intercepted missiles that had fallen into Jerusalem's Old City, striking both the Jewish and Christian Quarters. One large piece of metal landed in a car park about 250 metres from the home she shares with her husband and four children. That shrapnel crashed into a parked car. "It was a miracle no-one was there," she said. Other pieces struck rooftops, scattering debris across the Old City residential area.

The impact of this falling shrapnel, said Bash, destroyed a long-held assumption by Old City residents. "It's something we always said would never happen," she said. "They said they'd never aim

towards Jerusalem. But at the end of the day, they're just shooting. It doesn't matter where."

While Israel's missile defence systems mostly prevent direct hits, the debris that falls is still extremely dangerous.

In this case, large pieces of metal landed right next to and on the roofs of homes in one of the most densely inhabited and historically significant streets in the world.

"In the Jewish Quarter, where we live, a big piece of metal fell into a parking lot," Bash said. "In the Christian Quarter, there were several very large pieces. Everything here is so close together. It is all within a couple of minutes' walk."

She said that even when the shrapnel isn't visible, the horrific sound heard in the *miklat* is unmistakable. "You hear it like an echo," she explained. "And then you know

something has happened."

The danger isn't only in where shrapnel lands, but how it lands, she explained to the *SA Jewish Report* this week. "It doesn't just land. It splinters outwards. It can hit everywhere."

Even after the impact, the threat remains. "You're not allowed to touch it," she says. "Special forces have to come in to deal with it. Some of these can still explode after they've landed."

For Bash, and others living in the Old City, the fear during this war isn't a single moment but a constant state of readiness. Sirens can come with warnings, or without. "They try to give a warning before the sirens," she says. "But sometimes there's nothing. Just sirens. Or even explosions without sirens."

Unlike newer homes elsewhere in Israel, there are no inhouse safe rooms in the Old City. Instead, residents rely on *miklatot* located underground or beneath buildings. Reaching them requires speed. "We have to run out into the street. It's about a 30-second run to the *miklat*," Bash explained.

Those seconds shape how people live. "I go to bed in my clothes," she said. "I don't even get into pyjamas. Everybody's dressed, ready to go." For the past two weeks, this has been routine. "We sleep with bags ready. You have no idea when a siren is going to happen."

And yet, even as explosions echo through the Old City, life continues. A real estate agent, she sees that resilience plays out in her work every day.

"Nobody's saying, 'Israel's at war, we're going to cancel,'" she said. "I had four clients in one day. Every day, people are still looking for homes."

For many, the instability has only deepened their commitment. "People believe Israel is their safety net," she explained. "Especially with what's happening around the world, people would rather invest here than anywhere else."

For Bash, that belief is unwavering. "I wouldn't live anywhere else," she said. "Not in a million years. I really believe that this is where we're all supposed to be. This is our homeland."

Around her, the reality remains tense, unpredictable, and often frightening. But the response is consistent. "Israelis are resilient," she said. "We just get on with life. Yes, there are missiles. Yes, we run into bomb shelters. But this is life here. You just keep going."

Rolene Marks, South African Zionist

Continued on page 4 >>>



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'South Africa attractive to terror networks'

CLAUDIA GROSS

South Africa hasn't experienced a large-scale terrorist attack in recent years, but that shouldn't be mistaken for security, according to Professor Hussein Solomon, a senior professor at the University of the Free State and a leading scholar on terrorism and African security.

The fact that we haven't had a Bondi Beach-type attack doesn't mean there won't be one in the future," he said in a lecture to students at the University of Houston recently.

Solomon, who outlined in his lecture how extremist groups such as Islamic State (ISIS) have expanded rapidly across the African continent, warns that South Africa occupies a unique position in the global extremist landscape. The country isn't currently a battlefield for militant organisations, he says, but it is a place where networks can operate quietly.

"South Africa has become a place where people lie low," he says. "It's functioning enough that people can move around, but it's also prone to infiltration."

Solomon points out that much of ISIS' activity now takes place in Africa, where affiliates operate in regions ranging from the Sahel to Mozambique.

He makes the point that South Africa isn't isolated from broader terrorist trends despite many of the conflicts taking place far from this country. Militant networks, he says, often seek environments where they can operate quietly while maintaining access to infrastructure and financial systems. South Africa provides both.

"We've had Boko Haram here. We've had Al-Shabaab here. We've had Hamas and Hezbollah here. We've had al-Qaeda here," Solomon says.

He also points to the fact that South Africans have travelled abroad to join extremist organisations. "There were hundreds of South Africans who went to Raqqa and were trained as part of ISIS," he says.

Some later returned to South Africa. What became of them remains uncertain. "Where are they now? What happened to them?" Solomon asks.

The challenge facing South Africa, according to Solomon, isn't a lack of laws designed to prevent terrorism. On paper, the country has robust legislation aimed at combatting extremist activity and terror financing. The problem lies elsewhere. "We have great legislation but lousy implementation," he says.

Corruption and political interference weaken the institutions responsible for enforcing those laws. As a result, networks linked to organised crime, financial fraud, and extremist movements are able to operate with limited oversight.

"There's a growing nexus between crime, terrorism, the weakness of the state, and corruption," Solomon says. Financial networks illustrate how these systems operate. Terrorist organisations rely on funding to sustain their activities, and that funding often moves through legitimate financial channels.

Extremist groups raise money through kidnapping, extortion, robbery, narcotics trafficking, and the illegal trade in minerals. Some of these activities take place in South Africa or move through its financial system.

At the same time, investigations into suspected extremist activity sometimes stall before reaching prosecution. Solomon describes cases in which security officials uncovered suspicious activities such as paramilitary training

camp and believed they had strong evidence against those involved.

"Then suddenly the surveillance teams are told to stand down," he says. "All the evidence is handed over, and nothing happens." He says such incidents raise questions about political will.

South Africa's borders also pose challenges. Corruption among officials has allowed people to enter illegally.

Members of the Border Management Authority have been accused of accepting bribes to allow undocumented migrants into the country. Weak enforcement of immigration laws can create opportunities for criminal networks and extremist operatives. "Extremist groups look for countries that function but that they can penetrate," Solomon says.

Despite these vulnerabilities, South Africa hasn't experienced the kind of large-scale attacks seen elsewhere. Smaller incidents have occurred, including attempted attacks against Jewish institutions. However, the country hasn't experienced the scale of violence seen in parts of West Africa or the Middle East.

Solomon believes geography and political priorities have played a role. "South Africa is a huge country," he says. "It's easier to hide in."

For now, militant networks appear to use the country primarily as a logistical base rather than an operational battlefield. Elsewhere in Africa, however, the security picture is far more volatile.

Extremist organisations have expanded by exploiting weak governance, local grievances, and ethnic conflicts. In some regions, militant groups have established parallel systems of authority.

"They provide basic services," Solomon says. "Farm tools, schools, health clinics."

In communities where the state is absent or ineffective, this assistance can win loyalty. "People start transferring their loyalty from the state to the militant group," he says.

Heavy-handed responses by governments can also accelerate radicalisation. Studies of captured militants have found that many joined extremist organisations after experiencing violence at the hands of security forces.

Indiscriminate crackdowns, Solomon says, often create new recruits rather than eliminating insurgencies. "People join because they feel they have no other option," he says.

He believes effective counter-terrorism requires both capable security forces and accountable governance. Military action can disrupt extremist organisations, but it cannot address the underlying conditions that allow them to grow.

"If citizens feel the state is corrupt and offers them nothing, someone else will fill that space," Solomon says. South Africa's own internal divisions could also create vulnerabilities. Economic hardship, social inequality, and political tensions provide opportunities for extremist movements to exploit grievances. "When the economic situation is bad, terror groups recruit even more," Solomon says.

He points to divisions along racial, class, and regional lines that extremist groups could potentially manipulate. "These groups are very good at exploiting divisions," he says.

For Solomon, the central question is whether South Africa will confront these challenges before they become more serious. The country has avoided the large-scale violence seen elsewhere on the continent. Yet the conditions that allow extremist networks to operate already exist.

"The question," he says, "is whether we have the political will to deal with it."

When the economic situation is bad, terror groups recruit even more.

Even Jerusalem's Old City is running for cover

>>Continued from page 3

Federation spokesperson, said, "What we are witnessing is not just a series of statistics but a relentless assault on ordinary people going about their daily lives.

"Over the past week alone, Israelis have endured 5 424 red alerts, including 1 274 in a single day, and more than 18 403 over the past month," she said.

"Each siren is a moment of panic. Families running for cover, children being woken in the night, lives repeatedly interrupted by the threat of incoming fire. A single rocket can trigger alerts across multiple areas, meaning entire regions are forced into shelters at once."

To date, 14 people in Israel have been killed since the escalation began on 28 February. The most recent victims, an elderly couple in their 70s in Ramat Gan, were unable to reach a shelter in time.

"These are not numbers; they are people, our brothers and

sisters. Many of the injuries and deaths have been caused by shrapnel from intercepted missiles, a stark reminder that even when Israel's defence systems are working, the danger remains immediate and deadly," Marks said.

"There has also been damage to homes and civilian areas, including like in this instance in Jerusalem's Old City – one of the most religiously sensitive places on earth. This cannot be overstated: these attacks place all religious sites at risk, Jewish, Muslim, and Christian alike," she said.

"Without Israel's missile defence systems, the consequences would be catastrophic. Holy sites, including mosques in Jerusalem, have been directly exposed. The Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps is firing indiscriminately at population centres, showing no regard for civilians, for history, or for religion, even when it endangers sites sacred to its own faith."

Rocky start as US ambassador reprimanded

STEVEN GRUZD

The new US ambassador to South Africa, Leo Brent Bozell III, had barely unpacked before he landed in hot water with the government of his host country. To many commentators, this was no surprise as there is a perception that sending Bozell is, in effect, US President Donald Trump giving the South African government the middle finger.

Senior researcher at the South African Institute of International Affairs Gustavo de Carvalho agreed, saying, "Without question. Bozell isn't a career diplomat or an Africa hand. He's a conservative media activist who opposed engagement with the African National Congress in the 1980s. His appointment follows the US's expulsion of Ambassador Ebrahim Rasool, the G20 boycott, and the Afrikaner refugee programme. The message is clear: Washington has no interest in managing this relationship through conventional diplomacy."

During Bozell's first public speech in Hermanus in the Western Cape, he declared the chant "Kill the Boer" incendiary. "I am sorry, I don't care what your courts say, it's hate speech." He said that although Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE) was designed to address historical injustices, it created compliance burdens and avenues for corruption, increasing risk for investors. He said the US was concerned about domestic legislation and the company that Pretoria keeps.

Bozell added that Pretoria had ignored Trump's "five asks" from a year ago. "Protecting rural communities from violence; condemning rhetoric that incites hatred or glorifies violence; ensuring that expropriation policies include clear and fair compensation standards; expanding digital and critical minerals cooperation; and ending mandatory surrender of ownership or control of corporate decision-making as a cost of doing business." Bozell said Washington was losing patience.

Although many may agree with Bozell, his words earned him a *démarche* – a public dressing down – from the Department of International Relations and

Cooperation. His office later clarified that these were his personal opinions, but the damage was done.

Local commentators like Jovial Rantao were incensed at Bozell's perceived arrogance, his dismissal of South Africa's legal system, and his know-it-all, condescending tone. Others bayed for Bozell's expulsion, à la Rasool, and Israel's deputy ambassador to South Africa, Ariel Seidman.

De Carvalho said, "Bozell went before business leaders to dismiss South African court rulings on 'Kill the Boer', compare B-BBEE to apartheid, and publicly restate all five of Washington's demands – from dropping the International Court of Justice (ICJ) 'genocide' case against Israel to distancing from the walk-back the next day, reframing his remarks as personal views, suggests Washington wants to apply pressure without triggering a full rupture. It's a calibrated provocation: say the quiet part loud, then soften just enough to keep the channel open."

Professor of International Relations at Unisa, Jo-Ansie van Wyk, said, "It's very clear that Bozell is from Trump's inner circle and already expressed strong views on South Africa during his

confirmation hearings. He has condemned South Africa's ties with Iran and the ICJ case against Israel. This rebuke against him hasn't been good for our relations with the US. Like his predecessor, Reuben Brigety, he's rubbed the South African government up the wrong way."

South Africa is highly dependent on oil from Iran and the wider Middle East and must tread nimbly.

"South Africa must take the long view and be strategic, or risk further alienation," said Van Wyk. "There isn't going to be a good reception of our continued support of Iran, especially now during the war. Our diplomacy needs to adapt to uncharted waters."

Former US diplomat and writer J Brooks Spector said, "If Bozell can find the language of fresh beginnings, he has a chance to make an impact. But that requires a receptive audience in Washington as well as an effort in South Africa to engage with the broad array of opinions, people, and institutions, and not just those seen as aligned with the ideas of [right-wing] groups like AfriForum."

De Carvalho said, "Since arriving in South Africa in late February, Bozell has oscillated between conciliation and confrontation. His initial welcome video struck a surprisingly upbeat tone, emphasising partnership and 'South African exceptionalism'. But that softer opening did not last long. Within weeks, the mask slipped, and the confrontational posture that defined his confirmation testimony [in Congress] resurfaced with force."

Will Bozell change Pretoria's stance on Israel? "Almost certainly not through public browbeating," said De Carvalho. "The ICJ case carries too much domestic and Global South political capital for the

government to abandon under visible American pressure; doing so would undermine the very moral authority on which it was built. If anything, Bozell's approach risks hardening positions rather than shifting them. The real leverage Washington

has is economic: the African Growth and Opportunity Act, tariffs, and the weight of more than 500 US companies operating in South Africa. That is where this contest will ultimately play out, not through ambassadorial theatrics."

Spector wrote in *Daily Maverick*, "In our current circumstances, Ambassador Bozell and his staff should contemplate how they can boil down his message to one crisp, key phrase. It must be the kind of statement encapsulating his desire to build a better relationship for the future, even if there are disagreements. Underscoring this mantra should be the idea the relationship is sufficiently worth saving that the hard work on improving it lies ahead, rather than in dwelling on past insults, angry words, and prickly disputes. As an experienced media professional, Ambassador Bozell certainly understands the importance of such an effort and being prepared to do it. But it may take time to move away from this first pothole in the road."

Spector added that the lesson for Bozell should be, "Avoid obvious pitfalls in the way things are discussed and bear in mind that being a successful media critic and a successful ambassador are two different breeds of cats."



US ambassador to South Africa Leo Brent Bozell III speaking at the BizNews Conference in Hermanus

Photo: Screenshot

Children with fake guns at Al Quds march prompt legal questions

CLAUDIA GROSS

Experts are calling for legal scrutiny of the Al Quds march through the Cape Town city centre where many children carried imitation firearms and there were chants of “One Zionist, one bullet”. Questions have been raised about incitement to violence, the use of minors, and whether laws were contravened.

There were between 200 to 300 participants – far fewer than previous years – in the march that moved through the city centre, past Parliament, under police escort.

The large number and visibility of children with realistic-looking weapons struck observers. Images and video footage show children, some appearing to be between 10 and 13 years old, dressed in keffiyehs and military-style clothing, carrying imitation rifles, and positioned upfront in the procession. In several instances, they were placed alongside effigies of international political figures, with adults directing their participation and movement.

This wasn't the first time children with fake guns were involved, but their number had increased significantly this year.

The South African Zionist Federation national spokesperson, Rolene Marks, said the display crossed a clear line. “Children dressed as militants, handed replica firearms, and paraded through the Cape Town city centre as props in a political spectacle,” said Marks. “This is not protest. It is the deliberate grooming and exploitation of minors to normalise violence.”

Concerns were heightened by protesters chanting “One Zionist, one bullet” during the march. Footage of this is doing the rounds on social media.

Advocate Mark Oppenheimer said such a chant could constitute hate speech under the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act.

“Chanting ‘One Zionist, one bullet’ amounts to unprotected hate speech,” he said. “The Act expressly protects groups on the basis of their beliefs, which includes a belief in Zionism. Propagating hatred against such a group, and inciting harm against its members, falls squarely within the prohibition.”



He said this slogan echoed earlier politically charged phrases associated with violence, reinforcing its meaning and intent. Oppenheimer appeared for AfriForum in a case against the Economic Freedom Fighters claiming that “Kill the Boer” and associated slogans like “One settler, one bullet” amounted to hate speech and incitement. While AfriForum lost the case, the judge didn't make a ruling about the slogan “One settler, one bullet”, which has a clear implication of violence.

Oppenheimer was also critical of the use of children in the protest. “The use of children cosplaying as terrorists reflects extremely poorly on their parents,” he said. “Deploying children to convey a message of hatred and violence is an abuse of those children and should be unequivocally condemned.”



The Cape South African Jewish Board of Deputies (Cape SAJBD) similarly focused on the involvement of minors. “Particularly disturbing was, yet again, the involvement of children carrying replica weapons and dressed in militant-style clothing,” said Daniel Bloch, executive director of the Cape SAJBD.

“Using children in this way not only normalises violence but turns them into instruments of ideological indoctrination. Our children's rights, including their right to safety, freedom, and protection from exploitation, must always be upheld.”

Bloch said that although attendance at the march appeared to be declining, “the rhetoric and imagery remain troubling”, noting the presence of flags and posters linked to organisations and figures associated with conflict in the Middle East, including that of Hezbollah.

Legal experts say the presence of imitation firearms at a public demonstration raises important legal questions. The Dangerous Weapons Act defines a dangerous weapon as any object capable of causing serious harm if used unlawfully, and prohibits possession under circumstances that may raise a reasonable suspicion of intended unlawful use.

Damian Enslin, a property and firearms law specialist, told the SA Jewish Report that amendments to the Regulation of Gatherings Act make it clear that participants at a gathering or demonstration may not possess “any airgun, firearm, imitation firearm ... or any object that resembles a firearm and that is likely to be mistaken for a firearm”. Contravention of this provision can result in a fine or imprisonment of

up to three years.

The law places a clear responsibility on both participants and organisers. Convenors and marshals are required to take reasonable steps to ensure compliance with these restrictions, particularly in relation to the display of weapons or objects resembling firearms.

The legislation also requires that intent be assessed in context, including the behaviour of participants, the manner in which objects are displayed, and whether there is any associated intimidation or threat.

Against this backdrop, the images of children carrying imitation rifles in a politically charged protest environment have prompted questions about whether the threshold for legal scrutiny has been met.

Marks said the apparent tolerance of the

protest raised broader concerns. “Explicit incitement [was] broadcast openly under police escort, within sight of Parliament,” she said, describing what she called a “glaring double standard” in the enforcement of South Africa's laws.

Beyond South Africa, Al Quds Day protests have come under increasing scrutiny in other countries. In the United Kingdom, authorities banned the march this year for the first time in more than a decade, citing concerns about public disorder, links to Iranian state activity, and a history of arrests at previous events for offences including support for proscribed organisations and hate crimes.

Al Quds Day, established in Iran in 1979, is marked annually in cities around the world and is typically characterised by strong anti-Israel messaging. While the tone and scale of events varies internationally, controversies have

frequently arisen over militant imagery, slogans, and the involvement of children.

In Cape Town, those who attended or monitored the march said the use of children appeared deliberate rather than incidental.

Adults constructed effigies of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, United States President Donald Trump, and British Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer; positioned children alongside them; and placed imitation firearms in their hands before the procession moved through the city centre. The participation of minors was visible throughout the march,

and not confined to isolated instances.

“Legal action should be considered against the organisers and participants of the demonstration in order to curb the rise in violent anti-Zionist rhetoric,” said Oppenheimer.

For community organisations, the issue extends beyond legality to broader concerns about the normalisation of violence and the role of children in political activism. “Friday's march showed exactly what it looks like when children are drawn into political fanaticism and used as props for the extremist agendas of adults,” said Bloch.

As debate continues, this year's Al Quds Day protest has shifted attention away from turnout and towards the nature of participation, particularly where minors are involved in imagery and messaging that many say raise serious legal and ethical concerns.

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South African Jewish Report

Get me to Israel on time

"I don't care how you get me there, but I have to be in Israel for Pesach," the woman near me this week at the Norwood Mall shouted down the cellphone. "I know there's a war on, but my children are there and so I have to be with them for Pesach."

I couldn't help but smile as I got on with my business. That little interaction, or perhaps altercation, was so indicative of everything that we are as Jews.

Who else would be so eager to get to a country that's in the middle of a war? Not just at war but that has ballistic missiles being fired at its civilians many times a day. Most of the country is running backwards and forwards from underground shelters every day. I am sure the number of times in the last two weeks people have done the shelter run must feel infinite. Consider that in the past week alone, according to the South African Zionist Federation, Israelis have endured 5 424 red alerts, including 1 274 in a single day, and more than 18 403 over the past month. Granted, each of these doesn't cover the whole country and can be for isolated areas, but the numbers are astounding, especially when you must seek shelter to ensure your survival.

And yet, despite that, many Jews are still desperate to get to Israel. And it certainly hasn't been, nor is it yet, easy to get there. Not at all. The skies are still not open as such as planes are not flying in freely or directly. The skies are opening very slowly because the firing of ballistic missiles isn't abating.

To get to Israel, you still need to go via-via-via, and then probably catch a special bus in from Jordan or Egypt. And the cost? Suffice to say, people aren't talking openly about how much they're having to pay to get there. One person, I heard, had asked her mother to use her savings to ensure the family was together in Israel for Pesach. Seriously!

In the SA Jewish Report, you have read only a smidgen of the dramatic stories of people's travel experiences, which we have managed to attain to write about. There are many more that don't get past private WhatsApp groups.

I have to say it's not lost on me that so many people are making the Great Trek to Israel for Pesach through Egypt. There is something vaguely ironic about the fact that in the year 2026, more than 3 500 years since we left, escaping slavery, people are departing Egypt for Israel.

The second thing about that Norwood phone confrontation that I marvelled at was that intrinsic Jewish need in most of us to spend the *chaggim*, especially Pesach, Rosh Hashanah, and Yom Kippur, with our family.

I recall way back in my early adulthood when I was working at the *Sunday Times* in Cape Town. I was hardly settled when Pesach was upon us and I was nowhere near my family. While I was excited to be working there, I felt very sad knowing I wasn't going to be with them for Pesach. Fortunately, I was swept up by people around me and it didn't take long for me to be invited to spend memorable seders with fabulous people. But still, they weren't my family. I have since done my best to ensure I get to spend the *chaggim* with my loved ones. So, I understand that woman's desperation. She is not alone.

I also recognise that as tough as it is to be in Israel now, and in truth Israelis defy death every day, it's easier to be with your loved ones there. Let me explain. If you have children living in Israel and you're there with them, off you all run to the *miklatot* (bomb shelters). Yes, it's inconvenient, scary, frustrating, but you're together experiencing that. And as death-defying as it is, it becomes memories in the making (that is, as long as everyone survives).

However, once you're back home in Johannesburg, Cape Town, or Durban, and your children are still running the gauntlet with missiles, it has a different flavour and sense. And it's not an easy experience. You may keep up to date, as most of us do, with the red alerts and missile launches, but you can't help your children or ensure they're safe. I know we're mostly talking about young or not-so-young adults, but your children are always your babies.

That constant fear and wondering if they're still safe. You don't want to be calling or messaging them all the time. You don't want to appear overprotective, even though as Jewish parents we generally are. The point is, if there are 20 sirens in one day, can you realistically be in touch that many times? Perhaps, but put yourself in your kids' position; they might get a little aggravated with you. Just saying.

And because it's difficult in South Africa to know exactly where the siren is and what has happened once it's gone off, we worry. It's in our genes.

So, again, I understand why Jewish parents or children want to be with their family in Israel. The problem with getting them out here to South Africa is that they may not be able to be repatriated if necessary for more than 30 days, what with the current security restraints. Not sure how that works or if it would stick but sounds like it makes life difficult.

The good thing about having family and many friends in Israel is that no matter how realistic artificial intelligence videos of Tel Aviv and Israel being destroyed are, we are not conned. Having said that, it is astonishing how people share these horrific videos with glee. It's amazing how gullible people can be when something fits their narrative. Isn't it horrific to think that this is what many people want to see? *Am Yisrael Chai!*

Here's to staying safe and keeping pre-Pesach stress levels down!

Shabbat Shalom!

Peta Krost
Editor



South Africa bet on the wrong horse in its ICJ 'genocide' gambit

OPINION

ANNE HERZBERG



In December 2023, South Africa filed a petition at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) against Israel for allegedly violating the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide during its operations against Hamas in Gaza. South Africa demanded the ICJ place provisional measures on Israel, most notably, that it imposes a unilateral ceasefire.

South Africa claimed its actions were to "liberate humanity from the 'odious scourge' of genocide" and to "remind us all of our shared values". It further asserted that "We must all answer to the call to defend the principles of international law and to reassert the vital role played by the United Nations [UN] and international dispute settlement mechanisms like the ICJ."

Despite the lofty words, South Africa's case was always unsupportable, both factually and legally. To prove genocide, it would have to show that Israel acted with the sole special intent of destroying Palestinians as a group. No such intent exists, and South Africa's "proof" is weak at best. Its filings completely erase the context of 7 October 2023, cover up Hamas terror tunnels and use of human shields, and lie about the issue of humanitarian aid to Gaza. Its only "evidence" of intent are a few falsified statements allegedly made by Israeli officials.

Its initial request was so unconvincing that even the ICJ, the UN's politicised court, would not grant the demand for a ceasefire. Subsequent requests were treated similarly. When it came time to actually submit hard evidence, South Africa reportedly scrambled to cobble together more of the same tendentious and manipulated information.

It was clear from the outset, however, that South Africa's legal machinations were not about "defending the principles of international law" or to "reassert the vital role played by the UN" – as claimed by the government – but rather were part of the information war against Israel. The goal was to internationally isolate and pressure Israel into

20-point plan for Gaza, and its endorsement by UN Security Council Resolution 2803, South African government statements erase the humanitarian and security framework currently in place, while also remaining silent about Hamas's continuing violations of it.

South Africa's role in bringing this case, therefore, was never about the actual substance of the Genocide Convention or upholding international law and institutions. Rather, it reflected South Africa's desire to more closely align with the axis of China, Russia, and Iran.

In this vein, on the first anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, South Africa conducted military exercises with Russia and China. Another round took place in January 2026, this time with participation from Iran, precisely while the mullahs were massacring 30 000 of their own citizens protesting against the regime. South Africa has also sought to boost trade with all three actors. Choosing to ally with countries that threaten and wage aggressive war against their neighbours, commit genocide against their minority populations, crush any and all dissent by political opponents, arbitrarily detain and torture, block freedom of speech and protest, and practise gender and ethnic apartheid is the height of hypocrisy and belies South Africa's self-serving talk on Gaza.

South Africa's approach is not only hypocritical, but short-sighted, and it has already had far-reaching consequences. In addition to courting Russia, China, and Iran, South Africa was also looking to improve its ties with the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Iran's unceasing attacks on the UAE have provoked fury, and it may retaliate against those who have taken sides with Iran. South Africa's increasing hostility towards Israel has harmed much needed access to Israeli tech in the water, medical, cyber, defence, and agricultural fields.

South Africa's diplomatic choices have caused the most damage, however, to its most important relationship. The United States is South Africa's biggest trading partner, and largest funder of its civil society sector. The US has vociferously objected to the ICJ case. Pretoria's increasing alienation from and antagonism towards the US has drawn the ire of the Trump administration. The US has increased tariffs on South Africa and cut massive amounts of humanitarian aid to the country. The US has also snubbed South Africa in its efforts to enhance its international profile, by boycotting the G20 meeting last year in Johannesburg. Punitive actions are likely to intensify after the fallout from the Iran war.

Regardless of whether the regime in Iran survives, it has suffered serious military and financial destruction that will only exacerbate the country's economic collapse. It will be hard to think of the benefits it could now provide to South Africa. Moreover, should the people of Iran rise up and depose those who have oppressed them for 47 years, the new leaders will remember which side the South African government chose in their struggle for freedom.

It is highly possible that even with the geopolitical changes that will undoubtedly come from the Iran war, South Africa may ultimately prevail at the ICJ. The UN court is a political body that does not have the ability to engage in real fact finding or evidence testing. It is not bound by rules that generally govern court proceedings, and there are no mechanisms for oversight or accountability. Much of the time, this body merely endorses unverified UN reports, regardless of their credibility, and factual and legal accuracy.

So in the end, South Africa may score an information war "win" against Israel. But will it be worth the damage it has inflicted on itself in the process?

• Anne Herzberg is the legal adviser of NGO Monitor, a Jerusalem-based research organisation.



Adila Hassim SC presenting South Africa's case at the ICJ

stopping its operations against Hamas and Iran's other proxy armies, Hezbollah and the Houthis, which joined in the assault on the Jewish State.

Far from caring about "international law", the South African government's ongoing public sentiments have been virtually silent about 7 October 2023 and the hostages. Not only has the government misinformed, it openly embraced the butchers, hosting Hamas officials at a conference in Johannesburg just a month after the atrocities. The country began organising coalitions of countries to issue statements of condemnation solely directed at Israel. South Africa included members of nongovernmental organisations linked to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine terrorist organisation on its legal team. Around this time also, a large debt owed by the African National Congress was also mysteriously settled, with rumours that Iran had paid the bill in exchange for the ICJ filing.

Even today, far from "reasserting the UN's vital role", after the October 2025 ceasefire adopting United States (US) President Donald Trump's

Wits students transform anti-Israel narrative into declaration of pride



SASHA SAID

OPINION

This wasn't a week we braced for. It was a week we claimed.

For years, Jewish students at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) have approached this time of year with a sense of anticipation mixed with unease. What was known as Israeli Apartheid Week (IAW) didn't simply pass through campus, it shaped it. Internationally and locally, IAW has been a source of hostility and intimidation, and a key driver in making Jewish students feel unsafe at university.

It created an environment where being visibly Jewish came with a cost. Where speaking openly could invite confrontation. Where identity felt like something to manage, rather than something to live.

And so, for too long, Jewish students adapted.

We softened our language. We avoided certain conversations. We found ourselves explaining and defending instead of expressing and defining. We were asked, year after year, to respond to narratives about who we are, rather than being given the space to say it ourselves.

This year, we made a different choice.

As the South African Union of Jewish Students, we decided we would no longer build our presence around reaction. Instead of arguing what we are not, we started from the beginning: what we are, who we are, and what we stand for.

We turned the week on its head, choosing to define our identity on our own terms, not as it is framed by others, but as it is lived by us: as proud, unapologetic Jewish, South African, Zionist students.

Jewish, Christian, Muslim. Black, white, coloured. Gay, straight, bisexual. Just to mention a few. A healthy campus is one where those identities aren't suppressed, but expressed.

Our message was simple: Just as we are proud of our identity, so too should every student be proud of theirs.



Out of that conviction, we launched Pride Without Apology, a multi-day campaign that explored the many dimensions of Jewish identity.

Our first day began with Pride in our People. This was about Judaism, not as something abstract, but as something lived. It created a space for Jewish students to gather openly, to engage in conversation, and to participate in practice. It was about community as much as it was about education. In a

We then moved to Pride in our History, the day that demanded the most courage. With the simple statement "I'm a proud Zionist, come ask me what that means", we leaned into one of the most misunderstood and misrepresented aspects of our identity. Instead of avoiding the word,

we reclaimed it. We defined Zionism not through slogans, but through conversation about our belief in Jewish self-determination.

And we did something else: we brought creativity to a space that is often defined by confrontation.

During the height of campus protest activity, we hosted an interactive graffiti activation, "Come spray your pride". Students were invited to design and spray paint

their own tote bags and T-shirts. What could have been a moment of division became a moment of expression. It drew people in, disarmed tension, and created organic, human conversations. It was bold, visible, and entirely student-driven, a reflection of what happens when identity is expressed with confidence rather than fear.

Finally, we closed with Pride in our Countries. This day embraced the fullness of who we are: proudly South African and proudly connected to Israel. It challenged the false notion that these identities are in conflict, and instead affirmed that they can coexist, meaningfully and unapologetically.

Throughout the week, our approach remained consistent: open, confident, and invitational. Not confrontational, but not apologetic either.

This matters because universities remain one of the most important pillars of our South African Jewish community. Without viable and safe campuses, our community cannot secure its future. If Jewish students feel they must hide in order to belong, then the cost is far greater than one difficult week, it is the erosion of identity itself.

What this week showed is that this reality is not fixed.

Through deliberate strategy, sustained effort, and a refusal to be defined by hostility, even the most challenging environments can be reshaped. Spaces can be reclaimed. Conversations can be reset.

Confidence can replace fear.

IAW, once a source of antagonism and anxiety, has been transformed into something entirely different: a space of pride, celebration, and ownership of Jewish identity.

We are no longer on the defensive. We are present. We are visible. And we are unapologetic.

Proud Without Apology wasn't just a campaign.

It was a line in the sand and a statement of exactly who we are.

Sasha Said is the chairperson of the South African Union of Jewish Students.

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New SA olim overwhelmed but undeterred

CLAUDIA GROSS

Just months after stepping off planes into new lives, hundreds of South African *olim* have found themselves running for shelter as sirens sound across Israel, forced to navigate not only the challenges of immigration but the shock of living through war for the first time.

For many, the adjustment has been immediate and unrelenting. They've had to learn quickly what it means to live with uncertainty, warning systems, and the constant calculation of risk.

According to Dorron Kline, chief executive of Telfed, 255 South Africans made aliya in the past year. He describes them as "remarkably resilient", noting that outreach efforts to check on each *oleh* revealed that they were largely coping, with only minor issues requiring attention.

Kline says that for many, context matters. He recalls one *oleh* telling him, "This is home. This is where the action is" and this is where he wants to be. Even when families abroad questioned their decisions, the response was firm: they would stay.

Yet resilience does not mean ease.

For South African-born Brenda Frank, who made aliya on 3 November 2025, the experience has been overwhelming. Arriving from London, after 25 years abroad, she was still settling into her new apartment when the reality of war set in. "It hasn't been easy," she says. "You're just getting settled, meeting people, and then this happens."

Daily routines are shaped by uncertainty. "You think, should I start something? Should I go out? Will I make it before the siren goes off?" she says. Even simple activities, like showering or leaving the house, require calculation.

Frank describes a constant awareness of proximity to shelter. "I do have a shelter in the building, which is convenient," she says, noting that it's just below her apartment. That physical reassurance, however, doesn't remove the emotional strain.

"It's depressing," she admits. "You think you're settling in, and then you're back to square one." Still, like many others, she emphasises the need to continue. "You just get on with it. People are amazing. You just carry on with life."

For younger *olim*, the experience can feel both surreal and formative. Sydney Wohlman, who made aliya in December 2025, describes hearing a siren for the first time as "an out-of-body experience".

Despite the shock, she says she had prepared herself. "I had mentally prepared to live in a war situation," she explains, adding that she doesn't regret her decision.

For Wohlman, the move was driven by a desire for a fully Jewish life. In South Africa, she says, she struggled to balance her career with religious observance. "I was seeking a Jewish life where I could completely embrace my culture and traditions."

In Israel, even under fire, she has found a sense of belonging. "A sense of community is built in shelters," she says, describing how life continues even in constrained spaces, with events like weddings taking place in shelters.

She describes the experience as "a baptism of fire", but one that has reinforced her commitment to her new home.

Others also draw comparisons between life in Israel and life in South Africa, reframing perceptions of danger.

One recent *oleh*, who asked to remain anonymous, says that while the threat of missiles is real, it's also structured and mitigated in ways that feel different from the unpredictability of crime back home.

"You have warnings. You can take precautions," he says, describing the sequence of alerts that precede incoming fire. He contrasts this with South Africa, where violence can be sudden and unavoidable. "A car crash, getting shot while you're walking down the street, there's nothing you can do to prevent it," he says.

From his perspective, the systems in place in Israel, including missile defence and early

warning alerts, provide a sense of control. "I would much rather be here," he says, adding that statistically he feels safer.

However, he acknowledges a gap between outward behaviour and internal reality. "There's an unspoken rule that you put on a brave face and tell everyone everything's fine, when actually you're not coping," he says, reflecting on conversations with Israeli friends who admitted privately to anxiety and fear.

This duality, of resilience alongside vulnerability, is something organisations like Telfed have had to address directly.

Kline says that since 7 October 2023, Telfed has expanded its support systems significantly. New initiatives include WhatsApp groups providing real-time updates in English, webinars on coping with stress and trauma, and increased access to counselling services.

"We brought in a second social worker," he says, noting that demand for emotional support has grown. Workshops have also tackled less obvious effects of prolonged stress. One recent session focused on emotional eating, described as part of the body's coping mechanism during sustained anxiety.

The response, he adds, has been consistently strong, indicating a clear need among *olim* adjusting to both a new country and a high-pressure environment. Beyond the war itself, *olim* continue to face the standard challenges of integration.

Language remains a barrier for some, though English-speaking communities offer a soft

landing. Social networks often form quickly, particularly through ulpan programmes and community structures, where newcomers share similar experiences.

Employment, however, can be difficult.

Many *olim* take jobs below their qualifications as they establish themselves in a competitive market.

Yet even these challenges are often framed within a broader sense of purpose.

For some, aliya is less a choice than a calling. The anonymous *oleh* describes it as "going back to your homeland", something he felt drawn to despite years of resistance.

That sense of belonging appears to anchor many through

the instability. For Frank, despite moments of doubt, the decision remains in place. "What can you do? This is the way it is," she says.

For Wohlman, the experience has strengthened her connection to Israel, even under difficult circumstances. And for Kline, the collective response speaks to something deeper. "They're remarkably resilient," he says.

In a year marked by upheaval, new South African *olim* have had little time to ease into their new lives. Instead, they have been tested immediately, learning to navigate sirens, shelters, and uncertainty alongside the usual demands of starting over.

For many, the adjustment is ongoing. But the decision to stay, despite everything, appears to be constant.



Sydney Wohlman continuing her workday in the shelter

Reality of war is part of the gap-year experience

LEE TANKLE

As sirens interrupt life, young South Africans on programmes across Israel are having to navigate a reality few imagined when they arrived – and without their parents.

Many on gap-year programmes in Israel explained that when they were awoken on the morning of 28 February, they didn't know exactly what was going on, nor were they prepared. However, as time has gone on, despite running to shelters, they feel that there's no place they would rather be.

Benji Goldstein, who is on Bnei Akiva's MTA programme at the Eretz Hatzvi yeshiva in Jerusalem, knew that part of a gap year in Israel would probably include rockets.

"Even though it's been a new, slightly scary experience, we've never felt like we were in danger. Genuinely, the only feeling to come out properly was disappointment, when it meant that certain trips were cancelled, as well as bomb shelters acting like our new homes throughout the night," he said.

Da'el Basserabie, who is on the MTA Hashkara programme at Yeshivat Har Etzion in Gush Etzion, explained that on 28 February, everyone woke up a bit confused, as it was Shabbat and no-one knew what was going on.

"On that first Shabbos morning, when the siren went off, no-one really knew what was happening. I was on my way to the Beit Midrash for Shacharit when it sounded. I had to turn around and run to a *miklat* [bomb shelter] down the path, through the gardens. Everyone was already inside, confused and unsure," he said.

"Waking up to a siren on Shabbat Zachor was quite nerve-wracking, but in general, I've not been feeling too nervous or stressed about the situation," said Ariel Subotzky, who is also at Yeshivat Har Etzion. "For the most part, it's been business as usual. We're relatively far from everywhere, so it's not like we would have been travelling much anyway, even without all the transport changes."

"Being in Israel at a time like this has been challenging, but also very

meaningful. One thing that has really stood out is how, even in the bomb shelters, people come together through singing, davening, and supporting each other," said David Matisonn, who is studying at Ohr Somayach Yeshiva in Jerusalem.

Akiva Bome, who is studying at Yeshiva Eretz Hatzvi in Jerusalem through MTA, explained that even before war broke out, life in Israel had been an adjustment, and then suddenly he was plunged into something he only saw on the news. But after experiencing the first siren, he came to realise that though it's scary, it also creates a sense of community.

"I remember jumping out of bed in a panic and waking up my friend, telling him we had to get up immediately. Our *madrish* came in and reassured us that everything was under control and that the shelter was right next door. We walked there together and checked in on each other, making sure everyone was okay. In that moment, even though it was frightening, it also created a sense of unity and connection between all of us."

Meir Simcha Jackson, who is studying in Jerusalem at Ohr Somayach Yeshiva, explained that there has definitely been a different feeling in Israel. "The first week of the war was probably the hardest. It felt pretty tense at times, especially with the sirens and rockets flying over my head. Having to run to the bomb shelters multiple times during the day and night was exhausting, and some days I felt very tired from the constant interruptions," he said.

Ella Trope, who is on her Bnei Akiva Limmud gap year, explained that the weekend the war started was a free weekend for them, and so she was visiting her sister when the sirens first went off.

"During that time, my heart was racing, and I was so scared. I had no idea what was happening. But then throughout Shabbos there were more sirens, and each time I got calmer, and eventually the sirens didn't affect me, they just became annoying," Trope said.

Said Goldstein, "Almost all of us on our gap years have accepted that we



Akiva Bome at his yeshiva in Israel

did arrive at an interesting time, and it will be like this for a bit, but we all know that it will be over very soon."

Nobody on these gap years has returned home, so even though their programming has taken a pause, they're all still happy to be in Israel.

Basserabie explained that though there's confusion and days are disrupted, "life has just carried on as normal. By now, the rockets and sirens are honestly more of an inconvenience for your sleep

schedule than a real danger. But as you know, you're still in a war, and you have to be careful, you have to be cautious, but at the same time it's hard not to feel privileged to be in Israel at this time," he said.

Darren Basserabie, Da'el's father, explained that he's rather pleased that his son is in Israel.

"He's exactly where he wants to be in the sweet spot of his growth. I obviously want him to be safe, but I really do believe that the yeshiva and the Bnei Akiva programme he's part of will do whatever they can to ensure that they're doing the right things to keep him safe. And I think he's very level-headed and will also do whatever it is that he needs to do to keep himself safe."

He's not the only parent who feels this way. One anonymous mother explained that her concern is the idea of her children feeling unsafe. She has full confidence in the organisers of her child's programme to keep her safe.

Said Bome, "My parents are in South Africa, and naturally, they're worried. If they could, they would probably put me on the next flight home. But at the same time, they're also proud that I chose to come here and that I'm learning how to be independent and navigate a difficult situation. It's very different for them watching events unfold through the news compared with experiencing it first-hand here.

"Despite the challenges, this experience has shown me how resilient people can be. Life continues, learning continues, and friendships grow stronger even during difficult times. Being here has definitely changed my perspective in ways I never expected."



Gap year fun on kibbutz



Limmud

New tech campus targets jobs for South Africa's youth

CLAUDIA GROSS

Many more Johannesburg youngsters from disadvantaged backgrounds now have the opportunity to train for high-demand technology careers at the Maharishi NextUp Institute of Technology (MNIT).

South African-born American entrepreneurs and philanthropists David and Tracey Frankel, with their NextUp Foundation, and Dr Taddy Blecher and the Maharishi Invincibility Institute partnered in this innovative educational venture, which launched on 18 March.

Their goal is to equip young people with skills in areas such as artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, software development, robotics, and financial technology, while connecting them directly to employers who need those skills.

Although the Frankels now live in the United States, their philanthropic work remains closely tied to South Africa, particularly Johannesburg, where they both grew up. Through NextUp, the couple have focused on preparing young people for higher education and employment, working with local partners, schools, and training institutions to expand opportunities for disadvantaged youth.

"We've been blessed with unfair opportunities," Frankel told the *SA Jewish Report*. "Can we make a dent in the universe in terms of giving unfair opportunities to disadvantaged kids who really deserve it?"

Central to the MNIT model is what Frankel and Blecher describe as demand-driven education. Instead of offering generic qualifications, the institute works directly with large employers to identify specific skills shortages. "When we work with corporates, we find the critical scarce skills they have," Blecher says. "Then we train unemployed kids who will come and work for them."

Frankel says this approach was one of the reasons NextUp chose to partner with Maharishi rather than build a separate institution. "They reverse-engineer technology needs in the Johannesburg employment environment and train people for those jobs," he says. "There's tremendous demand for tech talent in South Africa. Someone just has to do the training."

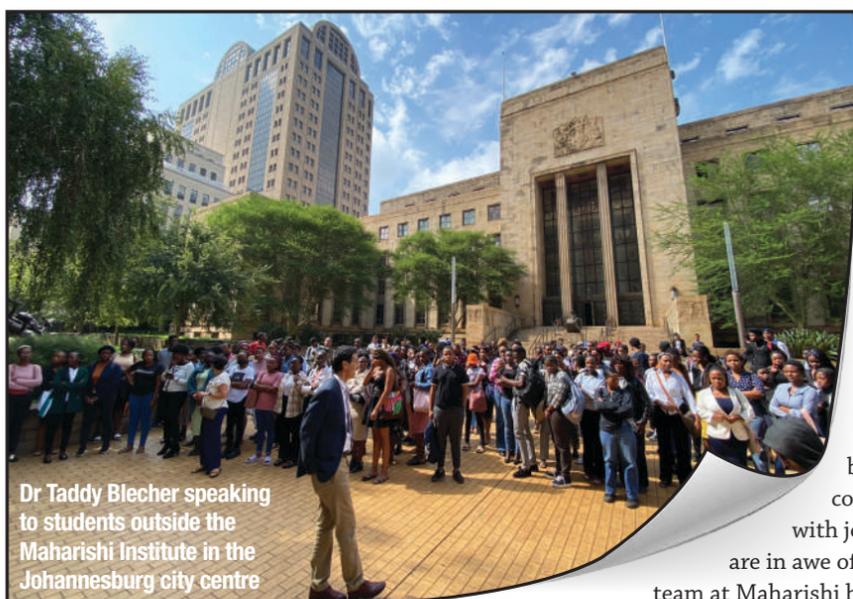
Another defining feature of the programme is its focus on the broader circumstances facing students. Many come from communities where poverty, unstable housing, and trauma create barriers to education long before the classroom. "You can do all the academics," Frankel says, "but these kids are coming from hard backgrounds."

The institute therefore provides extensive support, including stipends, food assistance, transport, social workers, and mentorship. Students also receive training in

communication, confidence, and workplace skills.

"There are so many soft skills that make someone sustainably employable," Frankel says. "You have to think about the whole person." Blecher agrees that the holistic approach is essential. "If you truly love other people, you empower them so that they can be great," he says. "It's about helping individuals realise their full potential."

NextUp originally began by working with high schools in Olievenhoutbosch, near Pretoria, helping pupils prepare for tertiary study and employment. Over time, the team placed students in institutions including the Maharishi Institute, Stellenbosch University, and the University of South Africa. But Frankel and his colleagues realised the scale of the challenge demanded something larger.



Dr Taddy Blecher speaking to students outside the Maharishi Institute in the Johannesburg city centre

"We had to have a much bigger top-of-the-funnel," he says. "There are so many kids that deserve a shot at this." A solution emerged through a collaboration with Blecher, the founder of the Maharishi Invincibility Institute, who has spent decades building a model that combines education with job placement. "We are in awe of what Taddy and the team at Maharishi have already achieved

and we're simply throwing another log on their

burning fire," says Frankel.

Blecher's journey into education began with a dramatic decision in 1995. At the time, he was the top actuarial science student in South Africa and had a promising international career ahead of him. "I bought my air ticket, I was leaving in two weeks," he recalls. "Then I stayed up all night, cried my eyes out, and went to see my mother the next day and said, 'I'm not leaving. I'm going into the townships and I'm going to help kids.'"

Within a week he was working in Alexandra township. After several years helping youngsters complete school, he noticed

a troubling pattern. "We worked in Alex and in Soweto and had amazing results helping kids pass school, but then found them ending up on the streets because of massive youth unemployment," he says.

That realisation led to the founding of a free tertiary education programme that eventually evolved into the Maharishi Invincibility Institute, which opened in 2007.

More than 25 000 students have been educated through its programmes, with more than 22 000 placed into employment. Graduates have already earned billions of rands in combined salaries, with a high rate of long-term employment.

"We've had a 95% job placement rate over two decades," Blecher says. "Education changes everything. It brings people out of poverty and creates dignity."

MNIT aims to expand this approach into the rapidly evolving technology sector.

MNIT and the Maharishi Institute are also tied to a broader vision for Johannesburg's inner city. Maharishi has been working for several years to transform parts of the central business district into what Blecher calls an "education town", a cluster of campuses, sports facilities, and cultural spaces designed to bring thousands of students into the area.

The aim is to create an ecosystem where education institutions, employers, and community organisations operate alongside one another, drawing large numbers of students into the city centre and supporting its renewal. "We hope to train and place 100 000 young people into quality jobs," Blecher says. "Ultimately, that can put enormous resources back into poor families."

For Frankel, the partnership reflects both a practical response to South Africa's unemployment crisis and values rooted in his upbringing. "The privilege of Tracey and me both being born into loving Jewish families that valued education so highly has completely shaped our initiative," he says.

Blecher says similar values shaped his path. "Judaism is about dignity, ethics, and respect for others," he says. "If you empower young people with education and purpose, you build a stable and beautiful society."

Frankel says the measure of success is simple: "We haven't changed a life until someone is educated, employed, and sustaining themselves."

In a country where youth unemployment remains one of the defining challenges of the post-apartheid era, the institute's founders say the goal is straightforward: give young people the skills employers need and ensure that opportunity leads to lasting employment and dignity.

From SA roadside rescue to wartime message

>>>Continued from page 1

family reached their destination.

For the father, the events of that evening have never faded.

"It was lifesaving really," he said.

He took the officers' names and details and wrote letters of gratitude to their superiors.

"We were just doing our jobs," Kholiwe told the *SA Jewish Report*. "They looked like they were struggling and that area is known to be very dangerous."

He reached out to the father this week because he said, "He was a good guy I was thinking of him and I wanted to check up on him."

A South African friend of the Israeli family, Julian Ovsowitz, told the *SA Jewish Report* that he remembers hearing the story when they had met in Cape Town shortly after the ordeal. "I told them

they could have been headline news!" he said. "It's remarkable that the policeman reached out this week. The South African police are slagged off and castigated daily. There are very few positive stories in the media. This is one that should be made public."

The father said the WhatsApp exchange carried profound meaning amid the ongoing conflict in Israel.

Reflecting on their time in South Africa, he added that despite the frightening ordeal, the kindness they experienced left a lasting impression. "The people of South Africa are incredible, warm, kind, and willing to help," he said. "What we experienced on that road, and throughout our trip, showed us the true heart of the country, not what you hear about in the news."

*The family has asked to remain anonymous for security reasons.

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Chevrakadisha

Tackling human rights issues one step at a time

GILLIAN KLAWSKY

From period poverty to health and human rights crises, to water scarcity and much more, South Africa's problems can seem overwhelming. Yet, as Human Rights Day approaches, we look at how members of the community are proving that even small actions can make a real impact in tackling such challenges.

"It's the power in the little things that add up and make a massive difference," says Melissa Zackon, who grew up in a home where giving back was second nature. "It's asking what small thing I can do every day to make the world a slightly better place. If everybody had that idea, it would make such a huge difference."

Now the co-founder of Mama Flo, an organisation that addresses period poverty, Zackon has built on this innate desire to help those less fortunate. She founded Mama Flo with Laurie Shone and Isabella Bisogno, her friends since Grade 1 at Herzlia.

When, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Shone's mother received a call from a

contact in Khayelitsha seeking sanitary pads, the three friends banded together to make it happen. Putting out a call on social media, they were astounded by people's generosity. "We were inundated," Zack recalls.

Armed with a mountain of sanitary pads, the women were safely escorted by a police convoy into Khayelitsha.

"To see the gratitude on people's faces after giving them just a small packet was remarkable," Zackon recalls. "We thought we had too many pads, but they were gone so quickly, and there were still so many more people that we couldn't help."

After confronting the magnitude of this reality, the friends formed Mama Flo, and

over the past five and a half years have managed to help thousands of girls.

Zackon and her co-founders were determined not to go into communities with a "white saviour complex", so

newspaper and missing school, but hearing it directly from them, and seeing how far it goes was beyond shocking."

Distribution of pads is complicated by the fact that teaching staff often steal donated pads and sell them to girls to make a profit, Zackon adds. "Those kinds of stories don't make the news. It's made me realise how deep this runs and how important this is, just to give women basic dignity."

Madeleine

Hicklin, the Democratic Alliance (DA) spokesperson on Health and Finance in the Gauteng Provincial Legislature, has been a human rights and health activist since the early 1980s. She became

politically active while studying drama at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits).

"South Africa was not a place where you could sit on a fence. I became very vocal in the early 1980s. I was part of the AIDS consortium at Wits and got involved in any way possible in AIDS education." She wrote the first AIDS awareness brochures in South Africa in 1984.

"I was always just an activist on the ground, but I never formalised it until I later became a ward councillor." Hicklin says that while she ultimately found her political home in the DA, it has never limited her capacity to help people, irrespective of what political party they are affiliated to.

"My human rights and health fights have always been extremely broad and diverse." Advocating for the LGBTQ+ community, the Jewish community, survivors of human trafficking, and generally helping others fulfils her need to uplift people who are adversely affected by life.

She is also a passionate advocate for regulation of the mortuary and funeral industries. "There is so much injustice there," she says. "Across the country, there are people who have been waiting 10 years for a post-mortem report."

Hicklin says she draws strength from her family and her faith in difficult times.

In the broader fight for human rights, she urges everyone to register to vote. "Do it for you, yes, but also do it for our children, because South Africa doesn't have the time. We must fight for the right to fight for others."

Andrew Chin, the founding director of Swim for Rivers, a nonprofit highlighting South Africa's water crisis, grew up on a Free State farm and consequently always understood the value of water. "We relied on rain as we didn't have access to water for irrigation," he says. "I later studied economics at Rhodes University, and did my honours in economics, with a slant towards rural economies."

After graduating, he travelled and spent time working on a moshav in Israel. "When I came back, I wanted to help others," he says. "I joined a nonprofit in KwaZulu-Natal where the simplicity of turning a tap on or off really struck me. We had to pipe water down from a spring about three kilometres away to a compound where we lived."

Later becoming an extreme swimmer, Chin came across communities in areas surrounding the rivers he swam in. "The river is often their only source of water," he says, "and generally it falls on women to collect 20-litre buckets and walk anywhere from a couple of metres to many kilometres to collect water." This is extremely dangerous for women, who on these long journeys have an increased risk of sexual violence, abduction, and femicide. Children also often help and therefore don't go to school.

Working with rural communities mainly in the Eastern Cape, Swim for Rivers identifies critical water supply challenges, raising funds and delivering solutions such as mobile 90-litre water-carrying Hippo Rollers and boreholes. "Simultaneously, we help protect the environment by extracting pollution choking our rivers and by supporting recycling initiatives," he says.

Chin says he helps because he can. "My passion is to help others and to achieve that I rely on the donations of others. Some people are givers, others are doers, but we can all make a difference by focusing on our strengths."



Swim for Rivers completing a spring protection and water collection point in the Eastern Cape



Mama Flo ambassador Asiyolise showing how to put on a pad at Illiso Care Society at Encotsheni Primary School

they teamed up with young women in Khayelitsha. "They asked to be involved and so we created an ambassador programme with them. You hear all these awful stories, that girls are using

King David trio nominated for Naledi Theatre Awards

LEE TANKLE

There are lots of Naledi Theatre Awards nominations every year, but this year there are more than most that emanate from King David Schools.

This year's nominees include Aimée Mica Komorowsky, a King David Linksfield (KDL) alum from 2006, nominated twice for *Sarajevo*: Best Lead Performance in a Play (Female) and Best New South African Script/Adaptation. Vicky Friedman, who matriculated from KDL in 1995, has been nominated as producer of *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, recognised in Best Production for Children and Young Audiences. Micaela Tucker, a King David Victory Park (KDVP) 2016 alum, has been nominated for Best Performance in a Solo Comedy Production for her one-woman show, *A Doll's Life*.

Drama teacher at King David Renos Spanoudes explained that these nominations attest to the culture fostered at the schools, where a pupil's love for something is nurtured.

"Throughout the history of the schools, culture and art, music, dance, sports, and academics have been allowed to be discovered and expressed and to be participated in," he said, "And what's lovely is that the Jewish students who, in particular, are writers, directors, performers, and singers, over the years have excelled at school in the major productions and then later on in life. Some have gone on into the world and are following these activities as a career."

way," she said.

"In South Africa, it feels like work like this is overlooked because they just focus on work that is in a South African context. So it felt very special that work that isn't about South Africa, and that isn't set in the context of the country, is acknowledged."

Tucker, who was nominated in 2023, explained that she felt an immense pride when she saw she was nominated this year for Best Performance in a Solo Comedy Production, and that she was among comedy heavyweights, like Alan Committie, Riaad Moosa, Stuart Taylor, and Costa Carastavrakis.

"I was delighted. Just being nominated is an achievement in itself," she said, "And especially since the category that I'm in and the peers that I'm among are legendary people in our industry. I'm also the only female in the category. So that was quite exciting for me to be among all of these males who are comedic kings."

Tucker explained that being nominated for *A Doll's Life*, a one-woman show she wrote and starred in, is particularly special because everything to do with the production came from her.

"To be acknowledged for the work that you've created yourself is almost like a cherry on top of what would already be an amazing accolade. The fact that you've created what is being acknowledged and that it is a segment of your life, it's quite special," she said. "I'm also just so happy that Naledi judges came to see my show. I was really glad that such a mass audience was receiving it in a city that I don't live in."

Komorowsky said that King David really opened the doors for her to even be able to write and make a production like this, as it fostered an intense connection to her Judaism and a love for history, which are two large elements in why she decided to embark on *Sarajevo* in the first place.

"It fostered an intense connection to my heritage and my Judaism with a very strong reminder that I'm a third-generation Holocaust survivor, which I carry with me. It gave an understanding of this inherited trauma, and that, together with studying drama with Clara Taub, fostered a way to combine the two and gave a way to express that trauma into something."

Tucker said that throughout her time at

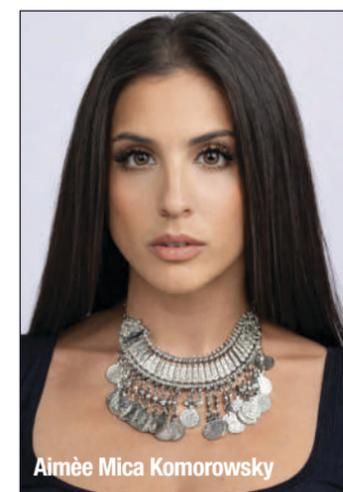
KDVP, Spanoudes supported her and instilled in her the belief that she could create something for herself.

KDVP 2018 alum Erin Blieden, who was the company manager for *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, said that King David and Spanoudes ignited her passion for theatre, showing her the importance of teamwork when putting something together.

"This came from working on exam practicals, play festivals, and the annual musical. There was always an emphasis on the importance of the team, and that's why I'm so lucky and privileged to have been part of the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* team, and it's an honour to be nominated along with the team. Everyone was great, and that's why it was as amazing as it was," she said.

Friedman explained that her love of performing was fostered during her time at KDL. "There was so much on offer, from the Glance team to musical productions, Shakespeare, debating, public speaking, and choir. Not every school has those opportunities. Being exposed to so many activities and having teachers who recognised and encouraged my interests made a huge difference."

The winners of the Naledi Awards will be announced on Monday, 23 March.



Aimée Mica Komorowsky



Vicky Friedman



Micaela Tucker

Friedman has been involved in theatre since childhood and joined her first professional production at age six. She has received several Naledi nominations over the years, including for *Hairspray* and an online production during the COVID-19 pandemic. She said this year's nomination feels especially gratifying because *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* was the culmination of a collaboration between her and Theatre on the Square owner Daphne Kuhn.

"It's a very special production for me. It was something unique as no-one else in South Africa had staged the production before. It's fairly new and was originally developed in the United States, so being nominated for it here makes it even more special."

Komorowsky said being nominated for *Sarajevo*, a play she wrote exploring love, friendship, and betrayal during the 1992–1995 Bosnian War siege through three friends, was especially meaningful. She said she was floating after seeing the Naledi nominations – two for herself and seven for the production overall – after working on the play for 10 years.

"To finally just get acknowledged for it is just indescribable. It means everything; it just means that all of the hard work has paid off in a

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Reclaiming Wits campus

This week, the Palestine Solidarity Committee (PSC) at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) hosted its once-vaunted Israeli Apartheid Week (IAW). Historically, IAW has been a source of hostility, intimidation, and even violence on campus, and a key driver in making Jewish students feel unsafe at this critically important South African university, which also happens to be my place of employment.

Previous iterations were absolutely hostile: effigies, fake walls, physical intimidation, confrontation. As both a professor and a community leader, I'm integrally invested in the future of South Africa's universities as safe and open spaces for Jewish students. Without viable and safe campuses, our community cannot secure its future. This is why, as a strategic imperative, the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) has placed immense focus on these campuses over the past years.

Through a multipronged approach working with the South African Union of Jewish Students (SAUJS), student government, and the university administration, the SAJBD has worked to diminish the impact of IAW and to ensure Jewish student safety.

In countering potential hostility, SAUJS led an exceptional three-day educational and identity-focused campus initiative titled "Proud Without Apology". The theme shifted from last year's "For the Future" to one centred on identity, pride, and narrative ownership, expressed respectfully and without apology.

The days' themes were deliberate and powerful: Day 1: Pride in our People – Judaism; Day 2 (coinciding with the PSC march): Pride in our History – Zionism; Day 3: Pride in our Countries – South Africa and Israel.

On Monday, during the lunch hour, SAUJS held an interactive graffiti activity on campus to coincide with the PSC protest, which was slated to be the IAW pinnacle event.

The results speak for themselves. The SAUJS event

ABOVE BOARD

Karen Milner



was a resounding success, attracting hundreds of students. These students engaged not only with their own sources of pride but also with the day's theme, "Proud Zionist", and with the broader Jewish student community.

IAW, once a source of antagonism and fear, has been entirely transformed into a space of pride, celebration, and confidence in Jewish identity.

We are immensely proud of the brave and tireless work of our student body, ably led by national SAUJS chair Sasha Said, Wits chair Leah Meyerowitz, and the committees across campuses. They are the real leaders on the frontlines against efforts to close off this most important space to Jewish students. In doing so, they not only instil pride in our community, they build the viability of our community into the future.

This intervention is a clear example of how, through persistent effort and strategic engagement, even the most hostile environments can be confronted and reshaped successfully. No person on the campus this week would have any doubt as to the vibrancy and strength of our student body, who not only stand up to attempted hostility and antagonism, but engage, debate, and thrive.

Our future is in exceptional hands.

We congratulate SAUJS on its excellent work and wish it well for the rest of IAW across other national campuses. It's shown us what's possible when we refuse to be cowed, when we claim space rather than cede it, and when we meet hostility not with fear but with creativity, bravery, and pride.

• Listen to Charisse Zeifert on Above Talk, 101.9 ChaiFM every Friday from 14:00 to 15:00.

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

Relationship stress test



INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman

Context is everything, which is why you need to know this before hearing my side of the story.

For the past nine months I have been on a strict calorie deficit. Yes, assisted by a GLP-1. No, I'm not hiding it. My routine is simple. Up at 04:00. Oats. Coffee. Discipline. Repeat. And then, at night, a small act of rebellion. Three pieces of 70% dark chocolate. Three neat, controlled, dignified squares.

I didn't think this was controversial. But I was wrong. "Howard," my wife said, walking into our room with the tone of someone about to introduce new legislation, "we are getting the house cleaned for Pesach, and I need you to not bring anything *chametz* upstairs."

"Pesach?" I asked, genuinely confused. "In three weeks?" "Yes," she said. "I want to be organised early."

This is the moment when a wiser man would nod, agree, and live to fight another day. But somewhere deep inside me, the teenager who once argued about pretty much everything woke up.

"Seriously?" I said. "I have deprived myself of anything remotely enjoyable for months. I don't think three cubes of dark chocolate are going to bring about a halachic crisis."

"Fine," she replied calmly. And defeated. "Then we'll start cleaning later. When you're ready."

And just like that, my chocolate had become a delaying factor in the redemption of our home.

Our forebears were enslaved for hundreds of years. They built pyramids. They escaped in the dead of night. They stood at the edge of a raging sea and walked forward in faith, while a murderous army chased them down.

And us? We're brought to a complete standstill by three squares of Lindt.

We're often told that the secret to Jewish survival is Shabbat. Others will argue it's persecution, or antisemitism, or resilience.

All valid. But I have a different theory. It's Pesach.

Not the festival. Not even the story. It's the preparation.

Pesach preparation is Judaism's ultimate relationship stress test. It's where love, patience, history, and unresolved childhood dynamics all come together in a single, highly

flammable environment.

Take, for example, my wife's family and what can only be described as "Mom's Soup Pot".

An ordinary piece of stainless steel. No gold plating. No diamonds. No visible connection to Sinai. And yet, this pot has the power to destabilise highly functional adults.

Who has it? Who used it last? Was it kashered properly? How many people can it feed? And perhaps most dangerously, who deserves it this year?

Out of curiosity (and what I thought was initiative), I found a very similar pot online. R895. Delivery tomorrow. Free if you're a Takealot member. Problem solved.

I was about to hit the "Buy it now" button when I mentioned it to my wife. The look I received suggested I had just proposed outsourcing a family heirloom to a stranger in Belarus.

"So male," she said. "No-one asked you to solve this."

And just like that, I was no longer a helpful husband. I was a disruptor of tradition. A man who didn't understand that the chicken soup pot is not about the pot. Or the soup. And definitely not about the chicken.

It's about history. Memory. Continuity. Identity. And, apparently, seating arrangements for 23 people.

So I apologised. Properly. With feeling. For my reckless attempt to introduce logic into a clearly non-logical situation.

And that is what Pesach teaches you.

Not just how to clean or to avoid *chametz*. But how to navigate the ecosystem of family, tradition, and emotion.

Pesach preparation teaches restraint. It teaches patience. And acceptance. It teaches that no matter how early you start, it's never early enough.

And it teaches surrender. Because sometimes the correct response is not to win the argument, but to survive it.

As for my three pieces of chocolate? Let's just say they're now enjoyed downstairs. Like a fugitive in the night. Which, come to think of it, is probably the most authentic Pesach experience of all.

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