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# South African Jewish Report

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## UN health advisor takes flotilla activists' side

NICOLA MILTZ

The South African United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on the Right to Health, Dr Tlaleng Mofokeng, has once again shown her Israel-hating colours by sticking her neck out on the anti-Israel flotilla saga.

The controversial rapporteur has demanded the release of two flotilla activists detained by Israel over alleged links to a Hamas-affiliated organisation sanctioned by the United States Treasury.

Mofokeng is understood to have spent time with the activists, Saif Abu Keshek and Thiago Ávila, during their visit to South Africa in February, with photographs circulating of them posing together.

Critics say that by publicly demanding the release of activists accused of links to a US-sanctioned Hamas front group, Mofokeng has blurred the line between human rights advocacy and political activism.

She has also recently been seen at anti-Israel gatherings alongside Gift of the Givers head Dr Imtiaz Sooliman, who publicly voiced his support for her and offered legal assistance, and vocal antizionist pastor Nigel Branken, adding to criticism of her growing proximity to outspoken anti-Israel figures.

Anne Herzberg, the legal advisor and UN representative of research institute NGO Monitor, said Mofokeng's actions were "highly improper and inconsistent" with the code of conduct governing special rapporteurs.

"Special rapporteurs are required to uphold international law standards. They are also required to investigate facts and act with impartiality. Mofokeng obviously did not do that and is instead exploiting her UN position for radical politics. The fact that she is head of the governing committee for rapporteurs is yet another stain on the credibility of the UN,"

Herzberg said.

The Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) also recently censured Mofokeng's public conduct.

She has demanded the release of Global Sumud Flotilla activists, describing their detention as unlawful and accusing Israel of "abduction".

Abu Keshek and Ávila were among more than 175 activists detained last week when the Israeli Navy intercepted the Gaza-bound flotilla heading to breach Israel's naval blockade. Most participants were released in Greece, but Abu Keshek, a Spanish national of Palestinian

origin, and Ávila, a Brazilian national, were taken to Israel for questioning.

Israeli authorities allege that Abu Keshek is a leading member of the Popular Conference for Palestinians Abroad (PCPA), which the US Treasury has accused of acting covertly on behalf of Hamas. Israel says Ávila operates with the PCPA and is suspected of illegal activity. The two appeared in court in Ashkelon on Sunday, where their detention was extended by two days, and again on Tuesday, when authorities requested a further extension, according to Adalah, the Israeli rights organisation

representing them. The two men are reportedly on a hunger strike.

In a statement, Mofokeng said Abu Keshek and Ávila "have been abducted by Israel and are being kept under unlawful detention. Being in international waters to deliver aid to Gaza is not a crime."

She accused Israel of acting with "impunity" and committing "illegal actions and violations of international law".

Her critics say it is further evidence that Mofokeng, who is expected in her UN role to uphold impartiality, restraint, and professionalism, has abandoned any pretence of neutrality when it comes to Israel.

Herzberg told the *SA Jewish Report*, "Israel is required to stop terror financing under international law. Since the flotilla members are suspected of terror involvement, Israel is acting in compliance with international law, while Mofokeng is encouraging action against international law."

Benji Shulman, director of the Middle East Africa Research Institute, said the situation highlighted "structural problems" within the UN, where autocratic states use their majority to support officials sympathetic to their agendas.

He said Mofokeng, whose mandate focuses on sexual and reproductive health, had instead involved herself in anti-Israel

Continued on page 3>>

## Keep the home fires burning



Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

Jews around the world celebrated Lag B'Omer this week. This photograph was taken at Johannesburg's Great Park Synagogue event, one of the many held at shuls across the country.

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# Human rights commission remains viable avenue for protection of Jewish community



GAVIN ROME

OPINION

The finding in the long-running litigation *South African Human Rights Commission versus Agro Data CC and Another* [2026] has confirmed that the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) doesn't possess binding remedial powers.

That is to say that its role is recommendatory and facilitative, not coercive. In plain terms, an offender has no obligation to comply with a commission directive to take corrective action, as it did with Johannesburg mayoral committee member Thapelo Amad, requesting him to apologise to our community for social media posts glorifying Hamas.

On paper, the court finding appears to cement the SAHRC's reputation as powerless, rendering it a futile destination for our community when our dignity and rights are impugned. There have been concerned mutterings about the supposed toothlessness of the commission and what this may mean for the future protection of our minority rights.

Those concerns are misplaced. Our constitutional sky has not fallen, nor have the horizons of minority protection been reduced.

Judicial finality on the question of whether the commission's directives are binding is only one important feature of the judgment.

Acting Constitutional Court Justice Caroline Nicholls, in a passage that deserves to be widely read, stressed that recognising the absence of binding remedial powers "does not diminish the constitutional importance of the SAHRC or render its work ineffectual". On the contrary, the court held, "The SAHRC is far from toothless."

That is exactly right.

The commission's influence lies in its investigative powers, its support of litigation, its shaping of public conduct, its informing of public debate, and its exertion of "normative pressure on organs of state and private actors alike". In short, the SAHRC remains a powerful constitutional actor because it performs a distinctive function in our democracy.

For the South African Jewish Board of Deputies

(SAJBD), that is not alarming. It is consistent with the Board's understanding of the role and function of the commission. The Board has never relied on the SAHRC because it imagined it to be a court by another name. It has relied on it because it is a serious constitutional institution that can investigate complaints, identify rights violations, and, where necessary, help carry a matter into litigation.



Lawyers from the Masuku case in discussion at a SAJBD conference

*South African Human Rights Commission on behalf of South African Jewish Board of Deputies versus Masuku and Another 2022 (4) SA 1 (CC)* illustrates the point plainly. In that matter, the SAHRC acted on behalf of the Board in litigation concerning hate speech directed at the Jewish community. The SAHRC did not remain on the

sidelines. It took up the complaint and pursued relief in court.

That is how constitutional protection often works in practice. A complaint is lodged. A constitutional institution investigates it, makes findings and recommendations, and, if those are ignored, the matter is then taken to a court that can grant binding relief. The fact that the Human Rights Commission cannot itself make final orders doesn't diminish the significance of its place in that process.

For minority communities like ours, that role is vital. In a constitutional democracy, minorities are entitled to insist that their place in the constitutional order is protected against discrimination and hate. Jewish life in this country depends in part on the strength of that order and on the willingness of institutions to uphold it.

The SAJBD has long regarded the SAHRC as a constitutional pillar in the work of enabling Jewish life in South Africa. The Constitutional Court judgment is consistent with that view. When Jewish rights are threatened by the storms of hate, the SAHRC remains one of the constitutional means by which protection and redress may be pursued.

Gavin Rome is a senior counsel. He writes this article as a board member of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies.

## Is anything okay here?

Have you heard the one about the waiter at the kosher restaurant, going around to the tables asking patrons, "Is anything okay here?"

It plays into a familiar stereotype, that of the eternally dissatisfied Jew, always finding something to kvetch about. Yet there is a hidden virtue in that dissatisfaction. It keeps us driven, innovative, and constantly searching for growth and improvement. It is the drive that has developed the creativity and tenacity that have allowed us, as a people, to punch far above our weight, contributing to humanity in so many ways and achieving excellence in so many spheres.

Still, like all traits, it is worth asking: Is it always a good thing?

In the second parsha we read this week, Bechukotai, Hashem promises us great blessings "if you walk in My statutes". Among the rewards listed is an abundance of produce. The land will yield generously, the vines will be full, and the seasons will overlap in a way that ensures continuous plenty.

Then we read an interesting phrase, "Vachaltem lachmechem l'sova", "You will eat your bread to satisfaction." At first glance, "to satisfaction" seems redundant. If there is so much abundance, of course we will be satisfied. If the seasons of abundance roll one into another, surely there will be nothing wanting. But perhaps, as with every seeming redundancy in the biblical text, there is something deeper here, a broader blessing and lesson that the Torah is

conveying.

We can suggest that the earlier part of the verse speaks of quantity, the blessing that there will be plenty, a never-ending supply that the land will produce. But *l'sova* introduces a different kind of blessing, quality, the ability to be content and truly feel full and satisfied. Because, let's face it, just having more does not always mean we feel satisfied. The blessing is not just in what we have, it is in our ability to appreciate it. So many have so much and yet are constantly dissatisfied.

And here lies the personal message of *l'sova*, that we should not always live with the instinct to ask, "Is anything okay here?"

## Torah Thought

**Rabbi Pini Hecht**  
Marais Road Shul



Rather, we should be able to look at what Hashem has given us and say, "Yes. This is more than okay. This is enough. This is a *brachah*." While we do not want to silence the drive to innovate, create, and contribute, we also want to cultivate the ability to be grateful for what we have and what we have achieved.

May Hashem bless us all with abundance, both in quantity and in quality, and may we merit to truly feel satisfied with our lot.

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# Fear – too familiar for SA Jews in London

CLAUDIA GROSS

When a stabbing attack unfolded on Golders Green Road last week, panic spread quickly through one of London's best-known Jewish neighbourhoods. Police sealed off parts of the road. Jewish-owned shops shut their doors. Parents frantically called children and relatives. WhatsApp groups exploded with warnings to stay inside.

For many South African Jews living in London, it was the moment fear stopped feeling abstract.

"Can people please stop trying to kill Jews right by my work?" said Rachel\*, who works close to where the attack took place. "It's really bringing the workplace vibe down and then I have to deal with my mom messaging me to see if I'm alive."

Comedian Claudine Ullman said conversations in the Jewish community have become darker and more urgent. "Living as a Jew in London right now is, quite honestly, bloody unsettling," she said.

The stabbing was another of the antisemitic incidents that have shaken Britain's Jews in recent weeks. There have been arson attacks linked to Jewish sites and on a Jewish-owned ambulance service, and threats against Jewish institutions.

"Things that should be simple and ordinary suddenly aren't," said Ullman. "Parents are thinking about security in schools in ways we never imagined we would. I find myself asking questions no parent should have to ask, like whether my child can safely wear a *kippah* on the way to school."

For Ullman, who grew up in South Africa, the emotional shift has been particularly jarring. "I grew up in South Africa, where conversations about safety were part of daily life," she said.

"When I experienced being hijacked at gunpoint, the question everyone asked afterwards was, 'Where are you going?' Meaning, where are you going to move to feel safe? What is so shocking now is hearing that same question again, but for a completely different reason."

She said conversations among Jewish Londoners increasingly revolve around escape plans and second passports. "Where are you going? Where could you go? What passport do you have? That shift is deeply unsettling," she said.

Amy Lazarus, a Johannesburg-born mother living in Golders Green, said the recent violence had hit close to home in the most literal sense. "When something happens literally down the road from your house, you do feel more vulnerable," she said.

The two men were stabbed on roads her family use daily. "It's a route that my children and I walk all

the time. My kids walk there to get ice cream from the shops."

Lazarus described the atmosphere after the stabbing as surreal. "A lot of the Jewish shops were closed," she said. "Most of Golders Green Road was blocked off because it was a crime scene."

She said the police presence in the area increased dramatically. "They've definitely stepped things up. There are more patrols and much more security present."

Though community members gathered for a pro-Israel rally shortly after the attack, Lazarus said the mood underneath the singing and solidarity was tense. "The vibe of the rally was uplifting and positive, but the actual feel of the day was dampened."

Josh\*, who has South African parents but was born and raised in London, described watching antisemitism intensify online and on the streets. "The cycle is:

people hate Jews because we're evil, they try to attack us, it gets on the news, people think we get too much media attention because we run it, they get angry, they hate Jews because we're evil, they try to attack us," he said. "Throw in some hate of Israel and blaming people outside Israel for the government's actions, and you've got a real societal issue."

Rabbi Naftali Schiff, head of educational organisation Jewish Futures, said the attacks have shocked him. "There was an implied personal threat against me," he said.

Schiff said he had never imagined he would witness this level of hostility in the UK. "My grandfather served in the British army in World War I, my father served in World War II, and I went to school and university here," he said. "It's a very civil and polite society. Extremism resorting to violence in this way is very shocking and saddening."

But Schiff warned against allowing terror to dictate Jewish life. "The definition of terror is exactly that. It strikes terror. But I don't think one can live in fear. That is exactly what terror wants."

He said he still wears a *kippah* in public and refuses to hide his Jewish identity. "We're a generation that vowed never again," he said. "Part of never again is that we will stand tall and proud."

Still, even those determined not to retreat acknowledge that the emotional toll is mounting. Ullman said, "That reality is exhausting. It is frightening. And it is deeply sad that something so core to who we are can feel like a risk."

Some Jewish Londoners have started changing daily routines. Others avoid public transport, remove Jewish symbols like *kippot* and Magen David jewellery, or think carefully before speaking Hebrew in public.

According to people interviewed for this article,

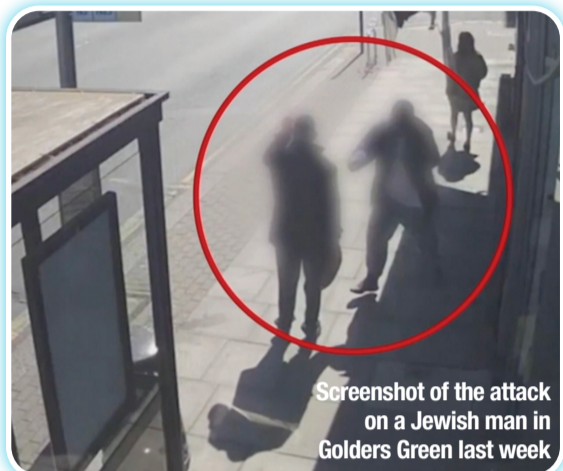
parents are increasingly worried about children travelling to Jewish schools, while synagogues and communal organisations have tightened security. Schiff said organisations now work closely with security groups and police before events or trips.

Yet both Schiff and Lazarus stressed that fear has not stopped communal life. Following the Golders Green attack, thousands gathered across London for Lag B'Omer celebrations. "There were huge bonfires and gatherings," Lazarus said. "Everyone was out. No one was afraid to appear Jewish, to behave Jewish, and to celebrate."

At the same time, many Jews say they feel abandoned by parts of wider society. Several people interviewed described feeling that antisemitism is minimised, excused, or quickly politicised.

Rachel said, "I feel like people are waiting for Jews to die before they take antisemitism seriously." Others spoke about a growing sense of isolation since the start of the Israel-Hamas war.

Ullman said she tries not to contribute to the anger consuming social media. "I am not interested in pretending everything is fine. It isn't," she said. "But I also don't believe that amplifying fear or anger alone is what moves us forward."



Screenshot of the attack on a Jewish man in Golders Green last week

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"For me, the response is to keep showing up with honesty, with humanity, and with content that educates, builds understanding, and reflects the depth and richness of Jewish life," she said.

Schiff believes Britain still has the ability to confront the problem, but warned that extremism must be challenged directly. "People need to be taught to debate and enter dialogue, not to resort to violence."

He warned that antisemitism is often a sign of deeper societal fractures. "The Jews are often the canary in the coalmine," he said. "If that alarm is ignored, it doesn't bode well for any part of society."

For now, many South African Jews in London remain caught between fear and defiance. Parents still send children to Jewish schools. Synagogues remain full. Restaurants and kosher shops continue trading. But beneath that determination lies an anxiety that many say they have not experienced before.

\*Sources have requested anonymity for security reasons.

## UN health advisor takes flotilla activists' side

>>Continued from page 1

activism. "Her engagement with the flotilla is another example of her operating outside her mandate while undermining the work she is supposed to be doing," he said.

Israel's Foreign Ministry alleged that Abu Keshk "serves as a liaison between senior Hamas officials and international actors" and "assists the terrorist organisation in facilitating financial transfers". It said he had previously been arrested in Egypt and deported in June 2025, and had faced questioning in Tunisia in connection with money laundering and financial irregularities.

The US Treasury sanctioned the PCPA in January 2026, accusing it of being part of Hamas's covert support network. It said Hamas's use of civilian organisations endangered Palestinians and undermined legitimate humanitarian efforts.

Mofokeng's call for the activists' release comes weeks after the South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) formally lodged a complaint with UN Secretary-General António Guterres regarding her conduct.

The complaint followed a ruling by the HPCSA, which found Mofokeng guilty of unprofessional conduct, including the use of abusive and inappropriate language on social media, and behaviour that brought the medical profession into disrepute. A financial penalty was imposed in terms of the Health Professions Act.

In its complaint to the UN, the SAZF argued that Mofokeng's conduct was incompatible with the standards expected of a United Nations mandate-holder.

"The United Nations cannot demand integrity from the world while turning a blind eye to conduct that erodes its own credibility," SAZF National Chairperson Craig

Pantanowitz said. "This isn't about politics – it's about standards. When a UN Special Rapporteur is formally censured by her own professional body for misconduct, it raises serious questions about her fitness for such a role."

"The position of Special Rapporteur carries both influence and responsibility," Pantanowitz said. "It requires fairness, discipline, and a commitment to truth. Where those standards are repeatedly breached, there must be accountability."

Mofokeng has long been a lightning rod for controversy. In January 2025, she caused outrage after posting "F\*\*k you Netanyahu" in response to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and later attacked UN Watch Executive Director Hillel Neuer with racially charged and abusive language after he called for UN action against her.

Neuer has been one of her fiercest critics. This week, he again condemned her continued role in the UN system, writing on X, "Meet Tlaleng Mofokeng, UN Rapporteur on health. She promoted prostitution in Teen Vogue, and calls her opponents 'evil scum white man'. She was recently found guilty by South Africa of bringing the medical profession into disrepute. Yet the UN still keeps her on."

He added, "The UN Human Rights Council is so twisted that racist lunatic Tlaleng Mofokeng, an open supporter of Hamas, was made Chair of the UN committee that oversees all of the UN human rights rapporteurs. I am not making this up."

Mofokeng's defenders have previously argued that criticism of her is politically motivated and intended to silence criticism of Israel. However, critics say the issue is not legitimate criticism of Israeli policy, but a sustained pattern of inflammatory, one-sided, and abusive conduct unbecoming of a UN official.

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# Writers called out for backing Coetzee's Israel boycott

TALI FEINBERG

The same South African writers' organisation that railed against "censorship" of the antizionist colouring book *From the River to the Sea* is now backing the boycott of an Israeli literary festival.

The National Writers Association of South Africa (NWSA) released a statement on 3 May expressing its support for South African Nobel laureate JM Coetzee's boycott of the 14th International Writers Festival, set to take place in Jerusalem at the end of May.

NWSA Secretary-General Dr Lebogang Lance Nawa said, "Professor Coetzee's refusal [to attend the festival] is a principled act of conscience." It is "not a rejection of dialogue", but a "challenge to the conditions under which dialogue is asked to take place".

NWSA said that boycotting the festival in Israel is "firmly aligned with South Africa's foreign policy principles, reflected in the country's decision to pursue legal recourse against Israel".

Coetzee, who now lives in and is a citizen of Australia, turned down the invitation because of what he called Israel's "genocide" in Gaza. Nawa said that by supporting Coetzee's stance, "NWSA echoes the same commitment to justice, accountability, and the rule of law that underpins South Africa's global posture."

NWSA represents approximately 700

writers in Southern Africa and the South African diaspora, and works to advance writers' rights and develop literature.

It said Coetzee's boycott "calls on all of us to reflect on the ethical implications of our participation in global forums".

An expert on hate speech and free speech, advocate Mark Oppenheimer says "a growing chorus insists that South Africans should support the government's stance against Israel, simply because it is official policy, and that doing so is somehow patriotic".

However, that view mistakes loyalty to the state for loyalty to a particular administration, says Oppenheimer. "In a vibrant democracy, citizens are entitled to scrutinise and criticise their government's

Fermentto-Tzaisler responded by saying that his term "murderous provocations" wasn't appropriate for the events of 7 October given that " Hamas terrorists planned this massacre for more than five years, for their genocidal mission – to kill Jews".

She told Coetzee that 7 October was "an expression of a jihadist ideology that sees the very presence of Jews as intolerable, and something to be fought with absolute and uncompromising violence. As a South African writer who fought apartheid, I would have expected – or perhaps dreamed – that you would extend a hand to me, that you would say to me, 'Fight, my daughter. Do not stop fighting.'"

for dialogue into platforms for selective outrage and exclusion. Israel and Jewish writers are increasingly targeted. This is discrimination."

The NWSA statement "distorts the truth and contributes to a climate of misinformation that corrodes the integrity literature is meant to uphold. Using literature and the arts as a boycott cudgel is also anathema to literature itself. Writers and festivals aren't representatives of governments, nor should they be excluded because of their nationality."

Cultural boycotts don't advance peace or justice, says Ingel. "They shut down conversation, harden divisions, and silence the very voices literature exists to elevate."

At a time of deep global fracture and rising anti-Jewish hatred, "the responsibility of literary institutions is clear: open doors", says Ingel. "Shamefully, NWSA has chosen to close them."

South African Zionist Federation National Chairperson Craig Pantanowitz says there is a "glaring contradiction" at the heart of NWSA's statement. "An organisation that declares 'silence is complicity' has, by its own conduct, chosen when to speak and when to look away," he says. "NWSA's platforms are saturated with one-sided content, including aligning with the GUPW and participating in Al Quds Day, yet there is a deafening silence on the 7 October massacre of Israeli civilians."

Just as striking is how little of NWSA's focus is directed at South Africa itself, says Pantanowitz. For a body that claims to represent South African writers, "its public output is overwhelmingly dominated by 'Palestine', with minimal attention to local literary and societal issues".

This raises "serious questions about whose voices are being amplified and whose are being sidelined".

NWSA presents itself as grounded in human rights and moral clarity, "yet it adopts contested claims as fact, while aligning openly with a particular political agenda", Pantanowitz says. "Human rights are not selective. They either apply to everyone, or they mean very little. What we are seeing here is not principled consistency, but advocacy shaped by omission and contradiction."



The National Writers Association of South Africa and the General Union of Palestinian Writers signing a 'partnership' in 2024

positions, both at home and abroad, especially where those positions are incoherent or are pursued for questionable ends."

NWSA signed a "cultural partnership" with the General Union of Palestinian Writers (GUPW) in 2024, which "symbolically links South Africa's national liberation history with the contemporary struggles of Palestinians". The two organisations signed a declaration called "From Cape to Gaza", which "affirms the enduring role of writers as agents of resistance and conscience", and draws parallels between "apartheid South Africa and present-day Palestine".

According to International Writers Festival director Julia Fermentto-Tzaisler, Coetzee said he was refusing the invitation because Israel's war on Gaza is "disproportionate to the 'murderous provocations' that took place on 7 October". He said the war has "received enthusiastic support from most of the Israeli public" and so Israeli society "shares in the guilt".

Fermentto-Tzaisler told Coetzee, "Writers and literature have a role, and it is not to remain silent or disappear."

Eight international writers confirmed they would attend the festival, which will close with an event honouring released hostage Eli Sharabi, who will speak about his book, *Hostage*.

The Creative Community for Peace (CCFP) Literary Alliance is a coalition of leaders in the literary industry committed to educating about rising antisemitism and countering the cultural boycott of Israel.

Speaking to the *SA Jewish Report* on behalf of the CCFP Literary Alliance, Ari Ingel said the organisation is deeply troubled by NWSA's embrace of cultural boycotts, and its support for scapegoating Israel and excluding Israeli voices from the global literary community.

"Literature and the arts are powerful cultural bridges," says Ingel. "Yet increasingly, literary institutions are losing their plot, turning spaces meant

## Hostage-march firebombing suspect to plead guilty

The man charged with firebombing a Boulder, Colorado, march for Israeli hostages in 2025 will plead guilty to killing one person and attempting to kill others, according to documents filed in the case on the weekend.

Mohamed Sabry Soliman, who was arrested at the scene of the 1 June 2025 attack, is asking for his ex-wife and children to be able to remain in the United States as a condition of his guilty plea, according to the documents.

Immigrations officials arrested his ex-wife and five children, like him all Egyptian nationals who came to the United States in 2022 via Kuwait, shortly after the attack. They were held until Thursday, when they were released from a detention centre in Texas, then briefly detained again on Saturday in Boulder and, their attorneys say, put onto a plane bound for Egypt before being freed once again. His ex-wife, whom Soliman divorced in April, has not been charged with a crime and said she did not know about his planned attack.

Soliman is reportedly pleading guilty to all state charges, but still faces federal charges in relation to the attack, which he allegedly said he staged to "kill all Zionist people", according to an earlier court filing. He has previously pleaded not guilty to the federal charges, for which prosecutors could seek the death penalty. Thirteen people were wounded in the firebombing, which took place on a pedestrian mall in downtown Boulder. One, 82-year-old Karen Diamond, died weeks later of her injuries.



Bomb squads set up a staging area following an incident that the FBI is investigating as an act of terror on 1 June 2025 in Boulder, Colorado

## Pulitzer Prize awarded to Palestinian photographer

A photographer for *The New York Times* working in Gaza has been awarded the 2025 Pulitzer Prize for photography.

The prize committee said it was honouring Saher Alghorra "for his haunting, sensitive series showing the devastation and starvation in Gaza resulting from the war with Israel".

One of Alghorra's front-page pictures, published in July 2025, showed an emaciated boy being cradled by his mother, becoming a symbol of the hunger crisis in the territory – and a target of criticism by those, including the Israeli government, who rejected the claim that Gaza Palestinians were starving because of the Israeli military campaign.

*The New York Times* subsequently altered the story to note that the boy suffered from a medical condition that inhibited muscle development, and removed a quote from his mother saying that he had been healthy before the war began on 7 October 2023.

The photographs for which Alghorra was recognised include snapshots of Gazans queuing for food, bringing wounded children for medical care, and marking Ramadan inside bombed buildings. They also include a picture of a different emaciated child who became a face of the hunger crisis without attracting the same specific criticism.

Alghorra, 28, did not immediately comment online on the Pulitzer, but he wrote on Instagram after winning a different prize, the World Press Photo Award, last month for a similar set of images.

"My heart is heavy with what I have witnessed – and what I was compelled to photograph: lives lost, lives shattered, displacement, hunger, total destruction, and relentless suffering," he wrote. "Each image in this series carries the weight of what we have lived through. The images – and the screams – are engraved in me."

Palestinian American author Hala Alyan's book *I'll Tell You When I'm Home: A Memoir*, which interweaves Alyan's story of infertility with her family's story of displacement, was a finalist in the memoir and autobiography category.

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# Mendelsohn's lecture raises urgent questions about Jewish future

CLAUDIA GROSS

Students at the University of Cape Town (UCT) are concealing their Jewish identity and reporting experiences of exclusion and hostility on campus.

That was one of the stark realities Professor Adam Mendelsohn spoke of in his inaugural lecture at UCT on 29 April, in which he questioned whether Jews can still feel fully at home in institutions.

"What is happening in societies and institutions where they once felt most at home?" he said, describing Jews' growing sense of uncertainty in places long associated with belonging.

He told the audience that some Jewish students concealed their school background or religious identity to avoid hostility. "I have heard plenty examples ... of being excluded and targeted," he said. Students were concealing "clothing and jewellery that could visibly mark them as Jewish", a sign of how everyday behaviour has changed.

For Mendelsohn, these experiences are part of a broader pattern. He described a growing expectation that Jews declare political positions, particularly on Israel, and face consequences if they do not.

"Are Jews required to conform to the dictates and expectations of others?" he said. He described this as "coerced speech", saying Jews are increasingly expected to take positions publicly "lest they be classed as bad Jews or, even worse, Zionists".

He argued that such demands are not applied to other groups. Instead, they reflect a deeper uncertainty about

whether Jews can remain fully accepted in institutions where they once felt at home.

"Has a golden age of Jewish life ended?" Mendelsohn said, suggesting that assumptions about security and acceptance may no longer hold.

That question carries particular weight at UCT. Mendelsohn traced a long history of Jewish belonging at the university, where Jewish students were welcomed at a time when universities elsewhere imposed quotas or exclusions.

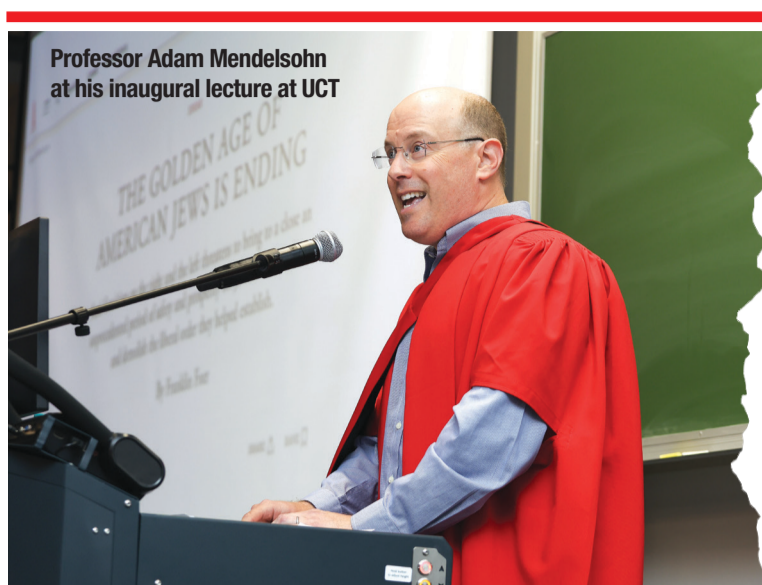
In 1928, then Vice-Chancellor Sir John Carruthers Beattie stated that there would be no discrimination against Jews at the institution. That commitment helped make UCT a place of opportunity for Jewish immigrants and their children. For many families, the university became a pathway to social mobility. Mendelsohn described how access to education transformed lives within a single generation. "Here was the transformative power of the university," he said.

That history, he suggested, makes the present moment more significant. "How times have changed."

Mendelsohn linked current tensions to wider developments in South Africa and globally. He pointed to a resurgence of antisemitism in public discourse, including the reappearance of long-standing tropes.

"The sensation is like that of a palaeontologist transported to Jurassic Park," he said. "We are seeing alive in the wild what we assumed only lived on in textbooks"

At the same time, Jewish concerns about antisemitism are often dismissed. Mendelsohn referred to claims made



Professor Adam Mendelsohn at his inaugural lecture at UCT

within UCT that Jews "instrumentalise claims of antisemitism". He questioned whether similar claims would be made about other groups. "The real problem ... is not one of definitions, but of hate. Can you imagine the same being said for other forms of prejudice?"

Mendelsohn also pointed to what he described as inconsistent institutional responses. He referred to recent controversies at the university, including the decision to award an honorary doctorate to Dr Imtiaz Sooliman of Gift of the Givers.

While acknowledging Sooliman's humanitarian work, Mendelsohn suggested that the reaction to the award highlighted a growing sense among some Jewish stakeholders that their concerns aren't taken seriously. He placed this within a broader pattern of responses that, in his

view, have failed to engage meaningfully with Jewish anxiety about antisemitism and exclusion.

These concerns unfold against the backdrop of a broader dispute between Mendelsohn and UCT over governance and academic freedom. Legal proceedings and public debate have brought increased scrutiny to the institution.

At the same time, Mendelsohn emphasised, the Jewish community in South Africa is becoming smaller and less visible. The population has declined from 118 000 in 1970 to about 50 000 today, largely due to emigration. "That absence matters," he said.

With fewer everyday interactions between Jews and the wider population, misunderstandings can deepen and prejudice can go unchallenged. Research by the Kaplan Centre, which Mendelsohn

heads, shows a surge in antisemitic content on social media since 2024. He described much of this material as crude and widely normalised.

This content ... escapes comment, criticism, and moderation," he said, noting how it increasingly moves from online spaces into real-world behaviour.

Although South Africa has not seen the levels of antisemitic violence reported elsewhere, he said the current climate has created anxiety and heightened vigilance within Jewish communities. "None of this is normal," he said, referring to the need for security at Jewish institutions and the climate of fear reported by some students.

The university's response to his lecture was restrained. Vice-Chancellor Professor Mosa Moshabela spoke about scholarship, dialogue, and the importance of reflecting on identity and belonging.

However, he didn't address concerns about antisemitism on campus. He didn't offer assurances to Jewish students or staff about their place at the university. The contrast was clear. Mendelsohn's lecture focused on uncertainty, vulnerability, and pulled no punches. The institutional response remained general.

By the end of the lecture, Mendelsohn returned to his central question. Jewish history, he said, is marked by cycles of acceptance and exclusion.

"The unanticipated reappearance of the Jewish question" is now part of public discourse again, echoing debates that many believed had been settled after World War II. "What does the future hold?" he asked. For those listening, the question was no longer theoretical. It was immediate.

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# South African Jewish Report

## Fighting antisemitism

"They came to kill us because we are Jews. Knowing this, it makes it really hard to feel safe as a Jew in Australia." These are the words of Dina Bloom, who is married to a South African expat, Greg, in evidence before the Royal Commission on Antisemitism and Social Cohesion in Australia this week.

"I make sure my children don't wear Magen Davids or Chais when they walk out of our house in London. They dare not show they are Jewish because I cannot protect them from those who hate us," said an expat South African mother who emigrated 20 years ago. "We moved to England because we didn't want to deal with crime in South Africa, and now we live with more fear"

These are just two Jewish women in two countries where Jews have felt safe for many decades. It is heartbreaking and devastating to hear them speak. And they are not alone.

The scourge of antisemitism has grown and continues to grow around the world in a way that most of us never imagined. We are truly living in a different world to the one we thought we were living in before 7 October 2023.

In South Africa, we are extremely fortunate that our lives have been altered far less. However, we dare not be lulled into a false sense of security.

The point is, though, that despite what we are witnessing and experiencing around the world, there are still many people in our own backyard who deny antisemitism exists and continue to perpetuate it.

We have people who do what they can, particularly on social media, to prove that Jews cry "antisemitism" all the time when it doesn't exist. What's more, we apparently do it only when it suits us.

In a recent article, a person who has made it his business to attack the *SA Jewish Report*, and by extension our community, claims the latter.

He uses the recent destruction of the Rafi Niya Synagogue in Tehran as an example, which he believed we would otherwise have called antisemitism, but didn't.

The shul was hit by an Israeli-United States missile early one morning during the Pesach week and there was substantial damage. What is clear is that nobody was aiming for the shul, and it was what Israel called "collateral damage" in the war.

I am sure the Iranian Jewish community was extremely upset and angry. Who wouldn't be? I don't blame them. However, while it doesn't justify the damage, ugly things like this happen in war and, thank G-d, nobody was harmed.

While we published an article about Rafi Niya Synagogue, it was written for and by the international Jewish news service Jewish Telegraphic Agency, to whom we and most Jewish publications worldwide subscribe.

However, to make this article and awful incident an issue of antisemitism is outrageous. Yes, when synagogues around the world are purposefully attacked because it is where Jewish people pray, it is antisemitic. I would be hard-pressed to find another reason for attacking Jews and their places of prayer.

But I find it unbelievable that in this day and age, when around the world we are witnessing such blatant antisemitism, people still choose to find ways to refute it or to turn it around and make it the fault of the Jews.

For those people who find their way to blaming Jews for antisemitism, there is a name for what they do. It's called victim blaming and it has a long and ugly history in antisemitism. So, blame the Jews for being hated because that hatred is only a reaction to our own behaviour. That way it is easy to hate Jews because we apparently brought it upon ourselves and therefore we deserve it.

So, if you claim that everything Israel does is evil, it is easy to justify antisemitism that way. Of course, you are going to hate those you have built, in your head, into genocidal maniacs.

I am so weary of people who claim they are not antisemites but simply replace the word "Jew" in their hateful sentences with "Zionist". It is true there are a number of outspoken Jewish antizionists, who love telling people, "We are Jews, but ..." However, most Jews in the world support the right of the Jewish State to exist and to defend itself. Not every Jew supports the present Israeli government. In any given year or time, many Jews are critical of elements of what the government of the day does. I have many criticisms, but without question I and most Jews in the world want Israel to survive and thrive.

While I don't have a say in what the Israeli government does, I am integrally linked emotionally, psychologically, and in other ways to the State of Israel. I also don't have to agree with what the government does. Much like I am entitled to my opinion on how the government of South Africa rules. I can criticise it as much as I want, but I still want South Africa to survive and thrive. No different.

There is such a big difference however between demonising Israel and the Israeli people and being critical of the government or a policy or a number of policies.

Those who demonise Israel aren't critical minds who believe in human rights. They aren't good people who see the wrong in the world and want to make it right. They aren't decent people. They are antisemites. They want to be rid of Israel and the Jews who live in it – and they have been openly against South African Jews who are intrinsically Zionist.

In South Africa, we are so fortunate to have a close-knit community that is extraordinarily self-contained, with CAP, CSO, Hatzolah, the Chev, and so many other organisations that look after us.

There are times that, as Jews do, we argue and disagree with one another. That is okay. Like any good dysfunctional close family, we don't all agree. It is our nature not to do so.

However, we need to stick together and work together to prevent those cracks becoming crevasses. I don't have to agree with you, and I can be vocal about it, but we are still siblings, and we need to work together against our real enemies. We all have our strengths and weaknesses, but our biggest strength is our bond with each other.

**Shabbat Shalom!**

**Peta Krost**  
Editor



## Can Bennett-Lapid 2.0 deliver lasting change?

OPINION

PAULA SLIER



We've seen this moment before in Israeli politics. Two former prime ministers, Naftali Bennett and Yair Lapid, are once again trying to redraw the map, this time by joining forces in what is being presented as a serious attempt to consolidate the opposition and offer a credible alternative to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

The question is whether this is the political alignment that can finally challenge his dominance, or whether it will follow the path of so many previous efforts that began with momentum and ended in fragmentation.

The last time Bennett and Lapid joined forces was in 2021, when they did the almost impossible by forming a broad eight-party coalition also aimed at unseating Netanyahu. That government successfully passed Israel's first budget in years and served for 18 months before ultimately collapsing under the weight of internal defections and persistent ideological friction.

This time round, much of the messaging is familiar, but the context is different. Observers point out that while the anti-Netanyahu camp may be able to win a moment, history has shown it cannot necessarily govern the country.

On paper, Bennett and Lapid's new alliance, called Together, or Beyachad in Hebrew, looks viable, with some polls suggesting it could become one of the country's largest political parties. Unlike the last time, when the two had a rotation leadership agreement, with Bennett first and Lapid later, Bennett is now clearly in charge from the outset. This creates less ambiguity and may help avoid past instability, but it also risks alienating parts of Lapid's base.

Israeli politics is also not won on paper. It's won in the arithmetic of coalition-building, where the largest party doesn't necessarily form the government, and where 61 seats matter more than headlines, slogans, or launch events in Herzliya. It's increasingly unclear whether the Arab Ra'am party would again be part of such a coalition, as it was in 2021. That move was historic and deeply controversial. In the current climate, such a configuration seems unlikely, and without Ra'am it isn't clear the alliance can reach the 61-seat threshold.



Naftali Bennett and Yair Lapid during a press conference announcing their new party

Bennett is also one of the few figures capable of drawing support from Netanyahu's traditional base, but that cuts both ways. If miscalculated, it could split the right-wing vote rather than consolidate it, complicating the opposition's path to a majority.

Bennett and Lapid – even if they succeed in strengthening their own position – still depend on a wider bloc that remains fractured. Smaller parties on both the right and in the centre have their own ambitions, their own red lines, and their own reasons not to disappear into a larger political framework. Israeli politics rewards survival, not sacrifice. The very system Bennett and Lapid are trying to navigate makes it difficult for smaller players to step aside, even when unity might serve a broader goal. That is why consolidation sounds simple in theory, but

proves far harder in practice.

Beyond that, the role of traditional kingmakers cannot be ignored. Ultra-Orthodox parties have historically aligned themselves with Netanyahu, and there is little indication that this will shift easily. This further limits the room for manoeuvre for any alternative coalition.

Bennett and Lapid aren't natural political partners. Bennett comes from the right. He's religious, hawkish on security, and speaks to voters who, while they may be deeply uncomfortable with Netanyahu, aren't looking for a left-wing alternative. Lapid is secular, centrist, and more naturally at home among middle-class liberal voters. Their partnership isn't ideological in the pure sense. It is practical. It is strategic. It is designed to say to Israelis: we are different enough to reach different voters, but disciplined enough to govern together.

Importantly, Israel today is different from what it was in 2021. After 7 October, Israelis are angrier, more wounded, more suspicious of their leaders, and far less patient with political theatre. The real question is not only whether Bennett and Lapid can topple Netanyahu, but whether they can convince Israelis that this time their alliance can survive the pressures that broke it before. Toppling Netanyahu is not the same as replacing him with a stable alternative. Can the two turn opposition into leadership? Are they offering something more than simply being the alternative to Netanyahu? These are the questions on which this alliance will stand or fall.

Netanyahu's strength has always been his narrative. He understands fear. He understands history. He understands how to present himself as the indispensable man in a dangerous region. Even his opponents have often found themselves reacting to his framing rather than setting their own. But 7 October weakened Netanyahu's most powerful claim that only he could keep Israel safe, and deepened the demand for accountability. Bennett has said he would establish a state commission of inquiry into the failures of 7 October if elected, something Netanyahu has so far resisted. That gives the new alliance a sharper political and moral edge than it had before.

On security, Gaza, Iran, and the Palestinians, the differences between Bennett, Lapid, and Netanyahu may be less dramatic than outside observers assume. Bennett isn't offering a soft alternative to Netanyahu. In some areas, he is firmly to the right. Lapid may change the tone, but he is unlikely to reshape Israel's security doctrine overnight. If this election is fought purely on policy, the distinctions may blur. If it is fought on leadership, trust, and accountability, the alliance is

on stronger ground. Bennett and Lapid may reshape the race. Their alliance may even, for the first time in years, seriously threaten Netanyahu's hold on power. But Israeli politics has a way of testing moments very quickly. What looks cohesive in opposition can quickly fracture in government. Voters also have to decide if now is the time for a post-war reset in leadership, or for continuity.

Together is a beautiful word. In Israeli politics, it is also a difficult one.

• Paula Slier is a veteran journalist and foreign correspondent who has reported from conflict zones across the Middle East, Africa, and Europe. She writes on media, geopolitics, and information warfare.

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# Dysfunctional South Africa is fertile ground for xenophobia

OPINION

MUZI KUZWAYO



Anarchy is a form of oppression. It curtails the freedoms of law-abiding citizens who must barricade themselves behind burglar bars and expensive security systems while criminals wield their illicit power. Like all forms of oppression, anarchy will also find resistance, which often erupts in the form of xenophobia, as we are seeing in Johannesburg, kuGompo (formerly East London), Gqeberha (formerly Port Elizabeth), and other parts of South Africa.

The situation will only worsen, unless Africa faces its demon: corruption, which leads to conflicts over resources. According to the Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 16 countries on the continent are experiencing internal conflicts, leading to the displacement of more than 40 million people. Some leave in search of economic opportunities that aren't existent in their home countries, and often they enter another country illegally.

In Israel, for instance, the Knesset reported that there are approximately 33 000 illegal foreign workers and a further 30 000 asylum-seekers from Africa, particularly from Eritrea and Sudan.

Immigrants are always a political football, and it can be humiliating.

economy has ground to a halt, criminal syndicates are in government, as commission after commission reveals, and it now shows on the ground. I go into the Joburg city centre quite regularly and local languages have become scarce, with many South African fruit vendors pushed out. Their children aren't working and their homes back in the township are now derelict. The political parties in power are either unwilling or unable to solve the jobs crisis, and the opposition are unable to galvanise desperate voters. It's clear that South Africa's greatest problem is leadership.

It will get worse before it gets better, because President Cyril Ramaphosa's government has chosen showmanship over statesmanship in geopolitics. When it had the unique chance to be a peaceful arbiter after 7 October, and the subsequent Gaza War, it chose brinkmanship and tried to demonise Israel at the International Court of Justice. Peacemakers understand that you cannot bring a piece of paper to a fire fight. Court orders mean nothing where rockets are flying.

Ramaphosa's actions have reduced his voice to that of a clown in peace-making forums. Now, the absence of a credible South African voice can

be felt on the continent. There is no one who can talk to the warring parties as Thabo Mbeki did in the Congo, Burundi, and Sudan conflicts. While Ramaphosa is obsessed with Palestine and Iran, Zulu armies are marching, terrifying innocent children in city centres, which is reminiscent of the violent days of ANC-Inkatha violence.

Immigration is both irreversible and unavoidable. It can only be managed at the source. The governments that treat their people poorly must be made to pay a heavy price. The citizens of those countries must hold their own government accountable and fight for change. They cannot enjoy the fruit of the labour of their neighbours, who paid for their own freedom with blood.

Four years after the establishment of the State of Israel, the African American civil rights activist Dr WEB Du Bois, who held a Harvard doctorate, gave a speech at an event organised by *Jewish Life*. It was themed "Tribute to the Warsaw Ghetto Fighters" and he told his audience he had visited the ruins of the ghetto.

"Nothing in my wildest imagination was equal to what I saw in Warsaw in 1949. I would have said before seeing it that it was impossible for a civilised nation with deep religious convictions and outstanding religious institutions; with literature and art; to treat fellow human beings as Warsaw had been treated. There had been complete planned and utter destruction," he said.

Du Bois told them he'd been a student at the University of Berlin some 40 years before the Holocaust. He'd gone to a social event with a German friend in a small town. He'd soon realised that things were amiss, so he mentioned this to his friend. "It's not you they are objecting to," the friend whispered. "It's me. They think I may be a Jew." Du Bois was shocked because he knew that his friend was pure German. It was "his dark hair and handsome face" that made him a suspect, as he wrote.

Xenophobia is a symptom and not the disease, which can only be cured through bread, books, water, and all the fruits of peace.

• Muzi Kuzwayo is the chairperson of South Africa's *Promise*, a non-profit company that works with young people across the country to help them unleash their potential.



I experienced this as a student in Germany, even though I was invited by the German government, granted a full bursary, and all my papers were intact. It was only two months after the Berlin Wall had fallen. Germany was a geopolitical faultline; the Soviet Union was still occupying the former East Germany, and West Germany still hosted American, French, and British troops. In the midst of all that, there were many people from Turkey (now known as Türkiye), who had come to rebuild Germany as cheap labour. As the former communist countries of Europe opened up, their citizens also descended on a hopeful Germany. They were poor, skilled, and burning with the desire to live a decent life, so they started at the bottom, doing the work that the Germans didn't want to do. There was also a large contingent of African students and former freedom fighters because both the East and the West were trying to influence the nascent African intelligentsia. As a response to all that, there was a strong feeling of xenophobia in Germany. Everywhere, there was graffiti that said "Ausländer raus!", meaning "Foreigners out!" It didn't feel good to be in a country that was still struggling to deal with the smouldering emotional ruins of World War II. The Holocaust was not even discussed, and the Germans seemed to feel guilty only about invading Poland.

If the blight of xenophobia could regrow in the reunified Germany, where all government systems performed like clockwork, predictable and repeatable, how much more so in South Africa, where public services have all but collapsed? The

# Visiting ambassador reaffirms Israel's commitment to SA Jews

PETA KROST

Israeli Ambassador Ilan Fluss is in South Africa for two weeks to send a clear message that the Israeli embassy in Pretoria is very much open for business and that Israel is still there to support South African Jews.

Fluss, who now officially serves as Policy Coordinator for Emerging Disruptive Technologies in the Division of Strategic Affairs in Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was a diplomat in South Africa 20 years ago.

"It is wonderful to be back in this country that I loved spending time in as deputy ambassador," he told the *SA Jewish Report*. "I spent two years here from 2004, one year of which I was chargé d'affaires [heading up the embassy].

"It was a very different time and a great experience. We had the greatest number of high-level visits between the countries during that time. This included a visit from former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert to the then President Thabo Mbeki."

His visit now, he says, is to engage with the leadership of the Jewish community and other communities. "Being here is to show clearly that the embassy is open. Israel will continue to send senior people here for short periods to show continuity.

"Israel's relationship with the Jewish community in South Africa has always been and is still vitally important and our relationship is excellent. It is important that people know the embassy is operational," he says.

"I am here to assist internally at the embassy and meet with leaders and other friends. Israel is in a complicated situation, but we are resilient and our economy is thriving. While social activism is alive and well in Israel, with many internal debates going on, this is as it's meant to be in a thriving liberal democracy.

"After 78 years, Israel is strong. It is a vibrant, creative, and resilient country and people."

He says this was clear to him when commemorating Yom Hazikaron and celebrating Yom Ha'atzmaut in Israel just before coming to South Africa.

"On Yom Hazikaron, we heard a woman who had lost her son in the war in the past two years. She was so inspiring and offered such strength to all of us listening. Her amazing insights made us all smile. This is true resilience.

"Then, we were out on the street celebrating. As much pain as we have suffered with the war, we celebrated. People were so obviously happy. They had the chance to celebrate, so celebrate they did, with gusto."

Looking back at his time in South Africa between 2004 and 2006, Fluss says there wasn't always agreement with the government of the day. "We had disagreements, but we were able to

engage and discuss it."

At the time, Israeli agricultural experts were brought to South Africa and worked with communities around the country to upgrade and modernise their farming practices.

"We had different projects in Gauteng, Eastern Cape, and Western Cape and were working with grassroots communities. For me, this is working with *neshama* (soul). I loved meeting and getting to know the people.

"I will never forget going into the Cape townships with Helen Lieberman of [empowerment organisation]

Ikamva Labantu. I really saw how people live in townships, the real challenges, problems, and the impressive women involved," he says.

Fluss met women who had nothing but created homes for children in need. Some housed and looked after as

many as 30 children. "Each child felt loved and was off the streets," he says. "And these women did it from their hearts. It was really wow!"

From South Africa in 2006, he went to work at the United Nations in the United States. "That was a real shock, having come from the warmth and kindness of this community. The culture is so different there, as is the community. It made me realise how special the South African Jews are and why this is such an incredibly close-knit community."

In his new position dealing with artificial intelligence (AI) and disruptive technologies, Fluss is excited about the many prospects Israel has to help the world. "Israel is very good at innovation and taking risks. We are leaders in AI because of this, and we want to help others in building their expertise in this."

While he acknowledges that AI is also being used to send negative messages about Israel and the Jewish people, he is clear it can be better used for good.

He goes on to say that, unfortunately, the growing antisemitism in the world is not new. "However, who would have imagined that after the Holocaust, antisemitic voices and attacks would be met with such weak responses from governments and society in centres of liberalism," he says.

"It was a wake-up call for all of us," says Fluss, who is the child of Holocaust survivors. "The difference now is that we have a Jewish State. However, we cannot and dare not let people stop us speaking out against antisemitism.

"We must fight against this. The hypocrisy you see in people who appear to be extreme liberals using the same slogans as the extreme right and jihadists. They are united in their antisemitism. So we will continue to fight evil and continue to spread our moral values and help others."



Israeli Ambassador Ilan Fluss

# Turning a rare diagnosis into global action

CLAUDIA GROSS

A diagnosis changed everything for Greg and Martine Nafte. It also set them on a path that could determine far more than their own son's future.

Levi has an exceptionally rare genetic condition, SLC1A4 deficiency. Only a small number of cases are known worldwide.

Levi's medical journey began early. He had his first seizure and hospital admission at just eight months old. Multiple seizures and repeated hospital stays followed. At the same time, he didn't meet key developmental milestones. For more than three years, the family hoped Levi's challenges might resolve. The diagnosis in April last year removed that possibility.

"With a genetic diagnosis, his problems become very real," Greg says. "We had to start to accept that we have a child with severe special needs and our family life will never be 'normal!'"

Martine, a physiotherapist, says, "I had always known deep in my gut that there was something not right." When the diagnosis came, it brought both grief and relief. "I am still grieving. The grieving will never stop," she says. "But knowing that there's nothing more than what we are doing for Levi brought a sense of relief."

Before they received clarity, Levi had undergone

extensive testing. This included blood tests, a microarray genetics test, CT scans, and MRIs. All of these came back clear. As his seizures continued and delays persisted, a geneticist recommended Whole Exome Sequencing. This test – which was done in Germany because it isn't available in South Africa – finally provided a diagnosis when Levi was three and a half years old.

The SLC1A4 deficiency is more common among Ashkenazi Jews, with about one in 144 people being carriers. That connection gave Martine some comfort. "I felt comfort in knowing that the majority of the other parents are our people," she says.

The deficiency affects how the brain develops. It's caused by a problem in a gene responsible for transporting an important amino acid called L-serine to the brain. Without enough of this amino acid, the brain cannot develop properly. This can lead to a smaller brain size, muscle stiffness in the arms and legs, seizures, and developmental delays.

Levi is completely dependent on others for his daily needs. He's non-verbal, although his communication is improving with intensive therapy. He can walk only with assistance.

Despite these challenges, his personality shines through. His parents describe him as "Mr Popular."

"He's the friendliest and happiest little boy." He

loves being around people and thrives on affection. He enjoys school, time outdoors, and visits to the park, especially the swings. "He has the most beautiful smile," his parents say. "When he looks at you, it's as if he's looking right into your soul."

Levi attends Herzlia Alon Ashel Pre-Primary in Cape Town. There, he receives therapies and support within a nurturing environment. The school has played a central role in the family's journey. It has also given them the confidence to speak openly about Levi's condition. "He's treated just like the other kids," they say. "We're truly blessed to have this in our lives."

The reality that there is currently no treatment or cure for Levi's condition has been difficult to accept. "At the beginning, it was earth-shattering," Greg says. "The mutation is so minute that it was painful to think that something so small cannot be fixed."

However, it's also been the catalyst for action. Through research, they discovered that advances in gene therapy and personalised medicine are creating new possibilities. Treatments for some rare genetic conditions are already in development, particularly in the United States and Europe.

"The scientific tools exist to create treatments that can change the outcome of children's lives," Greg says.

This belief led them to establish Rare Alliance, an organisation focused on addressing one of the biggest barriers in rare disease treatment, namely funding. "There's no shortage of scientists and institutions that have the capability to solve these

problems," Greg says. "They lack the financial resources."

Rare Alliance aims to bridge this gap by connecting international philanthropy with leading scientific research. It's working with researchers at Boston Children's Hospital on a programme focused on SLC1A4. The goal is to develop a treatment not only for Levi, but for others affected by similar conditions.

Greg and Martine are also co-founders of Jewish Genes, an organisation that focuses on raising awareness of Jewish genetic conditions, encourages testing, and drives funding for research into rare diseases.

"With Whole Exome Sequencing, it's now possible to identify a condition at its genetic cause," Greg says. "We're entering the dawn of a miraculous era where terrible conditions will be able to be treated."

For the Nafte family, the journey is deeply personal, but their vision extends far beyond their own experience. "There's a path to treatment for Levi's condition," Greg says. "The science is at the point where it's a reality that his life can be changed significantly."

They're now focused on raising funds to support ongoing research. Their goal is to establish a dedicated treatment programme that could benefit others in the future. For readers, their message is clear. Awareness, funding, and early diagnosis can change outcomes. "We're building a model to solve the funding gap for rare genetic conditions," Greg says.

Their story is one of resilience, but also of urgency. For families living with rare diseases, time matters. And for Levi, every step forward carries the hope of a different future.



Greg and Martine Nafte

## A grandfather's story becomes *The Boy in the Barrel*

LEE TANKLE

For as long as he could remember, South African expat Eric Lieberman knew the story of how his grandfather Izzy had come to South Africa, fleeing Vilna with his father in 1889. And how the father somehow vanished, leaving the boy to fend for himself.

Lieberman's own father, aunts, and uncles repeatedly told how Izzy was able to make a life for himself in this new country, and about the people he met along the way. Even though he wasn't an author, Lieberman set out some 30 years ago to write the story of his grandfather. It has finally become the book *The Boy in the Barrel*, released in April.

"With all the family stories, something was unsettling and unresolved, as though a voice had been silenced too soon and was still waiting to be heard. Over time, that feeling deepened into a sense of responsibility. I wasn't just drawn to the story; I felt compelled to follow it, to understand it, and ultimately, to tell it," he says.

Based on the true story of Izzy Lieberman, *The Boy in the Barrel* tells the fictionalised story of how, when Izzy is seven years old, he flees the pogroms with his father, Abraham, to start a new life in Cape Town, but is separated from him in the chaos of the port and left to fend for himself.

Growing up on the streets, he survives alongside other homeless boys, before heading to the Kimberley diamond fields, where he endures years of hardship. More than a decade later, Izzy arrives in Johannesburg, and is unexpectedly reunited with the family he thought he had lost, discovering that even the abandoned can find their way home.

Eric Lieberman, who grew up in Johannesburg, was educated in both public and private Jewish schools and earned a Bachelor of Commerce degree, though his interests extended beyond academics. A lifelong musician, he performed as a professional drummer before moving to Los Angeles nearly 40 years ago and building a career in real estate. Alongside his work and music, he has pursued a passion for magic.

In order to create the novel, he also had to learn the art of writing. The process started with collecting all the

interesting stories from his childhood. He then began putting them together, along with the historical context.

"What went into the writing was far more than research or craft. It became an emotional excavation. I found myself immersed not only in historical detail, the textures of Cape Town in 1899, and the looming shadow of the Anglo-Boer War, but also in the inner life of a child: the confusion, the fear, the fragile hope. Trying to inhabit the perspective of an eight-year-old boy, alone in a foreign land and believing he had been discarded, required a kind of imaginative empathy that was both demanding and, at times, overwhelming," he says.

The novel took a long time to come together, as Lieberman had to manage family life, his career, and writing the book. Unfortunately he wasn't able to release it before his father, Robert, passed away three years ago. But his dad did read the manuscript.

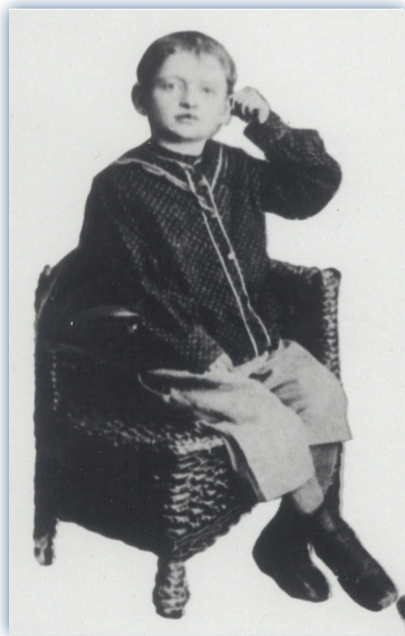
Lieberman says he wanted to ensure that the story was as close to the real-life experience of his grandfather as possible, but he had to use creative licence to make the story fit together.

"There were gaps that couldn't be definitively filled, moments where the record went silent, and imagination had to step in carefully, respectfully. Striking the balance between truth and storytelling, between what is known and what is felt, was one of the greatest challenges."

There were also practical frustrations: chasing down elusive details, verifying conflicting accounts, and occasionally realising that a beautifully written passage had to be cut because it strayed too far from the emotional truth of the story.

"Sometimes the line between writer and subject blurred; the act of telling his story became, in subtle ways, an act of understanding my own. I had set out to reconstruct a past, but I found myself also uncovering something present and deeply human," he says.

"Amid the gravity of the subject, there were unexpected moments of lightness. At times, the characters – particularly in their small, human details – would surprise me. A gesture, a turn of phrase, even a scene that unfolded with an almost stubborn insistence on humour, reminded me that even in the darkest circumstances, life retains its unpredictability. There were moments when I would step back from the work and find myself smiling, even laughing, or crying, at something I hadn't planned but somehow felt entirely true."



Izzy Lieberman, aged seven, 7 January 1891

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# The four principles behind Gore's leadership success

Founder and chief executive of Discovery **Adrian Gore** has authored a book called *The Four Principles – Multiply Your Impact in Life and Leadership*, which is to be launched soon. The *SA Jewish Report* spoke to him about it.

## What inspired you to write this book?

We built Discovery in the complex and unique context of South Africa, scaling the business from a startup to a global leader with a presence in more than 30 countries. Building an organisation in South Africa acted as a valuable laboratory and use-case in leadership through complexity, as we navigated the transition from apartheid to democracy, a considerably volatile society, and were tested across every facet of leadership to guide through hope, despair, physical danger, and dramatic regulatory change.

In addition, our global growth and scale have given me the privilege to observe and work with incredibly brilliant people, leaders, and companies across different markets and industries. These experiences have led to a series of leadership lessons and insights, which are captured in *The Four Principles*. Together, they answer an enduring and fascinating question I have grappled with for years: Why do some people have massive impact regardless of apparent ability, education, or intelligence, while others – with every advantage – fall short?

It turns out it's not talent that sets people apart but a small set of counterintuitive tactics that multiply human impact. I call them the "Four Principles" and they have an exponential effect on life and leadership. They are counterintuitive because while they are seemingly simple and obvious on the

surface, they contain hidden depth and intellectual rigour that make them exceptionally powerful and universally applicable. Critically, they can be understood, quantified, and learned.

I have explained these principles in many talks and engagements over the years – in different contexts and applications – and in that time have only become more convinced of their power and relevance for leadership today. That created an urgency and conviction in me to elaborate on and demonstrate them in a more formal way. I truly believe that once grasped and applied, these principles can profoundly change people's lives and trajectory of impact.

## Why did you think the time was right for it?

Leaders and institutions worldwide are confronting rising pessimism, declinism, and a growing loss of confidence in the future. Economic fragmentation, technological disruption, demographic shifts, and geopolitical tension cannot be solved by isolated action or linear thinking.

I believe *The Four Principles* offers a rigorous, evidence-based alternative to fatalism, blending behavioural science,



Adrian Gore

economics, and systems thinking with real-world leadership experience.

We are all living through immense complexity and change and there is a profound need for positive leadership and impact. I'm convinced the book and its applicability are perfectly timed for this moment.

## Who were you specifically hoping the book would help?

I wrote it for everyone because I believe there is greatness in every individual and that everyone can benefit from applying the principles in their life. I think it may be of particular relevance to people in leadership positions – whether in business, personally, or in their community – who are looking for ways to multiply their impact.

## What are the four principles?

### 1: The Pareto tail

This principle dictates that our lives are complex networks of decisions and actions and are therefore governed by power laws, in which a small number of critical decisions and actions determine the trajectory of our lives and ultimately our impact. The effect of operating in this tail is more than 20 times that of ordinary decisions and actions. We need to act in the tail, and this is achieved by following the next three principles.

### 2: Disciplined optimism

This principle dictates that disciplined optimism, not naïve optimism, requires the deliberate seeking of positive signals. This enables us to identify opportunities we would not otherwise see and to execute on them more effectively within complex networked systems such as companies, communities, and schools.

### 3: Focused urgency

This principle dictates that time is logarithmic rather than linear, meaning that only around 20% of our lives are available to build a career, pursue opportunities, and make a meaningful difference. We therefore need to act with focused urgency to maximise the effectiveness of time.

### 4: Setting and declaring goals

This principle dictates that setting and declaring goals drives motivation. Behavioural economics shows that individuals are more strongly motivated by potential loss than by potential gain, and the act of setting and declaring goals is therefore critical in creating something meaningful to lose, which drives commitment, intent, and follow-through.

## You generally have a crazy busy schedule. When and how did you go about writing this book?

I wasn't prepared for how rigorous the process would be. In the end it took two intense years of work by me and my team. I had support from a writer collaborator and a very dedicated chief of staff who helped shape the book and kept me on track. Several leaders inside and outside of Discovery also contributed to the book and refined its thinking and articulation.

## How do you use these principles in your life and career?

The book contains many examples of how I and the Discovery team have applied these principles over the three decades of building and scaling the organisation. Take the Pareto moment of having an idea to offer free gym memberships to insurance clients. This completely transformed our business model, bringing to life our purpose of making people healthier and creating the foundation of Vitality and the Shared-Value Insurance model. Other examples include employing disciplined optimism in the partnership between business and government that resulted in ending loadshedding and creating a focused turnaround strategy.

## In your book, you speak about how a person cannot rely on talent alone to achieve great success. What do you mean by that and what else is needed?

While we think talent and ability are critical to achieve success and impact, it turns out that successful and impactful people come in all shapes, sizes, and abilities, so these aren't the differentiating factors. Impact is ultimately an optimisation problem across the following dimensions: the opportunities we see, how we execute on them, and the time and motivation we have available to execute on them. If time were infinite, we could achieve almost anything we aimed for, at some point. If we knew exactly how to leverage the potential of networks of people and structures towards realising identified opportunities, we wouldn't need much time to make an impact. And if we had infinite drive to reach our lofty ambitions, we would achieve them come what may.

But we have none of these and so impact is an optimisation problem across these dimensions, which the four principles help to address.

Critically, the four principles are interlinked and optimising each of them has a multiplicative effect. Doubling your effective time (urgency) allows you to pursue twice as many opportunities, with optimism you are six times more likely to find and leverage value from them, and if your motivation to act on those opportunities (goals) is also doubled, the final effect on your impact becomes  $2 \times 6 \times 2 = 24!$

This 24-times multiplier might sound incredible but the science and mathematics – detailed in the book's technical appendices – bear this out. That is precisely the power of acting in the long tail of Pareto, putting us in a prime position to reap the benefits of rapid and transformational change.

This 24x multiplier effect is so powerful that it completely dwarfs differences in talent, skills, and capacity.

# The curtain lifts on Albie Sachs, icon and dad

*Albie Sachs, Fathers, Sons and Soft Vengeance* is on at Theatre on the Square in Sandton from 7 May. The *SA Jewish Report* speaks to its playwright, **Gail Louw**, and **Graham Hopkins**, who plays the role of the national icon in the one-man-show.

## Gail Louw

### What inspired you to write about Albie Sachs?

In 2022, I was on my way to Israel, where my play about Avrom Sutzkever, the Yiddish poet, was about to be on at the Theatronetto Festival. I saw a post from [artistic director] Ismail Mahomed saying that a play should be written to celebrate Albie Sachs on his 90th birthday. He asked for anyone interested to respond. I did and was lucky and pleased to be offered the opportunity to write the play. The idea was to focus it on Sachs's book *The Soft Vengeance of a Freedom Fighter*, as well as his father and sons.

### How did you go about doing your research?

I read the book and absolutely fell in love with Albie. I adored his wit, his self-deprecation, his reactions to horrific circumstances, his ability to deal with them, and his incredible resilience. I had known about his father, the trade unionist Solly Sachs, from my father, who thought very highly of him. I did the usual trawl through the internet for Albie's talks, discussions, presentations, and videos to get a wider knowledge of him. After several months, I sent the play off to Ismail. He replied by saying, 'This is absolutely beautiful!' Encouraged, I sent it off to Albie, only to receive the comment that I clearly did not know his son, or his father. He said if I was prepared to work with him on the play, then we could continue.

### What was your process in writing the script and how much input did Albie have?

Albie and I met every four to six months on Zoom, looking at the latest draft. It was never quite right, particularly in relation to my lack of understanding of his son Oliver, his challenges, his intriguing character, and his brilliance. After two or so years, Albie arranged for me to come to his home in Cape Town and get to know Oliver. We spent the day going through the play, and hearing Oliver's thoughts and experiences in his own words, rather than through Albie's veneer. I went back home to the UK and redrafted it for the nth time. Oliver came to stay with us for a month during his gap year after matric, and in May 2025, we set up a Zoom meeting with Albie to work through the last few issues. And Albie said, 'Right, it's ready!'

I was enormously relieved!

I had actually written two versions of the play, one as a one-man show and one with five actors; one playing Albie, and the others the huge variety of other characters. But we finally decided on the one-man show as working best.

### You have written plays with Jewish and South African political themes. This one straddles both. What draws you to these themes?

I am Jewish and was born and brought up in South Africa. I was always very interested in South African politics and massively against the apartheid regime. This interest has never left me.

### What does being Jewish mean to you and how has it influenced your career?

My mother got out of Germany in April 1939 and went to live in Israel, then Palestine. She left behind her beloved parents, who were murdered in 1942. This defining fact of her life impacted her and, consequently, us, and has been fundamental to my identity.

## Graham Hopkins

### How did you go about playing this national icon?

Director Fiona Ramsay asked me to participate in this project both as co-producer, under the banner of the Troupe Theatre Company, and as the actor representing the great man. Naturally, I jumped at the opportunity. Fiona and I have collaborated on the production of various projects over the years, from Alan Bennett's *Talking Heads* all of 30 years ago to Simon Woods' *Hansard* three years ago. We work well together.

### What is it about Albie Sachs that you relate to and want to be able to share with the audience?

His story is a compelling one, incorporating his life's work as a lawyer and activist, as well as the devastating physical impact of the bomb and his slow and painful physical and mental recovery. Sachs lost an arm and the sight in one eye in a 1988 assassination attempt. Interleaved with this narrative is a series of honest and moving reflections on his relationship with both his father and son Oliver.



The show's creative team: playwright Gail Louw, Graham Hopkins, and director Fiona Ramsay

The challenge has been to translate the text into the medium of live theatre, giving it both visual interest and storytelling dynamism.

### What is your sense of this man and why he is such an icon?

I have met Albie Sachs only a handful of times, to discuss this production. One is immediately struck by both his wisdom and his humility. His down-to-earth demeanour is far from what one might expect of a judge, legal luminary, and struggle icon. His 'short arm', as he calls it, has become emblematic of the candour and honesty of the man

himself, as he chose not to hide behind a prosthesis in order to appear normalised, but to be comfortable and proud to simply be what he is. His appearance has also become a symbol for the sacrifices so many people made in the struggle for freedom.

### How do you go about getting into the character every day?

I don't attempt to mimic the singular presence of Judge Albie Sachs, but rather to take his words and to represent him, his experiences, and his emotions in a theatrical space. I hope to honour this national icon in so doing.

• The production will open at The Baxter in Cape Town in October.

# An incurable condition

I used to be a hypochondriac. Until I discovered that I, in fact, suffer from something far more current, and far more insidious. It's called cyber-chondria. And, as far as I can tell, there is no cure. Which I know, because I've looked.

I was diagnosed recently, self-diagnosed, obviously, and I am still coming to terms with not only the condition itself, but the impact it is likely to have on my daily life.

As with all medical conditions, I ask that you respect my privacy, and that of my family, as we navigate this challenging time, armed with Wi-Fi and a search history that would impress most professionals.

Cyber-chondria is defined (by ChatGPT) as: "The modern condition of consulting the internet for reassurance and leaving with a far more serious diagnosis than you started with – a disorder in which mild symptoms meet unlimited information, and the result is not clarity, but conviction."

That last word is important. Conviction. Because cyber-chondria provides morbid certainty in the face of mild concern.

What starts innocently – a headache, a slight pain, a moment of fatigue that could easily be explained by an 18-hour day, or the fact that I begin my day before the birds do – evolves quickly into what is confirmed online to be a deadly and inoperable combination of Bubonic plague and cirrhosis of the liver. Which is why I knew I should never have had the tot of Baileys on Wednesday last week. The only way forward – according to my research – is palliative care at a step-up facility in Lyndhurst.

Sufferers of cyber-chondria are not fools. The patient is acutely aware that the condition needs to be confirmed by someone with a medical practitioner's registration number and who has met their minimum requirement of CPD points six months into the year.

Which is why I find myself, for the third time this month, sitting with my doctor. A man I respect enormously. "I think," I say with the measured calm of someone who has made peace with a difficult prognosis, "it might be serious this time."

"How long," he asks, "have you had this headache?"

Since Tuesday, I say. "But I've had it before. Which, according to my research, is itself a red flag."

He examines me with the quiet efficiency of a man who charges by the consultation and not by the

## INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



drama. He takes my blood pressure. He looks in my ears. He does the thing with the little light.

"You're fine," he says.

"That's what they said about Joburg," I reply.

The thing about cyber-chondria that its sufferers understand, and that medical professionals continue to underestimate, is that it is not irrational. It is, in fact, hyper-rational. Symptoms are not imaginary. We are simply contextualising them. Within the broadest possible diagnostic framework. At midnight. Without supervision.

The internet, it turns out, was not designed to make anxious people feel better. Every symptom you enter returns results arranged in ascending order of severity, culminating inevitably in something that was last seen in medieval Europe. The algorithm is designed for engagement and not reassurance. And nothing is more engaging than the possibility that your Tuesday headache is, in fact, historically significant.

I have, in the past six months, self-diagnosed conditions across four specialities, two of which required me to look up what the speciality was. I have watched explainer videos narrated by Americans in lab coats who may or may not have medical degrees but who speak with tremendous authority.

My wife has been supportive, in the way that people are supportive when they are also slightly over it. "You were fine yesterday," she said recently, with the tone of someone stating a fact rather than offering comfort.

"Yesterday," I reminded her. "But I hadn't done the research yet."

There is sadly no cure. But there is management. ChatGPT has suggested I consider speaking to a mental health professional. My wife has suggested I put the phone down and watch something on Netflix that isn't a medical documentary.

I am considering all options. In the meantime, if you need me, I'll be fine. Probably. I just need to check one more thing.

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

# It's election season



## ABOVE BOARD

Karen Milner

This week brought confirmation of something our

community has long been anticipating: 4 November will be election day. Following the watershed national elections of last year, these municipal elections carry a weight that is difficult to overstate. They represent, in my view, one of the most consequential and defining moments of our post-apartheid democracy, a moment in which the choices we make as citizens will shape the character of our cities for years to come. For Johannesburg in particular, the need for inspired, effective, and genuinely pragmatic leadership has never been more urgent.

As is its long-standing tradition, the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) will host its "Great Debates" ahead of the elections.

Johannesburg will hold a "Great Joburg Mayoral Debate" in October, and the Cape SAJBD will host its own debate. Both debates promise the robust, rigorous exchanges that have come to define these events. This year, however, the stakes are particularly high. Given how intensely contested these municipal elections are, these debates aren't merely civic exercises, they are genuine opportunities for our community to interrogate, to question, and to hold those who seek our trust to account.

Before any of that, the single most

important thing we can do right now is to be properly registered to vote. We urge every member of our community to ensure they are registered, and to exercise that right when the time comes.

We will be running educational programmes, engaging with the various parties, and shortly launching our election observer teams across the country. These teams are something we are genuinely proud of. Notably, the teams are organised and run by the SAJBD, but they have always included other South African communities, because that is precisely what it means to be South African: to be invested in a shared future, and to do the difficult work of democracy together.

On Tuesday the SAJBD had a very constructive meeting with US Ambassador Leo Bozell III and the US Embassy Human Rights team, to provide insights into antisemitism in South Africa. We were able to share our detailed monitoring structures and the trends we are seeing in South Africa and globally. It was a valuable and encouraging engagement, reminding us that we don't face these challenges alone, and that our documentation and advocacy work carry real weight internationally.

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

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**THEATRE ON THE SQUARE**

# Chef elevating SA patisserie to top-class standards

GILANA LAB

"Desserts are an afterthought for people in South Africa. Overseas, they're not. They're front and centre."

For chef Jared Melamed, that contrast is everything. The King David High School Linksfield alumnus noticed the difference after years spent abroad. Now, armed with international recognition, award-winning work, and a reputation that is rapidly positioning him as a leading figure in modern French pastry, he is set to close this gap.

Melamed is self-taught and says he has built a name defined by precision, innovation, and uncompromising standards. In 2024, he was awarded Best Pastry Chef in the Country at the Luxe Awards. In 2025, he received Best Patisserie in South Africa, followed by Best Patisserie in Johannesburg in 2026 at the People's Choice Luxe Awards.

But for Melamed, 38, the accolades are secondary. "The awards don't mean much to me," he says. Elevating the South African pastry scene is his goal.

His journey into high-end patisserie didn't begin in a classroom. "School was never for me," he says. At 19, he left South Africa, inspired in part by the world he saw through the late American celebrity chef Anthony Bourdain. "I thought travel was a better form of education than school." What followed was nearly two decades of movement across close to 50 countries. He worked in kitchens, restaurants, and hotels, initially funding his travels as a professional scuba diver.

Those experiences, he says, shaped his palate and his perspective in ways no formal education could. "When you live in many countries, your mind opens quite a bit more than just living in one space," he says. "You come back with a different palate. You can appreciate good things, but you also realise what's lacking." From street food in Thailand to Michelin-starred dining in France, each experience refined his understanding of flavour, technique, and standards.

It was in France that everything sharpened for him. "That is what really got my eye tuned in, my palate tuned in, and the method and knowledge to produce this kind of stuff on such a fine level." The discipline and precision of French pastry became the foundation of his work.

Returning to South Africa, however, was an eye-opener. "I don't think the food here is where it should be on the global map, especially desserts," he says. Where pastry overseas is treated as an art form, he found it was often overlooked locally. "Most of it is frozen, produced in a warehouse

in Germany six months ago, and sold now for premium prices. It's disgusting."



Melamed chose to redefine that standard. Over the past two and a half years he has focused on setting a new benchmark for pastry in South Africa, rooted in classical French technique and meticulous execution. "If you do things right in French patisserie, you're not going to lose," he says. "That's how you beat everyone else, by being consistent."

His approach extends to ingredients. "If you want to race an F1 car, you've got to pay the price of that fuel," he says. "You can't be F1 racing and putting diesel into your car. It's not going to work." For

Melamed, that means sourcing the correct butter, cream, and flour, often French, to achieve the quality he demands. "I'm not slamming our local produce. We have excellent produce, but high-end patisserie needs a

certain standard."

Despite his global recognition, including appearances as a *MasterChef* guest judge and collaborations within elite culinary circles, Melamed's focus remains firmly on building something local and lasting. His kitchen reflects that philosophy. Many of his team members began with no formal training. "The one was a waiter. The one was a domestic worker, and now they're putting out high-end desserts," he says.

He believes in hands-on learning, repetition, and exposure to high standards.

Melamed is committed to educating and mentoring the next generation of chefs. "We need more up-and-coming pastry chefs," he says. "I don't know what the stigma is. Being a chef is just as technical as being a lawyer or an architect."

He hopes to address what he sees as a critical gap in skills and education within South Africa's pastry industry with his plans for a physical store, offering internships, and doing workshops. "I want students in my kitchen, showing them proper French methods."

Melamed's work sits at the intersection of luxury and craftsmanship, and his influence is already being felt. "A lot of places have started upping their game because I've set such a high bar," he says.

His goal isn't recognition, but to reshape how pastry is understood, valued, and executed in South Africa, and to ensure that the next generation is equipped to take it even further.

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