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Palestinian flag brings political protests to Houghton Golf Club

NICOLA MILTZ

Chaos erupted outside Johannesburg's Houghton Golf Club on Wednesday 22 April as protesters descended on the normally quiet, tree-lined sanctuary, forcing it to shut its gates.

Supporters of the Economic Freedom Fighters gathered at the entrance, chanting and demonstrating, while structures of the African National Congress (ANC) mobilised alongside anti-Israel activists, threatening mass action.

What was until now a place of recreation and coexistence between Jews, Muslims, and others has, in a matter of days, become a flashpoint of political confrontation.

At the heart of the storm is an incident on 17 April, when Johannesburg businessman Louis Seeco arrived at the club as a guest, with a large Palestinian flag attached to his vehicle. He had a 06:58 tee-off time.

At about 10:45, the club's general manager, James Loughnane, was informed of the prominent flag display. "I went outside to see for myself and knew the flag was bound to elicit strong feelings, so I decided to write a letter explaining the club's position," Loughnane told the SA Jewish Report.

After Seeco completed his round, Loughnane went to explain the club's long-standing ethos of inclusivity and political neutrality.

"I introduced myself, and explained that we don't allow flags of any country, or political or religious symbols to be displayed at the club, as these could be divisive," he said.

In a letter issued to Seeco, Loughnane made the club's position clear. "Houghton Golf Club is proudly diverse and inclusive. It is precisely because we value and respect the wide range of backgrounds, beliefs, and cultures represented within our membership, staff, and guests. Such displays are, by their nature, divisive and can be experienced as inflammatory or exclusionary by others."

The letter continued, "The Club does not promote, endorse, or take positions on political or religious causes. Our purpose is simple and clear: Houghton Golf Club is a golf club – a place of sport, fellowship, relaxation, and mutual respect."

"He told me he supported the Palestinian people, as does the South African government, and referenced South Africa's case against Israel at the ICJ [International Court of Justice]," said Loughnane. "He continued, but I made it clear I was not going to debate the issue and asked him to leave."

Within hours, the incident exploded online after Seeco posted on Facebook.

"I was confronted by the GM of Houghton Golf Club for displaying a Palestinian flag on my car," he wrote. "I explained that I stand with my government in opposing what I believe to be the genocide of the Palestinian people. The exchange ended with him informing me that

I am no longer permitted at the club. I am at a loss for words, but I remain firm in my belief that Palestine will be free."

In subsequent responses to comments, he added, "A flag on my car? If I went there with my Methodist regalia would they be offended? What about the *kippah* and the *tzitzit*? These Zionists must accept that the position adopted by government is the position of this country. Let's not pretend that we do not know what the broader agenda is."

As the post gained traction, a powerful narrative took hold – that Seeco had been "banned" from the club.

Inside Houghton, that claim is fiercely rejected.

"He was a guest, not a member. You cannot ban someone who is not a member," said one source. "He was asked to leave."

The ANC soon intervened, issuing a statement saying, "We condemn the actions taken against Mr Seeco, which

we view as an infringement of his constitutional right to freedom of expression."

Regional ANC representative Mantombi Nkosi escalated things, warning, "If we do not receive feedback, we will not hesitate to march and mobilise to that club because we will not tolerate such unconstitutional, unlawful, and apartheid style of doing things."

By Wednesday, those threats had materialised, with the ANC calling for a picket on Friday.

Protesters gathered outside the club gates on Wednesday. Tensions flared, and members described scenes of intimidation as the situation deteriorated rapidly.

"I'm afraid to mention my name. I need to protect my family, my life, and my business," said one Jewish club member.

Inside the club, the mood has shifted from disbelief to alarm. "This has turned very ugly," said another member. "Very quickly."

Loughnane, speaking as protests unfolded, remained resolute. "Any visitor displaying any flag of any country would be treated the same," he said. "There isn't an approved list of flags. The exact same letter would have been issued to any member, visitor, or guest."

He warned that the unfolding events illustrate exactly why the club enforces neutrality.

"Houghton Golf Club is a haven of tranquillity, safety, camaraderie, and fellowship – that's who we are and what we represent. This situation has proven our point. Emotions run deep. This is precisely why we do not allow political or religious displays."

In a bitter twist, it has emerged that Seeco had engaged with the club just days earlier. On 5 April he had written requesting support for the Greater Alexandra Golf Club and Academy. Two days before the incident, Seeco collected a bakkie-load of donated second-hand equipment from the club.

Continued on page 6>>

Dancing in the rain



Yom Ha'atzmaut celebrations in Johannesburg

See pages 8 and 9

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Seven hundred voices, one cry: Free Iran



SHERVIN GHORBANI

On 16 April, far from Tehran but bound to it in heart, nearly 700 people gathered outside the US consulate in Johannesburg. Iranians stood alongside South Africans of every background Christians, Jews, Muslims, people of all races and faiths united by something simple and urgent: the demand that the Iranian people be free.

For many of us, this wasn't a political gathering. It was personal.

We held signs calling for a "Free Iran", simple words, but heavy with longing, loss, and hope. Something new also appeared in our hands, "Am Iran Chai." Not just a slogan, but a declaration. That we are still here. That like the Jewish people, we refuse to disappear. That no regime built on fear, violence, and erasure will ever succeed in stripping us of who we are, our history, our identity, or our future.

There was something deeply moving about the space we created together. South African Jews stood with Iranian exiles. Pastors from South African Friends

of Israel stood beside Muslim voices of conscience. The South African Jewish community showed up with conviction and compassion, as they so often do, and the South African Zionist Federation was present, steadfast in its support. In a world that feels increasingly fractured, this gathering felt like a glimpse of what solidarity can look like when it is rooted in truth rather than politics.

We sang. We prayed. We spoke. And above all, we remembered.

Sam Nik, an Iranian peace activist, reminded us what is at stake. She asked us not to look back decades, but just three months, to when ordinary Iranians took to the streets with empty hands and full hearts, demanding nothing more radical than dignity and basic human rights. What they were met with was not dialogue, but violence. Not reform, but repression.

Her words landed heavily because they were lived. They were raw. They were real.

She spoke of a regime that fears its own people so deeply that it silences them, cutting internet access, crushing dissent, erasing voices. A regime that invests more in proxies and militias than in its own citizens. A regime that has spent nearly half a century teaching hatred outward while tightening its grip inward.

And yet, even in that darkness, there is defiance.

There is the Iranian woman who removes her hijab in protest. The student who dares to speak. The worker who refuses to stay silent. The families who mourn and still demand answers. And there are those of us in the diaspora, carrying their voices

Peace in the Middle East cannot be built on denial. It cannot be built on the erasure of history or the rejection of entire peoples. It begins with recognition of truth, of rights, of each other.

As we closed the gathering, we sang the South African national anthem. It wasn't just a gesture of gratitude to the country we now call home. It was a statement of belief that coexistence is possible, that justice is possible, that freedom is possible.

But belief alone isn't enough.

The international community, including our government here in South Africa, must begin to draw clear lines. Engagement with Tehran cannot come without conditions. There must be accountability for the repression of its people, and there must be a willingness

to accept the existence of other nations, including Israel, as part of any serious path to peace.

For those of us who demonstrated, this isn't a distant issue. It's our families, our friends, our country. We may live in South Africa now, but our hearts remain tied to Iran, to a version of it that is still waiting to be born.

And until that day comes, we will keep showing up. We will keep speaking.

And we will keep believing that one day, the words we chanted in the streets of Johannesburg will no longer be a demand but a reality, and Iran will be free.

• Shervin Ghorbani is an Iranian-born analyst and commentator based in South Africa with deep expertise in Persian history, geopolitics, and contemporary affairs. He left Iran as a teenager and maintains close personal and familial ties to the country.



The Free Iran march on 16 April 2026 at the American Consulate in Sandton

across continents because they cannot safely speak for themselves.

Standing at the consulate in Johannesburg it was impossible not to feel the echoes of other struggles. South Africans know what it means to confront injustice and to fight for dignity. The Jewish community knows what it means when the world looks away, and why it cannot afford to.

That is why this moment of unity matters. Because the Islamic Republic's repression at home and its hostility abroad aren't separate issues. They are part of the same worldview, one that denies people their basic rights, whether it's the right of Iranians to live freely in their own country, or the right of Christian and Jewish people to live safely in theirs.

Counting towards something greater

Torah Thought

Each night of the Omer, we count. One day. Two days. Three. We're now approximately halfway through this quiet ritual that links Pesach to Shavuot. But why do we count? What are we really waiting for?

The journey from Pesach to Shavuot isn't simply a transition from freedom to revelation. It's a process of becoming worthy of receiving the Torah. The counting contains a powerful lesson about how we become a person who can truly receive the Torah. These aren't just days we move through, but days we are meant to grow through. With each number we add, we are meant to add something within ourselves – greater awareness, self-refinement, and purpose.

Yet the preparation for receiving the Torah isn't only about learning more or doing more. It begins with something more fundamental: *achdut*, unity. The Torah wasn't given to individuals, nor only to the great and learned Jews. It was given to a people, together, as one.

At Sinai, the Jewish people stood "like one person with one heart". This unity wasn't incidental, it was essential. A prerequisite that made receiving the Torah possible. Without it, there is no vessel capable of holding something as vast and infinite as the

in one crucial area: they didn't treat one another with proper respect.

The contrast is striking. On the one hand, we are preparing to receive the Torah. On the other, we are remembering a generation of Torah scholars whose lack of interpersonal sensitivity led to tragedy.

But the truth is, these two seemingly separate aspects of the Omer both highlight this core truth. An essential foundation for Torah is unity. Knowledge alone isn't enough. Spiritual growth that doesn't include how we treat one another is incomplete.

The Omer, then, becomes a bridge, linking our relationship with Hashem to our relationships with each other. It reminds us that the two are inseparable. Our relationship with G-d is dependent on our relationship with other people and vice versa.

This idea is captured in this week's Parsha of

Kedoshim through the *mitzvah of Ve'ahavta l'reacha kamocho*, to love one's fellow as oneself, which Rabbi Akiva himself famously described as a fundamental principle of the Torah.

So what does this look like in practice? It begins with small, deliberate choices.

Paying attention to how we speak. Choosing patience over frustration. Giving others the benefit of the doubt.

Including someone new. Reaching out to those who may feel alone. Recognising that every person carries a story we

Torah. At the same time, the days of the Omer carry a very different, sobering memory. A painful reminder of what happens when that unity breaks down. We mourn the loss of the students of Rabbi Akiva, thousands of great Torah scholars who were deeply immersed in learning, yet failed



Rabbi Motti Hadar
Pine Street Shul

may never fully see. Respecting differences.

True unity isn't sameness. It's the ability to stand alongside someone who thinks, lives, or expresses their Judaism differently, and still sees them as deeply, inherently connected.

By the time we arrive at Shavuot, the goal isn't simply that we have counted 49 days.

It's that we have changed. We have grown. A little more patient. A little more sensitive. A lot more unified.

Because receiving the Torah begins with how we stand together.

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Express kidnappings on the increase

NICOLA MILTZ

An average of at least one Jewish person a month has fallen victim to an express kidnapping in the past year.

That is according to CSO Chief Executive Liron Sanders.

"This crime is on the increase," he says. "There were between 12 and 15 incidents recorded in the community last year."

It happens in minutes. A routine drive home, a quick stop at a gate, a glance at a phone and suddenly, control is gone. Victims are forced into cars, driven around under threat, and coerced into handing over bank cards and access to their digital funds. This is the chilling reality of express kidnappings, a fast-evolving crime pattern now firmly on the radar of community safety structures in South Africa.

The CAP analytics team's latest findings show that hijackings and kidnappings "remain a serious concern", with express kidnappings emerging as a particularly significant pattern, says Sean Jammy, CAP deputy chief executive.

But the encouraging message, Jammy says, is that understanding the pattern helps reduce vulnerability. "Awareness, preparation, and a few practical changes in daily habits can make a meaningful difference."

Experts warn that the nature of the crime fast, opportunistic, and financially driven makes it particularly concerning.

Critically, CAP emphasises that the target isn't wealthy individuals. "Most incidents are opportunistic," says Jammy. "Suspects are often looking for a vulnerable moment rather than a specific individual."

Sanders says, "Victims are frequently driving ordinary vehicles, dressed in everyday

clothing, and going about routine activities. The risk lies not in how affluent someone appears, but in whether they are momentarily distracted or exposed."

Most incidents occur in public spaces such as roads, driveways, parking areas, and transitional points.

"In terms of timing, two key risk windows have emerged," says Jammy. The first is the evening commute period, especially from late afternoon into early evening, when many people follow predictable routes home. The second is mid-morning to early afternoon, when residents are out at shops, businesses, schools, or other daily destinations. The data makes it clear there is no single "safe" time of day, only times when heightened awareness is especially important.

In many reported cases, suspects move quickly, targeting people in or near their vehicles. Victims may be forced into their



Photo: AI generated

own car or another vehicle, threatened, and driven around while suspects demand access to phones, bank cards, PINs, and banking apps. Some people are forced to make cash withdrawals, cash-send transactions, or transfers, while suspects attempt to exploit biometric access and available credit. Once they believe they have taken what they can, they often abandon victims and flee, sometimes with the stolen vehicle.

CAP says there are simple but effective steps every resident can take to reduce the risk:

- Stay alert. Be especially aware when arriving home, leaving home, parking, or getting into or out of a vehicle.
 - Put your phone away before reaching your gate, driveway, or car. Visible distraction is a repeated vulnerability.
 - Avoid sitting stationary at your gate for longer than necessary. Have your remote ready and enter promptly.
 - Vary routines and departure times where possible.
 - Keep vehicle doors locked and windows up when driving.
 - If an unknown or suspicious vehicle tries to stop you, especially one using blue lights, don't stop immediately. Drive to a well-lit public space, a petrol station, or a police station if you feel unsafe.
 - Trust your instincts. If something feels wrong, leave the area and seek safety first.
 - If you suspect you're being followed, don't drive home. Drive to a well-lit area such as a petrol station and call for help.
- CAP warns that financial precautions are critical:
- Lower your daily withdrawal and transfer limits on all banking apps.
 - Keep only limited funds in accounts that are easily accessible from your phone.
 - Disable unnecessary payment, transfer, or credit features if you don't use them regularly.
 - Turn on transaction alerts so you're notified immediately of activity on your accounts.
 - Review your app security settings and ensure your phone and banking apps are

protected with strong authentication. These steps may not eliminate risk, but they can significantly limit the extent of financial loss.

Sanders says situational awareness remains the most powerful form of prevention. "I preach this all the time: know your surroundings. Be aware. Take in what is around you," he says. He warns that everyday distractions, particularly being on a phone while stationary, significantly increase risk.

Before placing items in a vehicle boot, he advises taking a moment to look around and assess the environment. Avoid putting your head down in the boot and becoming unaware of who is nearby. "It's quite simple. Look around you and understand what's going on," he says.

He also stresses the importance of having an exit strategy in everyday situations. Motorists should leave enough space between their car and the one in front at traffic lights to allow for a quick escape if necessary. Thinking ahead about how to respond in a threatening situation can make a critical difference in the moment.

Preparation at a family level is equally important. Sanders recommends creating a family emergency file kept at home, containing essential information such as bank details, vehicle registration numbers, tracking information, medical aid details, and access to location-sharing applications like Life360. This ensures that if something does happen, critical information is immediately available to assist in response efforts.

Regular check-ins between family members can also serve as a simple but effective safety measure. A quick message or emoji during the day can confirm that everything is normal and help identify when something may be wrong.

If caught in an express kidnapping, both CAP and CSO are clear: Victims should comply, avoid confrontation, and not attempt to resist, as these situations often involve weapons and can escalate rapidly. Most incidents are over within hours, but the psychological impact can linger long after.

CAP continues to urge residents to play an active role in community safety. "If you see it, call it in," Jammy says, encouraging the public to report suspicious activity to the CAP control room on 0861 227 227. Early reporting enables faster response and can prevent incidents before they escalate.

Ultimately, both organisations stress that while crime remains a reality, individuals are not powerless. "We live in South Africa. There are many positives, but there is also crime," Sanders says. "Crime can numb us, but we need to understand how we can live around it."

Mexican pair arrested for flying drones over Joburg Jewish college

LEE TANKLE

What began as a suspected drone violation over a Sandringham Jewish college quickly escalated into a high-priority investigation, culminating in the arrest of two Mexican journalists and the seizure of their electronic devices.

CSO is clear that the incident presents no danger to the community.

Hawks spokesperson Colonel Katlego Mogale told the SA Jewish Report that while the men's true intentions behind flying the drone remain unknown, it has nothing to do with the Jewish community.

Julio Ibáñez, a sports reporter at Televisa, a major Mexican broadcasting company, and Danny García, his cameraman, were arrested in a dramatic Hawks and Crime Intelligence operation on 19 March. They were released on bail six days later after appearing in the Hillbrow Magistrate's Court. They were charged with contravening the Civil Aviation Act for flying a drone over the Jewish college without permission.

It has been reported that the men were in the country filming for the upcoming FIFA World Cup, in which South Africa are Mexico's first opponent.

A Jewish person spotted the two drones above the college campus on 16 March and reported them to CSO as they found it suspicious. CSO asked not to disclose the name of the college over which the drones were flown.

"We tried to find them but were unable to and, as a result, we went back to review camera footage to understand more about them and what they were doing. At this point, we noticed the drone in the video footage," said CSO Chief Executive Liron Sanders.

Mogale confirmed that the sighting was reported to the Sandringham police.

After Crime Intelligence alerted the Hawks to the potential threat, the team traced the suspects to a hotel in Rosebank, according to Mogale.

The Hawks arrested the suspects while Ibáñez was filming a live social media video. In the footage, he's speaking to the camera from his hotel room about football when the camera suddenly shifts and

an armed man appears behind him. Ibáñez asks what's happening, and the video then cuts.

Because of the live video, the arrests of Ibáñez and García have been widely reported on sports platforms and in Spanish-language media. In these reports, people seemed to believe that Ibáñez was kidnapped live on air, and the police officers were criminals targeting journalists.

Prominent Mexican sports journalist David Faitelson, who has 3.9 million followers on X, criticised the arrests and claimed the two journalists were being held unjustly. He accuses the South African judicial system of inefficiency and corruption, expresses frustration over the men's nearly 20-day ordeal, and ends by saying he has little confidence in the Mexican government's ability to protect its citizens abroad.



Julio Ibáñez

"The Hawks made arrests, and following the arrests, we weren't told why they were flying the drones in the area. However, it is understood they had been touring most of South Africa and flying drones all around the country."

"The incident, which took place more than a month ago, proves that our security systems are working. It also further reinforces the relationships between CSO and the relevant governmental organisations, who are committed to the safety of South Africans," said Sanders.

Mogale added that during the operation, the Department of Home Affairs detected issues with the journalists' entry into the country.

"We aren't fully aware of their true intentions. Due to this now being a state investigation, we have left the evidence trail to the Hawks to maintain. We hope to find out the intentions during the court case," said Sanders.

The accused were granted bail of R10 000 each on 20 March. They are to appear again in court on 12 May.

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Siblings in legal battle over R1 million donation to Gaza

TALI FEINBERG

Derek Yach is suing his sister, Dianna Yach, for donating R1 million from their grandfather's foundation to Gift of the Givers (GOTG) in 2025, to be sent directly to Gaza.

Dianna Yach, the director and chairperson of the Mauerberger Foundation Fund (MFF), one of the oldest, most reputable Jewish charitable foundations in South Africa, donated this money to a region where Hamas terrorists control daily life.

The MFF is primarily a Zionist foundation, with its founder, the late Morris Mauerberger, having stipulated that 50% of MFF grants must go towards Israeli entities.

Derek Yach and his cousin Steven Levy, both directors of the MFF, are taking Dianna Yach to court over this donation and other decisions, which they say are redirecting the MFF away from its Jewish and Zionist identity.

Court papers show that Dianna Yach categorised the donation to GOTG under "grants to Israeli entities", which the applicants say was a purposeful attempt to inflate the recorded amount donated to Israeli organisations.

Court papers also show that she stopped the MFF donating to Telfed, an organisation that supports South African olim. Telfed chief executive Dorron Kline recorded in a letter to the MFF in March 2026 that she told him in 2025 that "Israel's reaction to the 7 October atrocity is outrageously disproportionate, and Israel is committing genocide. Therefore, Israel has lost its right to call itself a nation among other nations. There is no reason for Telfed to approach the MFF for funding until the Israeli government ceases to kill innocents and agrees to the establishment of a

Palestinian state."

Derek Yach and Levy emphasise that this is not a family dispute, but a battle for "institutional integrity", to ensure the MFF abides by its founder's wishes and ethos. "The allocation regime [of 50% of donations to Israeli entities] is a binding constitutional obligation that reflects the express wishes of the founder and defines the very purpose for which the foundation exists," they say.

Furthermore, under Dianna Yach's leadership, "the foundation's relationships with key grantee institutions are being destroyed in real time", say the applicants. Listed among those grantees are Tel Aviv University, Ben Gurion University, the Israel Museum of Jerusalem, and many others.

"Every day that passes deepens the foundation's contractual exposure and compounds the reputational harm to the founder's legacy," they say.

They say that as far back as 2022, Dianna Yach allegedly tried to alter the distribution of donations, so that "the distributable income of the MFF [is decided] on the basis of need to entities in Israel, Palestine, and South Africa".

Levy recalls in the court documents that "the insertion of 'Palestine' as a beneficiary territory alongside Israel and South Africa was a departure of the most profound kind from the founder's objectives. It foreshadowed the revelation in the Telfed letter that the First Respondent [Dianna Yach] had represented to external stakeholders that it was foundation policy to support Palestinian rather than Israeli organisations."

Regarding the GOTG donation, Derek Yach and Levy allege that "the scale of the distortion is material". Records show a total Israeli allocation of R4.15 million for the 2025/2026 financial year. But remove the GOTG grant, and the true Israeli allocation falls to R3.15 million, "a reduction of approximately 24%. The reported Israeli allocation of 26% of total distributable income falls to approximately 20%. This is not a rounding error. It is a million-rand misclassification that moves the foundation's reported Israeli allocation further from the mandatory 50% threshold, not closer to it."

The Israeli category "is being artificially inflated through creative accounting, while the presentation obscures both the true destination and the true character of the funds being allocated", they say.

The applicants allege many areas of misconduct by Dianna Yach and fellow directors Igshaan Higgins and Professor Brian Figaji. They are asking the court to suspend them from the MFF board, and to declare them "delinquent directors", a classification for leaders found guilty of gross abuse of position, wilful misconduct, or a total breach of fiduciary trust.



Dianna Yach giving a R1 million donation to Dr Imtiaz Sooliman, in front of a bust of Morris Mauerberger

The applicants also raise concerns about Dianna Yach voting in favour of the University of Cape Town's (UCT's) anti-Israel resolutions. They claim this puts her in direct opposition to the MFF, and question why she dragged the foundation into the legal dispute over the resolutions, which they say damages the MFF's standing.

They note that these decisions have destroyed the MFF's relationship with the Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies at UCT. In turn, this affected the production of a book the Kaplan Centre was commissioned to write about the MFF.

According to the court papers, Dianna Yach also agreed to bestow the Li Boiskin Jewish Social Justice Fellowship (in memory of the late community leader) to the Kaplan Centre, which would then choose a social justice initiative as a beneficiary of that funding. However, Dianna Yach allegedly moved the funding to fall under the management of local Jewish nonprofit Mensch, against a signed agreement with the Kaplan Centre.

The board of Mensch issued a statement to the SA Jewish Report, saying, "Mensch confirms that, to the best of its knowledge, the [Li Boiskin] grant was validly

provided to Mensch in good faith. Mensch was not involved in, nor privy to, any internal deliberations within the MFF that preceded the payment."

According to Mensch, "we have processes to identify and manage conflicts of interest, and we are not aware of any conflict relating to the acceptance of this grant. This is the first time that concern regarding the grant has been brought to our attention. The matter will be placed before Mensch's board, and any appropriate steps will be taken in due course."

Kline said that when Dianna Yach told him that funding was dependent on Israel's actions, it was the first time in 40 years that the political stance of the Israeli government had been invoked as a basis for withholding access to educational funding for disadvantaged students in Israel.

He describes the relationship between Telfed and the MFF as "one of deep and long-standing significance".

In 1992, "[Dianna Yach's parents] Solm and Estelle Yach established the Mauerberger Trust in Israel, with the administration entrusted to Telfed.

Through this trust, Telfed administered scholastic bursaries for tertiary education in Israel, with a particular focus on Jewish students of South African heritage and disadvantaged student populations." This was ended by their daughter, Dianna Yach.

Now, he says, "Telfed hopes that the court case will bring about a change in the implementation of the Mauerberger Trust's distributions in Israel and, once again, provide vital scholarships, enabling students to pursue their academic dreams."

Back in Cape Town, where Dianna Yach lives, her actions are already impacting communal organisations. Communal leaders are choosing to resign rather than work with her, because of her antizionist choices and her alleged decisions at the MFF. Some communal leaders say that Yach is attempting to shift communal organisations away from their Zionist identities.

The case will be called in open court on 4 May.

Asked to comment by the SA Jewish Report, Dianna Yach said, "The matters to which you refer have yet to be decided by a court. I am happy to respond after the court decides on 4 May 2026." She, Figaji, and Higgins have filed a notice of intention to oppose the application.

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The privilege you don't notice until it's missing

OPINION

ADAM THAL



I was sitting at the clubhouse of our soccer club recently, doing what I always do, drinking my evening double Jameson while watching whether my son was giving it his all or not.

The early evening light was soft. The boys were kicking around. It was just another practice.

And then it wasn't.

One of the 13-year-old boys went up for a challenge and came down wrong. His coach brought him up to the clubhouse. His wrist was bent in a way wrists should never bend. The kind of injury that makes grown men look away.

He wasn't one of our community's children. He was an underprivileged kid from Hillbrow. A good kid. Tough. Brave. Trying not to cry.

So the club manager did what anyone would do. She phoned for help.

082 911 told us it wouldn't dispatch an ambulance because the boy didn't have medical aid and would be a financial risk. We were advised to call 112. So we did.

Ten minutes on hold. Then the words you never want to hear in a moment like that, "There are no ambulances available any time soon. You'll have to make another plan." Make another plan?

On a soccer field with a 13-year-old with a wrist that looked broken or worse and his parents nowhere to be seen.

Long story short, his father eventually got to the club by public transport, and they began to make their way on their own to Chris Hani Baragwanath Academic Hospital, getting there late at night, with

the boy eventually operated on the next morning.

And I sat there thinking about something that made me both incredibly grateful and deeply unsettled. If, G-d forbid, that had been my son, I know what would have happened.

I would have dialled one number!

And within minutes, not hours, Hatzolah would have been there.

Calm. Professional. Kind. Efficient.

Not asking about medical aid.

Not asking about payment.

Just asking, "Where are you? We're on our way."

That realisation hit me hard.

We often speak about Jewish community in terms of schools, shuls, youth movements, philanthropy, and Israel. And yes, those are pillars of our strength. But there's another pillar we don't talk about nearly enough: our infrastructure of care.

Hatzolah isn't just an ambulance service. It's a living expression of Jewish values.

It's volunteers who leave Shabbos tables, boardrooms, family dinners, and children's bedtime stories to respond to strangers.

It's a community that built a safety net before it ever needed to fall into it.

And perhaps most importantly, it's a reminder that we're not alone.

That afternoon, I wasn't thinking about politics or budgets or leadership debates. I was thinking about something far simpler. How lucky we are!

Not because we're elite. Not because we're better. But because we built something together.

Something organised. Something disciplined. Something compassionate. Something fast.

In a country where emergency services are stretched thin and where many families live one crisis away from catastrophe, having a reliable network of communal response isn't a luxury, it's a blessing.

And blessings should never be taken for granted.

SECURITY ISN'T JUST ABOUT FENCES AND GUARDS. COMMUNITY ISN'T JUST ABOUT SCHOOLS AND SCHOLARSHIPS. STRENGTH ISN'T JUST ABOUT NUMBERS.

The uncomfortable truth is that most of us don't think about Hatzolah until we need it. We see the ambulances at events. We notice them speeding through traffic. We nod with appreciation and move on.

But sitting at that soccer club, watching a child wait for help that wasn't coming, I realised something:

Security isn't just about fences and guards. Community isn't just about schools and scholarships. Strength isn't just about numbers.

It's about showing up for each other ... immediately, without hesitation.

That young boy eventually received care. Thank G-d he did. But the delay could have been worse. The outcome could have been different. And it made me look at my own community with fresh eyes.

We're not fortunate because we're insulated. We're fortunate because we're organised. We're fortunate because generations before us decided that we won't rely only on the system but will build our own support within it.

That isn't superiority. That is responsibility.

And perhaps the deeper message for all of us is this: If we know what it feels like to be protected, we also know what it feels like when protection doesn't arrive.

Maybe the ultimate expression of gratitude isn't just appreciation but participation.

Supporting. Volunteering. Donating. Strengthening the structures that protect us.

Because one day on some random Thursday afternoon at a soccer club it might be our child.

And when that moment comes, may we always be able to say with confidence that help is already on its way.

• Adam Thal, husband and father of two, writes with honesty about community, fatherhood, and the quiet responsibilities that shape modern Jewish men in South Africa. Sometimes humorous, sometimes emotional but always truthful!

The fog of war and the myth of Iranian victory



DR DAVID BROCK KATZ

It is remarkable that in the information age, we know so little of what is happening in the war between the United States, Israel, and Iran. The little that does emerge is thin, contradictory, and heavily biased one way or another. Traditional media have long abandoned hard investigative journalism in favour of delivering partisan messages, overtly signalling their political ideology and affiliation. Pro-Trump media outlets have insisted the war was over soon after it started. The anti-Trump movement argues that the US lost even before firing the first shot, and disregards the strategic extent of the military damage inflicted on Iran. Social media has led the anti-war charge and rapidly overtaken mainstream news outlets in peddling an anti-Israel narrative at every turn.

regularly issues contradictory statements within minutes of each other. Agreements reached at peace negotiations are countermanded hours later. There seems to be at least two centres of power, residing in the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps and the theocratic government. It's not even clear whether the US knows who it's negotiating with. Into this knowledge vacuum step the myriad pundits who have no clue about the science or history of warfare and haphazardly peddle their warped and inane

on one of his programmes whether Trump should have anticipated that Iran might close the Strait of Hormuz. The real question is the opposite. Did Iran anticipate that a closure of Hormuz would trap its own economy? Here is the central point that much of the commentary misses. Iran isn't fighting from a position of endless strategic depth. It's fighting while under immense economic strain, under heavy bombardment, and with badly damaged command-and-control structures.

Lebanon and Israel have sat down for peace talks, and the prospects of a Lebanon free of Iran and Hezbollah have never been better. A new friendlier regime has replaced the Assad dictatorship, and the Syrian border is more secure than it's been in recent memory. The Houthis remain isolated in the wake of the devastating US-Israel attacks on Iranian military sites. Iran has almost ceased to pose a military threat to Israel and its Arab neighbours as relentless airstrikes have downgraded its missile/drone capability. Iranian leadership and its command-and-control structures are all but destroyed.



Tel Aviv skyline during the war with Iran

Israel has a different objective and timeline than its ally, the US. On 8 October 2023, one day after Hamas infiltrated the Israeli border and massacred 1 200 people, the Jewish nation was in a precarious position. The society was divided against itself as left and right-wing politicians battled for the soul of the nation. The military stood in disarray after failing to protect its citizens in a monumental intelligence failure. Rockets poured over the border from Gaza, and the threat of more rockets from Hezbollah, the Houthis, and Iran was a distinct possibility. Across the Golan, Israel faced a hostile Syrian regime propped up by Hezbollah and ready to seize any opportunity to launch an attack. The Abraham Accords, promising a lasting peace in the Middle East, lay in tatters as Iran and its proxies proudly announced that Israel, isolated and weakened, was surrounded by a ring of fire.

versions of what victory looks like. The latest nonsense is "Iran has only to survive to win the war".

Arguments tend to rest on two assumptions. The first is that the US is under intense time pressure and must achieve a rapid victory. The second is that Iran can endure until Washington grows tired of the conflict. Neither assumption survives first-principles analysis. Many observers argue that Iran is winning because it can throttle world energy supplies through the Straits of Hormuz. They misunderstand the strategic geography of the war. The Straits of Hormuz are not primarily the US's lifeline. They are Iran's. If Hormuz is closed, the greatest pressure falls not on Washington, but on Tehran and Beijing. Broadcaster Piers Morgan captured the irony when he asked

After two and a half years of bloody warfare, Israel has managed to extricate itself from a precarious position and dismantle, one by one, the existential threats it faced on 7 October. It has comprehensively dismantled the ring of steel. It has subdued Hamas, rescued the hostages, and suffered not one missile from Gaza for months. Mossad decapitated Hezbollah in an unprecedented intelligence operation, and the Israelis now occupy a buffer zone deep inside Lebanese territory. For the first time in decades,

Exquisite intelligence and stunning operations have extinguished the ring of fire. The opportunities for Iran to develop nuclear weapons in the wake of the war have evaporated. The prospects of revitalising the Abraham Accords are brighter than ever after Iran turned on its Arab neighbours with its hordes of missiles and drones. Israel can claim a massive victory.

A deep lesson is that much of the "expert" commentary surrounding this war confuses emotional symbolism with sound scientific analysis. Iran surviving isn't the same thing as Iran winning. Regimes often survive after suffering a devastating strategic defeat. First principles matter. They cut through propaganda, slogans, and emotional reactions. When one examines the war through the basic realities of operational success, economics, geography, command structures, and strategic objectives, the fashionable claim that "Iran only has to survive to win" begins to look less like analysis and more like wishful thinking.

• Dr David Brock Katz is a research fellow at Stellenbosch University in the faculty of military science. He has published three books and numerous academic articles dealing with aspects of South African military history and military doctrine.



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South African Jewish Report

Finding the happiness in the pain

For the past few years, it's felt so much easier to commemorate Yom Hazikaron and feel the pain of loss than to celebrate on Yom Ha'atzmaut.

The devastating and ongoing losses seem interminable and way too close to all of us so that joy seems a little out of reach.

There has been way too much pain and anguish in the past two and a half years.

However, celebrate we must, no matter what, because we have so very much to be grateful for. We have a 78-year-old Israel and that is certainly worth celebrating.

Right now, the Jewish State is going through what feels like an interminable war, with tenuous ceasefires. First there was the horrifying 7 October massacre, for which Israel had no choice but to retaliate and prevent from ever happening again. When the war in Gaza seemed to taper off, there was an uptick in the war with Hezbollah on the Lebanese front. Then there is Iran. And don't forget its proxy the Houthis, in Yemen, who keep up their attacks on Israel.

This has clearly taken a massive toll on Jews in Israel and the diaspora. But we have a Jewish State that is strong and resilient.

And Israelis know why this is worth celebrating, no matter what. I guess they have gotten used to celebrating the many small wins within the ongoing threats of war and destruction. They appreciate every bit of life and know how to enjoy every last morsel of it.

After spending months cramped up in, or staying as close as possible to, underground shelters because of the constant Iranian ballistic missiles, they take every opportunity for *kef*, the slang word for "fun" or "a good time". Even between missiles, you will find young and old people enjoying life at coffee shops or out on the town. People even learned to find the *kef* in shelters, having parties or playing games.

Incredibly, Israel is rated the eighth happiest country in the World Happiness Report released in March. In the middle of a war, that is! And it has consistently been in the top eight for years. Israelis under 25 years old rank in the top three happiest groups in the world. According to the report, this is driven by strong social support, close family bonds, community solidarity, and a high sense of meaning/purpose.

Having said that, there is a distressing paradox in the massive rise in negative emotions – such as worry, sadness, and anger – in Israel, from 119th before October 2023 to 39th globally. This reflects the severe psychological toll of the ongoing conflict.

And in this week of Yom Hazikaron and Yom Ha'atzmaut, we are reminded of the pain and devastation of Israel at war. It was just a few short months back, on 26 January, that the body of the last hostage held in Gaza was returned to Israel. Somehow it feels like it happened in the distant past already. But this week, the pain came flooding back for many of us.

We were reminded of the massive loss of lives, the devastation of 7 October, when 1 200 innocent people were butchered and many thousands more were tortured and wounded. The scars remain etched into the lives of Israelis who survived.

There is not an Israeli who is untouched by the losses of the past two and a half years. Just in the past year alone, 174 soldiers were killed and 79 people fell victim to terrorists. And the truth is, ever since Israel became a state in 1948, Israelis have been under constant threat of war or terrorism.

A total of more than 30 000 have been killed in defence of the State of Israel and in terrorist attacks. And for Israelis, the one thing they want more than anything is peace. The ever-elusive experience that Israelis verbalise hundreds of times a day. Shalom!

No mother wants to send her child into an army in which he is likely to have to fight for his life. No mother wants to send her child into combat, fearing that he might not return. Every day, parents with children in the defence forces worry about what news they might hear.

I am reminded of something Israel-based writer Sarah Tuttle-Singer wrote in the last few days about understanding Israelis. It was profound and worth sharing.

"For those who say 'Israel has no real security concerns', tell me something: have you ever sat down with an Israeli over coffee and asked her what it's like to live under rocket fire, or the nagging fear that you might be blown up or knifed in the back, or thrown like a rag doll in the air with the brutal impact of a car as it drives into you on purpose?"

"Have you looked into the eyes of a Nova survivor who hid under a pile of bodies, just like in the Holocaust – who hid under the stink of blood and burned flesh and urine just to survive?"

"Have you looked into the eyes of the mothers and fathers of hostages held in terror tunnels, the parents who refuse to give up hope and who will keep the light on until their babies are home?"

Sarah clearly understands this deeply.

She goes on to ask if you've ever thought twice about getting on a bus, or getting off a bus because someone gets on with a bulky jacket on a warm day.

She speaks of the Israeli children who have spent 40 days in and out of shelters and who have nightmares about rockets flying in the air.

The point she ultimately makes, which resonates so clearly for me, is not to think for one moment that Israelis want anything other than peace. However, peace is not as easy as wanting it. The road to peace is not straightforward. Peace is attainable only when enemies can lay down arms, stop hating, and negotiate in earnest. Also, you cannot formulate peace agreements with people who are determined to wipe you off the face of the earth.

In this week of Yom Hazikaron and Yom Ha'atzmaut, I pray for an end to the wars, death, and destruction and for a light of peace at the end of a short tunnel.

Shabbat Shalom!

Peta Krost
Editor



Julius's courtroom *minyana*

OPINION

HOWARD SACKSTEIN



Tension crackled through the air in the KuGompo City Magistrate's Court, as protesters clad in Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) red danced and sang their support outside. Inside the courtroom, Magistrate Twanet Olivier sternly read the sentences in her heavy Afrikaans accent.

On count one, EFF leader Julius Malema would be sentenced to five years in prison for the unlawful possession of a semi-automatic firearm. Then two years for the illegal possession of ammunition, and fines of R20 000 each for discharging a firearm in public, failing to take precautions, and reckless endangerment. None of the sentences was suspended, and Malema's lawyers immediately appealed both.

The sentences were striking, particularly when contrasted with those of former Paralympian Oscar Pistorius, who received a wholly suspended sentence, albeit three years, for discharging a Glock at Tashas restaurant in Melrose Arch. The distinction, of course, is that Pistorius's actions were deemed accidental, while Malema's appeared premeditated and calculated political theatre, designed to portray him as a revolutionary leader, but endangering the lives of the 20 000 people gathered in the stadium when he effectively "went postal".

According to the South African Constitution, a sentence exceeding 12 months' direct imprisonment, without the option of a fine, effectively disqualifies the EFF commander in chief from assuming a seat in Parliament for five years.

Malema will, of course, appeal the sentences and follow the "Stalingrad defence" strategy used by former president Jacob Zuma, who has successfully avoided his corruption trial for more than two decades.

Perhaps more surprising was the scene inside the courtroom. In the front rows sat a group of Malema supporters, almost all of them wearing *kippot*, the traditional Jewish head covering. Indeed, among the very few not

wearing *kippot* were Malema's own Jewish legal team, attorney Ian Levitt and senior counsel Laurance Hodes.

Malema is a member of the Lemba community, a group of between 50 000 and 150 000 people, primarily in Limpopo province and southern Zimbabwe, who claim Jewish ancestry. In recent years, many Lemba have increasingly embraced Jewish customs, the wearing of *kippot* is now a common expression of identity within this predominantly Venda-speaking cultural group.

When Malema's grandmother, who raised him, passed away in 2019, the funeral was conducted by a Lemba "rabbi", clad in a *tallit*, a Jewish prayer shawl, and waving a stick.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many television viewers were surprised when Dr Rudo Mathivha, then head of the intensive care unit, and later trauma and critical care, at Chris Hani Baragwanath Academic Hospital, used the phrase "*Baruch Hashem*", the Hebrew expression for "Thank G-d" during a live television interview. She is, of course, Lemba.

Other notable figures associated with the Lemba community include Hannah Sadiki, the chief executive of Bidvest Financial Services and a fellow trustee of the Afrika Tikkun Investment Trust, and businessman Nick Selamolela, who previously served on the South

African Jewish Board of Deputies, formally converted to Judaism, and is a member of the Chabad community.

The Lemba were first documented by Swiss missionary Henri-Alexandre Junod in the early 1900s. According to oral tradition, a small group of men had left the Middle East by sea, travelling down the East African coast before settling in what is now Zimbabwe and South Africa.

Many Lemba customs echo those of Judaism. They abstain from eating pork and shellfish, avoid mixing milk and meat, practise circumcision, and incorporate the Star of David into clothing and gravestones. Lemba graves are often oriented towards Jerusalem – though some claim Mecca – and stones are placed on them as a sign of respect.

Genetic studies on the Lemba in the late 1990s and early 2000s, led by British historian Tudor Parfitt, suggested evidence of Semitic origins, including a high prevalence of the so-called Cohen Modal Haplotype, or "Cohen gene", associated with high priests of the Jewish people, the descendants of Aaron. However, Professor Scott Hazelhurst of the University of the Witwatersrand has contested this, arguing that the concept of a "Cohen gene" itself rests on flawed data and misinterpretation.

Today, most Lemba identify as Christian or Muslim, with traditional practices syncretised into those faiths. At

the same time, a growing number are exploring a move to Jewish religious identity. The Lemba Cultural Association continues to promote heritage and identity, hosting regular conferences in Limpopo that often feature Jewish and Israeli speakers.

In 2024, social media personality Rudy Rochman, also known as Rudi Israel, who documents journeys to so-called "lost Jewish tribes", attended the Lemba conference in Limpopo. Among those in attendance was Malema himself, wearing a *kippah* adorned with a prominent

Magen David.

The following year, the Lemba community was visited by Caribbean Jewish content creator and diversity educator Yirmiyahu Danzig, who goes by the name @that_semite on social media, during his trip to South Africa for Limmud.

At Malema's sentencing, Lemba elders arrived in numbers, occupying the front rows of the courtroom, proudly wearing their *kippot*. When asked how a man so visibly connected to the Lemba community could adopt such an aggressively anti-Israel stance, some elders offered a striking explanation. Malema, they say, is "on-side", he just gets money from the other side to propagate these views.

That claim is impossible to verify. But the image of Malema being escorted into court by *kippah*-wearing Lemba elders will linger as one of the most unexpected and enduring visuals of his trial.

• Howard Sackstein has a degree in law and international relations, an LLB, and a Master's in political advocacy and international conflict resolution. He is an outspoken human rights activist and political commentator. He served as executive director of the Independent Electoral Commission and worked on the CR17 Ramaphosa campaign. He is chairperson of the SA Jewish Report but writes in his personal capacity.



Palestinian flag brings political protests to Houghton Golf Club

>>Continued from page 1

"It is so regrettable and bitterly disappointing that it has turned so ugly," said Loughnane. "We are a club that brings people together. This is one of the most helpful clubs in South Africa, our ethos is to support wherever we can."

Among members there is growing suspicion.

"Seeco deliberately arrived at the club, knowing it has a large Jewish membership base, with that flag, knowing full well it would cause upset," said one member.

Another was more direct. "I believe Seeco came to Houghton to cause trouble. He is an agitator and a provocateur who has gone on multiple news channels, repeatedly advancing claims of genocide in Gaza."

Others describe a simmering unease now brought to the surface.

"For a while there has been an undercurrent of unpleasantness and nastiness, everyone can feel it," said one member.

Another added, "This was premeditated. Planned to get maximum reaction."

For decades, Houghton has functioned as a rare shared space where politics is deliberately left outside the gates. That fragile balance, members say, is now under threat.

"This isn't a protest ground," said one member. "It's a shared space. If you allow one political display, you open the door to all of them – and then everything changes."

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ChevrahKadisha

The beloved sons murdered by Hamas

LEE TANKLE

For 57 days, Ayelet Samerano and Mishell Iluz lived in a state of unbearable uncertainty, not knowing whether their sons, Yonatan, 21, and Guy, 26, were alive, wounded, or waiting to be rescued after 7 October.

On 3 December 2023, both families were told their sons were no longer alive, but Hamas was still holding onto them.



Mishell Iluz, a father of one of the hostages, with Sam Nik, an Iranian activist

Iluz and Samerano told their agonising stories at the Yom Hazikaron ceremony in Johannesburg on 20 April, hosted by the South African Zionist Federation (SAZF). The Johannesburg Jewish community gathered to honour the 30 961 Israeli soldiers and victims of terror who have lost their lives. The two parents were brought to South Africa through a collaborative effort with the Israel Centre, the Jewish National Fund, and The Base.

"Fifty-seven days of living with darkness, with emptiness, with nothing, no information about your son. Our children go for one hour, and we don't know where they are, and we'll be crazy," said Iluz. "We go crazy because we're so worried about them."

"Try to concentrate on 57 days without knowing anything about what's happened to your son. It's madness. And after 57 days, the intelligence came to my house, knocked on the door, and then told me that Guy isn't alive anymore."

Israel Defense Forces troops recovered Yonatan's body from Gaza on 21 June 2025, along with those of Ofra Keidar and Staff Sergeant Shay Levinson, and brought them back

to Israel.

Guy's body was returned to Israel by Hamas as part of a ceasefire deal in October 2025.

SAZF national chairperson Craig Pantanowitz said, "This day isn't only about one moment in time, it's also about generations. It's about every soldier who stood in defence of Israel and every civilian whose life was cut short simply for being a Jew. Every name we recall tonight was a world, a future interrupted, a family forever changed."

On the morning of 7 October, Yonatan and his friends Bnayahu Bitton and Maor Gratzyani tried to leave the Nova festival grounds before the terrorists arrived. However, on the road back to Tel Aviv, police told them to turn around and find shelter because it was unsafe to drive with all the rockets flying overhead. So, they went to find shelter at Kibbutz Be'eri.

They were communicating with their parents, saying they were in the shelter when, in fact, Samerano later saw a video showing Hamas terrorists had stopped them at the gates of the kibbutz. They'd robbed them, thrown them to the ground, and murdered them. Later, other terrorists took Yonatan's body to Gaza. One of the men involved was identified as an employee of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).



Guy, who was working at the Nova festival with his friends Alon Werber and Almog Sarusi, tried to escape the terrorists who had entered the festival. A few minutes later, Iluz received a phone call. All Guy said was, "Father, I love you", and the phone went silent.

Iluz knew immediately that something was wrong and tried to find out where his son

was. He later found out that Werber had been murdered, and Guy was using his phone while hiding in a tree. Iluz knew he had to go bring Guy home. But he couldn't find him anywhere.



Mishell Iluz and Ayelet Samerano speaking at the Johannesburg Yom Hazikaron event

"I tried to find my son among all the bodies. I saw at least 100 bodies, but I will never forget them. I remember only nice faces of people, of children who came to celebrate freedom," said Iluz. "I don't remember any blood. I don't remember any deaths. I remember only the faces of nice young guys."

After that day, Iluz and Samerano hoped and prayed their sons had been kidnapped because that was the hope they were alive.

Iluz was later told that Guy too was dead, having died 10 days after being taken into captivity as a result of his injuries. Maya Regev, a hostage who was released, told how she had seen Guy take his last breath.

Iluz explained that while he had wanted his son's body back, he hadn't wanted to put other soldiers' lives at risk in order to rescue Guy.

Samerano, whose mission since her son's capture had been to alert the world to the truth about UNRWA, said, "I understood then that my son chose this journey for me."

And then I realised that I have a mission for the rest of my life. My young son was killed when he was just 21 years old. He was very ambitious and very successful, and he had a lot of ideas and dreams. And I took them on. To accomplish all his dreams and to do the huge mission for the Jewish people, for Israel, for my son. And I will close UNRWA. I will close UNRWA."

'Israel in the eye of the storm since its founding'

STAFF REPORTER

"Loss does not fade with time; it changes shape, but it remains," Naama Scop told the Yom Hazikaron gathering at the Israeli embassy in Pretoria on Tuesday morning.

Scop, who is Consul and Head of Administration at the embassy, said, "The families who carry this loss walk with it every single day, learning to live alongside the absence of those they love most. Your strength, your resilience, and your ability to continue forward, even through pain, are a testament to the enduring human spirit."

The embassy held a gathering to commemorate 174 fallen soldiers and 79 victims of terror lost this past year. Their deaths brought the cumulative number of people killed in defence of the State of Israel and in terrorist attacks there to more than 30 000.

Scop said that Yom Hazikaron is not only about mourning, it's about telling the stories of those lost.

"Each name carries a world within it: dreams, laughter, courage, and love," she said. "When we speak their names, when we recall their lives, we ensure that they remain part of us, part of our collective story."

"Since the events of 7 October, our nation has faced pain, loss, and uncertainty on a scale we haven't seen before. Yet even as we face these hardships, we are reminded that Israel has lived in the eye of the storm since its very founding. The struggle for security, for existence, and for peace has never been abstract; it has always been real, immediate, and deeply personal."

She said, "Memory is not something that lives in ceremonies, but in everyday moments – in a familiar song, in a shared meal, in the quiet spaces where absence is most deeply felt."

As a representative of Israel abroad, she feels this reality every day. "In times like these, the role of Israeli diplomats carries a special weight. We are tasked not only with representing our country, but with telling its human story – your story. Here in South Africa, this mission can be particularly challenging, as we navigate a complex environment and at times face difficult positions from those around us. Yet it is precisely here that our presence matters so much. Israeli missions around the world serve as bridges, between people, between communities, between truth and understanding."

"And today, standing before you, I am reminded that the strongest bridge of all is the one built within our own people. The bond between us – across continents, across generations – is unbreakable. It is rooted in shared memory, in shared grief, but also in shared hope."

She said to the bereaved families at the ceremony, "Please know that you are not alone. We stand with you, and we carry this loss together. Your loved ones will always be part of our nation's heart, and their memory continues to guide us forward."

"We honour their memory not only with sorrow, but through the way we choose to go on – with courage, with purpose, and with care for one another. In difficult times, we hold on to what binds us together, and we continue forward, carrying both the pain and the strength they have left us."



Yom Hazikaron at the Israeli embassy in Pretoria

Honouring the dead and those living through war

CLAUDIA GROSS

A father describing his children running to shelters, a soldier's final act of bravery, and a toddler shaped by war formed the heart of the Yom Hazikaron ceremony in Cape Town this week.

While the evening at the Cape Town Holocaust & Genocide Centre had the traditional elements of remembrance, the most moving moments came through personal stories.

One recalled Danny, who was killed in a terrorist attack in his home in 1995. He was described as someone who had embraced life and community. In his final moments, he fought the attacker, allowing his wife and children to escape. His actions were presented as a reflection of instinctive courage, shaped by deep commitment to family and identity.

Roy, a soldier who died during the Second Lebanon War in 2006, had been academically gifted, creative, and deeply engaged in life. His final act, jumping on a grenade to protect others in his unit, was framed not as a single moment of bravery, but as the result of values built over time. "These were the same values that defined his life," said Eitan Frei, a *bochurim* to Cape Town.

Joshua Schewitz, executive director of the South African Zionist Federation Cape Council, brought the lived experience of Israelis today into sharp focus. "As a father, you just focus on protecting your kids," he said, describing moments of rushing to shelters during missile sirens. He said even young children internalise this reality.

Schewitz shared a conversation at home in which one of his daughters spoke about wanting to become an air force pilot, while another expressed a desire to guide military targets. He said such conversations are not unusual in Israel, but reflect a childhood shaped by conflict.

Schewitz described the fear often felt only after the immediate danger of a missile has passed. His account highlighted how families continue to function

despite ongoing uncertainty.

His wife, Daphna, offered the perspective of someone who grew up in Israel. She described military service as a given part of life, influenced by generations who served before. Her father fought in multiple wars, and she spoke about the continuity of that experience across families.

Standing on stage with their two-year-old son, she explained that his entire life so far has taken place during conflict. This has shaped his behaviour, including a reluctance to being separated from her.

At one stage during her address, Joshua walked with their son to the back of the room to allow Daphna to speak uninterrupted, and the boy sobbed, shouting, "Ima! Ima! Ima!", calling for his mother. A tangible demonstration of the effects of growing up in conflict.

Another reflection on daily life came through a written piece titled "The messy middle", which first appeared on a WhatsApp group, and was read with permission from the author. It described the emotional strain of moving between crisis and routine. It captured the uncertainty of the ceasefire. "A ceasefire is not peace," the text said.

The reading described the tension between relief and ongoing anxiety, and the challenge of resuming normal activities while still processing trauma.

It emphasised that recovery is not immediate, and that emotional responses often lag behind events.



Adding a sticker to the commemoration board at the Cape Town event

While the ceremony included traditional elements such as prayers and candle lighting, they supported rather than defined the evening. The lighting of candles by youth representatives and community members symbolised continuity, but the focus remained on the stories behind the names.

The presence of Sam Zinn, a 101-year-old veteran of the 1948 War of Independence, added a historical dimension. His participation connected past and present, reinforcing the long history of sacrifice that Yom Hazikaron represents.

Opening remarks by Mia Briner, chairperson of the Zionist Youth Council, set the tone by linking remembrance to both grief and gratitude. She referred to the lasting impact of 7 October, saying it continues to shape collective memory. "Each life lost, an entire

world destroyed," she said.

Her words echoed throughout the evening, with each story providing a different lens on loss, courage, and resilience.

The ceremony underscored that remembrance is not only about honouring those who have died, but about understanding the lives they lived and the realities of those they left behind. As the community gathered in Cape Town, far from Israel, these stories created a shared space of reflection that bridged distance through personal experience.

'Israel isn't optional, it's a necessity'

GILANA LAB

"Rabbi [Doron] Perez said we don't get over the pain, we take it with us and carry on, and that's what we are doing tonight."

These words, delivered by Craig Pantanowitz, National Chairperson of the South African Zionist Federation (SAZF), at this year's Yom Ha'atzmaut celebration in Johannesburg, hosted by the SAZF on 21 April, set the tone for an evening that held memory and celebration in equal measure.

Even as rain fell, nothing could dampen the spirit of a community determined to stand together, and to celebrate. If anything, it underscored what Pantanowitz described so clearly, "We carry the weight of yesterday's Yom Hazikaron ceremony, the grief, the loss, the names, the faces, and we

step forward into today. Not lighter, not healed, but stronger, more determined, and still standing."

Pantanowitz repeatedly returned to the idea of resilience rooted in history and identity. "Israel isn't some optional extra in Jewish life. Israel is a necessity," he said. "For most of our history, we lived without power, without the ability to protect our own children when the world turned against us. And we paid for that powerlessness. With our blood, again and again."

But the establishment of the State of Israel, he said, changed everything. "We aren't speaking about some political idea or a place on a map. We are speaking about the single greatest transformation in our thousand-year Jewish history. We came home."

He described a nation "born in fire that has never



Both speakers were clear that joy and pain aren't separate experiences. As Pantanowitz put it, "Tonight we don't leave the pain behind. We carry it with us, but we don't let it define us. We let it strengthen us."

Despite the rain, people stayed. They sang, they listened, they danced. It was, unmistakably, the true spirit of the Jewish people – to gather, to remember, and to celebrate, no matter the circumstances.

South African Friends of Israel spokesperson Bafana Modise delivered a message of support, "Since 7 October, you may have felt

A mother shares 908 days of anguish

LEE TANKLE

For South African *olah* Martine Ben Harush, every day is Yom Hazikaron. Her son, Shoam, 20, was shot by a Hamas terrorist on 7 October and later died as a result of his wounds.

Ben Harush, one of the speakers at the Yom Hazikaron ceremony on 21 April in their village, Hispin, in Israel, said the remembrance day is difficult because "on this day, the grief becomes very public". At the same time, everyone else is mourning, too.

"This is the dichotomy I live with: I carry this sadness all the time, even as life goes on, and I try to keep moving forward," she told the *SA Jewish Report* this week.



Shoam Ben Harush

"It's especially hard to feel genuinely happy on *chaggim*," she said. "So, in a way, Yom Hazikaron feels like a moment when that gap finally closes, when what I'm feeling all the time is shared by everyone around me."

Shoam had one more year left of compulsory military service in the Israel Defense Forces, and had planned a lengthy holiday with his friends upon completion. However, on 7 October, when Hamas terrorists infiltrated Kibbutz Kerem Shalom near the Gaza Strip, where he was stationed, he was shot in the jaw in an unprovoked attack. He died three weeks later in the Hadassah Ein Kerem Hospital in Jerusalem, from a fatal head wound.

"Today, as the siren's cry fades across Israel, we stand in the space between silence and memory," his mother said at the Yom Hazikaron ceremony. "Nine hundred and eight days ago, the clock stopped. Nine hundred and eight days have passed since Shoam's life became part of the foundation of this nation. Since then, we have been living in the 'after.'"

Shoam is buried in the cemetery in Hispin, rather than at the military cemetery Har Herzl, as his mother wanted him close to home. She said that in the 908 days since his passing, she has learned to live with the silence that the loss of him has left.

"As a bereaved mother living through the years that follow, that silence changes. It becomes a space where memory lives."

In her speech, she said, "He moved through life with an open heart, acting as a bridge between people. But we see now, through the letter he left us, that his sight went even deeper. He didn't just see the beauty; he saw the 'twisted', the 'scary', and the 'wrong', and he

made the conscious, brave choice to embrace it all.

"A hero isn't someone who is unafraid; a hero is someone who knows exactly how 'unusual' and 'scary' the world is, and chooses to step forward into it for the sake of others. On 7 October, you stepped forward and defended your friends, the observers, every single one of us standing here, and the nation of Israel," she said at the memorial.

Ben Harush explained that for the first year after her son's death, she could do little more than cry.

"I don't think it's gotten easier over the past two and a half years, but there have been changes," she said. "Everyone grieves differently, and a lot of it comes down to time. In the first year, I couldn't speak at all; I would just wake up crying and keep crying. That silence is something I still carry with me."

"Now, it's different. It's not a question of whether I can speak; I want to. I feel a need to talk about him, to make sure people know who he was. That's become deeply important to me. I'm still searching for the words, but now I'm actively seeking them out," she said.

Over time, she has learned that she doesn't have to pretend to be fine.

"I'm a high school teacher, so there were days that I learned that it's okay to cry in front of the students that I teach. I don't have to pretend all the time. Because that's what happens. To get through the day, you're basically pretending," she said.

Ben Harush said her community has been supportive the entire journey.

"Especially in the first year, I was just, 'Leave me alone. I need to be alone.' Sometimes people would say to me, 'This isn't what Shoam would want from you.' And the intention was good. I knew that. But it wasn't helpful. Because you think I don't know that. Of course, I know what Shoam would want for me. I don't need someone to tell me that."

"There were days I couldn't get up in the morning, and I just learned that that was okay."

In a final letter he wrote to his family, before going into Jenin for a military operation months before 7 October, he said even though the world was scary and dysfunctional, he still saw it as something beautiful.

"He didn't want a world where we pretend everything is fine," said his mother. "He wanted a world where we are 'different' and 'unusual'. He saw the best in us; now, we must be the ones to see the best in each other, even when it's hard to see through the tears."

She said that his words "give us a way to move through the silence. He knew that the world was scary and unclear, yet he filled his moments with gratitude. He didn't ask for a perfect world; he asked for this one," she said.

Shoam wrote about the possibility he might not return. "The world is strange ... the world is wrong ... but even with all its shortcomings, the world is beautiful ... I don't want to live in another world. I want to live in this world."

He wrote how he saw the world's flaws and the "messed up" parts of our reality and, instead of turning away he said, "Thank you for the challenges, thank you for my strength, thank you for my parents, my friends, my home, and my life."

stopped facing fire, and yet, it lives. It thrives; it grows." A country that "turned desert into innovation, scarcity into ingenuity, and survival into strength, and one that doesn't just endure, it builds, it creates, it dreams, and above all, we choose life over and over again."

That message of pride and gratitude was echoed by Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein, who called on the crowd to "look around and see our community gathered in such huge numbers to celebrate proudly as Zionists". He reminded attendees of the privilege of doing so openly. "We live in a free country and that's a blessing, that we can come as South African citizens, proudly Zionists, with our heads held high."

Reflecting on Jewish history, Goldstein spoke of survival against all odds. "There's no record in all of the annals of human history of a nation that has survived, exiled for 2 000 years, scattered and persecuted, and then come back to its ancient homeland."



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SAJBD
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Zille stands firm on Joburg focus amid anti-Israel storm

CLAUDIA GROSS

An Israel-hating pastor confronted Helen Zille about the Democratic Alliance's (DA's) supposed stance on Gaza, at a DA campaign event in Johannesburg recently.

Nigel Branken challenged the mayoral contender in front of a packed audience at the Kensington Club.

"You continue to deny there is a genocide," he shouted from the audience. "Where is your morality? How many more children must die? How many people must starve, Helen Zille?"

This was recorded and widely shared online, prompting debate about the role of international issues in local elections.

Political commentator and former *Sunday Times* editor Ray Hartley said the incident reflected broader concerns about how emotionally charged issues are being brought into local campaigns.

"Divisive, emotional sloganeering

delivered in a threatening manner has no place in our discourse, let alone in a local government election, which ought to be about saving Joburg from disaster, not single-issue radicalism," he said.

Zille calmly addressed attendees at the meeting, saying, "There are terrible and serious things happening all over the world. And believe me, I take a great deal of interest in that, and I read a lot about it. And if you know anything about my history, you'll know that I know a little bit about genocide too."

But she said her focus is on building South Africa and cultivating unity at home. "South Africa has a different project. And that is taking people from extraordinarily diverse backgrounds, cultures, religions, races, ethnicities, and levels of development. And our project is to make it work for everyone."

"Our project is to show the world, including the Middle East, that Muslims and Jews, and Christians and agnostics and atheists can live together in one country by respecting each other's rights and defending



each other's rights," she said.

Zille claimed to be unscathed by Branken's attack. "I am not bothered by criticism, wherever it comes from. I don't want to make this election about the Middle East, so I'm not going to discuss it. Nothing that I can say is going to have any impact on the situation there, but just make it very difficult for us to win Joburg, which we are trying to do," she said.

Zille accused critics of trying to shift the campaign agenda. "People like Nigel

Branken are trying to drag us onto this field. I am not going to follow."

Her remarks reflect a deliberate campaign focus on local governance. Johannesburg continues to face serious challenges, including unreliable electricity supply, water disruptions, and financial instability. The DA has framed its campaign around improving service delivery and restoring administrative capacity.

According to experts, the incident at the Kensington Club shows how the Israel-

Palestinian conflict is used to sway political opinion in unrelated areas.

Darren Bergman, DA spokesperson for planning, monitoring, and evaluation in the Office of the Presidency, defended Zille's handling of the situation, saying her response was appropriate in the context of a local campaign.

He argued that public reaction had focused too heavily on the confrontation itself. "I am disappointed that many have spread the challenge but few have been generous and fair in sharing her response," he said. "People need to be very clear that Helen is here to save Johannesburg, that is her aim and objective. She cannot solve Middle East issues too."

DA Member of Parliament (MP) Michael Bagraim agreed. "Helen is quite right to explain that we have more than enough troubles of our own," he said, adding that focusing on an external issue beyond South Africa's influence was "disingenuous".

Despite these defences, criticism of the DA continues. Opponents argue that political parties cannot avoid taking positions on major global issues, particularly those involving human rights. They say that even in local elections, voters expect clarity on matters of international concern.

The DA's perceived stance on Israel has become a focal point in this debate. Critics say the party's position differs from that of the South African government, which has been outspoken in its support for the Palestinians.

The controversy has also drawn in voices from other political parties. Steve Swart, an MP from the African Christian Democratic Party, criticised what he described as selective outrage in public responses to the conflict. "It is disgraceful how pro-Palestinian activists not only ignore the horrific Hamas attacks on Israel on 7 October, but also twist the truth to suit their purposes," he said.

Swart also addressed claims about legal findings on the conflict. "The International Court of Justice has made no finding that Israel committed genocide in Gaza. That is still to be decided when the merits of the case are heard," he said.

He went further, questioning the focus of international activism. "It is equally disgraceful that nothing is said about human rights abuses elsewhere," he said, referring to reports of large numbers of protesters killed in Iran. "Why do we not see protests in the capitals of the world against this and similar atrocious human rights abuses elsewhere, while Israel is continually singled out? It is clearly a case of double standards being applied."

Sara Gon, a fellow at the SA Institute of Race Relations, said Zille had been put in a difficult situation. "Zille faced the ultimate challenge, which is a nightmare to face, in that to answer the accusations would be impossible particularly in the context of a public meeting," she said.

Gon said Zille handled the confrontation well. "I think she did well in the heat of the moment. I do, however, think that the issue of confronting these accusations, particularly when debate is impossible, needs to be debated by the DA because it is going to be faced with this repeatedly in the run-up to the elections."

Gon added that broader input may be needed. "It might be an appropriate issue for the Jewish community to contribute to and help craft suitable responses to meet a slew of accusations that cannot be dealt with in the context," she said.

Responses from political figures, analysts, and activists reflect differing expectations of what leadership should address in local elections. As campaigning continues, the extent to which parties engage or resist such issues may shape both voter perceptions and the direction of the race for control of Johannesburg.

Fedler swims the ocean of sorrow

South African expat and author **Joanne Fedler** recently brought out her latest book, *Bring Us Home From Sorrow: A Love Letter*, which focuses on her experience of losing her mother. The *SA Jewish Report* speaks to Fedler, who now lives in Australia.

Why did you write *Bring Us Home from Sorrow*?

I began writing letters to my mother from the day she was diagnosed with ovarian cancer. I knew I was about to experience one of the greatest losses of my life and wanted to track it, as a way of holding onto her. This all happened during the COVID-19 pandemic, so I experienced the distance as a banishment from being present with her as her life was ebbing away. I wrote letters for the nine months of her illness and for a year after she died. I then put them away not knowing if they would turn into anything I wanted to share more widely. When I started writing again, *The Whale's Last Song* emerged, a mythic story about grief and loss. I then came back to the letters and began working them into a memoir about losing my mother. The letters were for me, but this book is for my sisters and my mother's grandchildren, so they can remember her in exquisite detail. It's also for anyone navigating the shock of grief and trying to understand what just happened to them and the person they love.

One of the big issues you touch on is the love between mother and daughter.

What is unique and special about this for you?

My mother was a kind, generous, and unobtrusive presence. She was emotionally difficult to reach, but she loved me and my sisters fiercely. I never realised how fundamental she was to my sense of self until she died. She was the ground I stood on, the home I ached for, the only person who has loved me unconditionally. I know I was lucky and that not everyone experiences their mother this way.

How would you describe the love between your mom and you, and your daughter and you?

I spent my life trying to get close to my mother – I didn't get enough of her when I was a little girl as she had a child with special needs by the time I arrived. Watching her as a grandmother to my daughter healed many childhood wounds. My relationship with my daughter is different, I was able to be completely present. I had anxious attachment to my mother, and my daughter has secure attachment.

Losing a parent is massive for a person, no matter how old they are. Can you describe what that grief was for you and how you dealt with it?

I have seen some people experience relief rather than grief when a problematic parent dies. For me, I experienced my mother's death as a shock. I spent a year trying to believe that she was really gone – because we've lived in different countries for more than 20 years, I sometimes imagined she was just far away. After six months, I felt as if the life force had gone out of me. I was inconsolable, like a child, undefended, raw, impossibly vulnerable. It took nine months before I felt the seal of my grief lifting. Through it all, I wrote letters to her and swam in the ocean.

Tell us about your mother and what made her so special in your life.

My mother was a non-nonsense, practical person, a medical doctor. We were unlike in every way. She believed in medicine. She had no spiritual practice. I found this deeply challenging when she was dying, I didn't know how to console her. My mother was my greatest fan. She took an interest in everything I did, and thought I was wonderful, though a bit "oversensitive".

Do your sisters have the same image of her that you do?

We each had a different relationship with her. My younger sister, Laura, became close to her in the last few years because she helped her with finances online and they went to water aerobics together. My older sister, Carolyn, was her support person through her cancer journey, so their relationship was also very precious.

What about your relationship with your sisters?

My sisters and I have always been close, but grief brings up all the pain from the past. After my mother died, we had to work through childhood wounds we all carried. But we never fought over things or money. My mother hated conflict and always begged us, 'Please don't fight.' As an only child, who longed for a brother or sister, she instilled in us the appreciation

of having siblings. Perhaps my sisters and I have held onto that, what a privilege it is to have a friendship with someone you've grown up with. We've been a huge support to each other since she, and more recently our dad, passed away.

The ocean is such an important tool in your book. Why did you use it? What is its importance to you and your life? How does it fit into your story?

The vastness of the ocean helped me to keep moving forward. I felt lost in my grief, but the ocean held me, it made me feel part of all life, not "special". It forced me to stay afloat. It's also where I often "speak to the dead", when I'm far from shore with the enormity of the sea below me and the sky above me. It's my sacred praying place.

What has being separated from your original family been like for you over the years and how did you come to terms with it?

Emigration is a grief all of its own – I wrote a book about it, *When Hungry, Eat* in 2010. I don't think you ever come to terms with the distance, though you have to make peace with the decisions you've made. After she finished reading this book, my daughter messaged me to say she is grateful for the life we gave her in Sydney, and that sacrifice is unavoidable. Even though I carry a lot of guilt and grief for taking my kids away from my parents and family, she said she thought she and her brother gained something special from leaving. "Leaving made us the sort of people who find home in the people we love and carry it with us. Leaving made us the sort of people who want to come back."

What have been the most difficult times to be apart from your original family?

It's only been really rough through my mother's illness and then my father's. Because of COVID-19 I was with my mother when she died – I had to be in South Africa for three months – but I missed my father's death and funeral. These absences at a time when people I love need me weigh heavily on me.

What do you miss most about your mom and dad?

Really just chatting to them every day and having someone interested in every silly thing I do. I also miss my father's brilliance and the deep spiritual conversations we used to have.

What do you want others to take from your book?

I hope others feel able to process their own experiences of grief, even if they are very different from mine. Some people have to grieve the mothering they never had; others might not have had the chance to process the horrors of watching a parent die slowly; and at the end, I hope they will be inspired to go for a swim in a natural body of water!

How did you choose the name of the book?

Grief is universal, which is why it's "Bring Us" (not "Me"). It's a kind of incantation or prayer, asking G-d, spirit, the ocean to bring us home from sorrow. We all get lost in grief and need to find a way home.

This is a soul-baring book. How has bringing it to life made you feel?

My mother was a private person and I have felt guilty about trespassing on her privacy by writing this book, but the

responses from those who endorsed it, and readers, subsequently, has eased this. I just want others to feel held and seen in their grief. I hope this book is a mirror for people who wonder if they're doing grief "right".

How has being part of the Jewish community affected how you related to family, to grief, to love?

I really struggled with some of the Jewish rituals especially the exclusion from being allowed to say kaddish, and the swamping by the community during shiva. But there is deep wisdom in these ceremonies. My sisters and I also spent a morning decorating my mother's gravesite with shells and stones and succulents, and I found that deeply anchoring and meaningful. A friend told me that "attending to the gravesite" is the last duty we perform for a parent, and it is not a quid pro quo. It is done entirely out of love. I think as Jews, we carry so much grief and loss, and we are diligent about honouring our dead.



Joanne Fedler and her mother, Dorrine

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Not protest, but desecration



ABOVE BOARD
Karen Milner

This past week began, once again, with news that no community should have to absorb as routine. The firebombing of Kenton United Synagogue in northwest London, the third suspected arson attack on a Jewish site in the British capital within three days, following earlier incidents in Finchley and Hendon/Golders Green.

Let me be unambiguous: a synagogue is a house of worship. It is a place of prayer, of community, of children's laughter on a Shabbat morning. It is not a military installation. It is not a proxy for any government's foreign policy. No geopolitical framing, however elaborately constructed, constitutes a defence for firebombing it. Any attempt to provide such "context" is moral evasion, and we must refuse to accept it as anything else.

What we're witnessing with increasing frequency and little apology is one of antisemitism's most insidious modern forms: the collective punishment of Jews everywhere for the actions of the Israeli State.

This is not political critique. It is a libel with a very long history, dressed in the language of human rights and activism. But the logic is ancient and recognisable: Jews are uniquely evil. Jewish grief is suspicious. Jewish fear is performance. Jewish self-defence is criminal or aggressive.

The refusal by so many institutions, politicians, universities, and cultural figures to name this is a failure of moral clarity, and it carries consequences.

This is the same intellectual and moral corruption that underpins the Holocaust inversion trope, the conflation of Jews with the very perpetrators of the genocide against them. At last week's Yom HaShoah commemoration in Johannesburg, SA Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) Gauteng Chairperson Danny Mofowitz addressed this directly and with remarkable force. Her words deserve to be heard widely:

"Yom HaShoah demands clarity. And clarity, in our current moment, has become an act of resistance.

Something dangerous is happening across the world and in our country ... We are witnessing the deliberate distortion of one of humanity's darkest chapters. Not to honour the dead. But

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

to weaponise them against their very descendants."

Danny spoke of protesters gathering outside Holocaust centres in Johannesburg, Durban, and Cape Town, and of placards equating the Star of David with the swastika. She was right to call this what it is: not protest, but desecration.

Danny went on to conclude that there must be a moment when a society can say, "This is not negotiable." I could not agree more forcefully. That moment is not approaching, it is here, and it is demanded of us by the fires still smouldering in London.

A section of Danny's speech is available on the Board's social media platforms. I encourage every member of our community to watch it and to share it as broadly as possible.

This week also brought the full emotional arc of our communal calendar into sharp relief. On Monday night, we commemorated Yom Hazikaron with the solemnity and grief it demands. If Yom HaShoah teaches us about the catastrophic cost of powerlessness, of a people left entirely at the mercy of others, then Yom Hazikaron teaches us the cost of the state we were compelled to build. Both days carry a weight that does not lift easily. But they are balanced by Yom Ha'atzmaut, the celebration of our resilience and our declaration, renewed each year, that we are here, that we endure, that we will never again be powerless.

I wish to congratulate the South African Zionist Federation for its hosting of both Yom Hazikaron and Yom Ha'atzmaut this week. The events were moving, well-attended, and exactly what they needed to be, robust demonstrations of communal unity and pride.

In this spirit of fortitude, the SAJBD remains fully committed to confronting all forms of antisemitism in South Africa. If you witness or experience an antisemitic incident, I urge you to contact our reporting hotline at 078 259 4147. Our team is ready to provide swift support and response.

If I had a customer service line (Spoiler: I do)



INNER VOICE
Howard Feldman

Earlier this week on air, I asked listeners a simple question: If you had your own personal customer service line, what would people complain about most? The answers were honest. Occasionally brutal.

"Late replies". "Bad parking". "Selective hearing". "My tone". That last one came up a lot.

But as the messages came in, I had a slightly unsettling realisation. I don't need to imagine a complaints line because I already have one. It's not recorded "for quality purposes", although, for entertainment value alone, it probably should be.

So impressive is the volume that there are days it feels like I'm the unofficial complaints desk for members of the Jewish community. The range is extraordinary, from nursing issues at Linksfield Hospital to the price of kosher-for-Pesach food, which, to be fair, deserves its own regulatory body and possibly United Nations intervention.

Other days, I'm apparently handling overflow calls for Israel itself.

If an antisemite stumbles across a 2012 photo of a Syrian soldier kicking a dog, mislabelled "IDF brutally brutalises Brutus", there is every chance I will be summoned. I will be expected to clarify, contextualise, apologise, and, if possible, issue a statement for the attention of the Kempton Park SPCA, which has somehow been dragged into this narrative for reasons no one fully understands.

And on particularly ambitious days, I moonlight as the global Jewish affairs representative. For all of diaspora Jewry south of the equator.

If a Jew litters in Caulfield on the way to synagogue, I am expected to not only be aware of the incident, but to condemn it in the strongest possible terms. Because, naturally, Australian Jewry falls squarely within my jurisdiction. Which is fascinating because I don't remember being appointed. And have never even visited the island.

I have received no training, unless you count being born into a family with the dominant complaining gene. My paternal grandmother could have won Olympic gold if complaining were a sport. Judges would have scored her highly for consistency, volume, and facial expressions.

My complaints line has no escalation protocol. No helpful menu options. No "press 1 for geopolitics, 2 for synagogue politics, 3 for kosher establishments, 4 for the ANC, and 5 if the rabbi should have known you were ill and didn't even reach out once. Not even once. Which, frankly, after all you've done for him, and his family, is a disgrace."

In truth, there needs to be a rabbinical hotline.

"Why did he say what he said? Why didn't he say what he should have said? And mostly, surely, even if his wife isn't being paid, has six children under the age of four, and works a full day, she needs to entertain more frequently!"

The uncomfortable truth is that it isn't really about me. Or rabbis. Or restaurants. Or even Israel. It's about how we deal with complexity and things we don't like it. It's about feeling noticed and heard in a world that tends to look past those who are quiet.

Which is why we look for a number to call, to have someone answer, explain, and absorb our frustration.

Some complaints are valid. Some are even helpful. And some ... are just sport. But most of them reveal far more about the caller than the person answering. So yes, where my customer service line is open there is one small disclaimer: You may have reached a representative, just not the one responsible for everything you're upset about.

Stay on the line to rate our service.

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Aunt and niece are powerlifting champs

LEE TANKLE

Behind every one of Gila Smith and her aunt Sorah Garber's lifts at the South African Powerlifting Championships were years of discipline, setbacks, and determination. Their dedication paid off as they claimed victory in their divisions at the championships between 19 and 22 March.

"It was wonderful competing together with my niece. It made the competition so much more enjoyable," says Garber. They weren't competing against each other, as Garber won in the adult division, while Smith's achievement was in the sub-junior division.

"Competing next to my aunt made the atmosphere lighter and more relaxed," says Smith. "It's nice having someone close to me competing because we understand and support each other."

Garber, an electrical engineer, and Smith, a Grade 11 pupil at Hirsch Lyons, have been powerlifting for 10 and five years respectively, but never thought they would defend their respective titles at the South Africa Powerlifting Championships at the same time.

Garber says she was introduced to powerlifting a decade ago when her husband

read an article by the woman who would later become her coach. "He brought it to me to read because he knew I'd enjoy the way she cut through all the nonsense around women training. She had a gym in my area, so I went to find her to see about training there," she says.



Sorah Garber at the South African Powerlifting Championships

Garber thought it would be a fun way to push herself, so she threw herself into the sport.

She likes competing as she is always striving to do better than she did before. "Often when you're doing things, it's hard to see progress because it's always little by little. But here, the

numbers are the numbers, you either got it or you didn't. Some years the progress goes backwards, and your numbers aren't improving; they're going backwards, and you can't even get close to what you did before. But on the whole, when you see the numbers moving up, it's an amazing feeling."

Smith started training at a gym when she was 12, after her dad took her to his own training sessions. She immediately felt drawn to powerlifting as it was something different and which she could do with her family. Both her aunt and cousin have done powerlifting with her.

"It's such a different sport, and it was fun for me," Smith says. "At competitions, everyone's really friendly and always supporting each other because it's a small sport, so you know everyone. But also, when you try something repeatedly it can be disheartening, but then when you finally achieve your goal, it's more of an achievement. I really like that."

For Garber, though she has competed in and

won many South African championships before, this one felt special as she was in a different weight class, which meant that she competed against people she hadn't before.

"It was more competitive, and I didn't go into it knowing how it would go," said Garber. This fuelled her more, and she even broke the South African record for the bench press, at 95.5kg.

"For me, it was all about moving forward with my body. It's all about trying your best and just trying to be better than you are," she says.

Smith has been competing in the sub-junior division since 2022 and bench presses at a maximum of 100kg, squats 160kg, and deadlifts 170kg. She says when she heard she had become division champ, she was over the moon, because it meant all of her training had paid off – especially after a difficult training period where not everything had gone to plan.

"I was happy that I finally achieved this," she said. "It proved that my work in the gym paid off. I did two to three months of more intense training, focused only on the competition and not doing anything else, to ensure that I wasn't peaking in the gym for the competition. But for this competition, my training didn't go so well before. So, I was surprised when the day went very well."

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