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# South African Jewish Report

Volume 30 – Number 22 ■ 2 July 2026 ■ 17 Tammuz 5786

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## UN health rapporteur returns to a legal fight

NICOLA MILTZ

Controversial Dr Tlaleng Mofokeng has concluded her six-year tenure as the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Health with praise from allies and blistering condemnation from critics.

Mofokeng now returns to South Africa, where she is challenging a Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) ruling that found her guilty of unprofessional conduct.

South Africa, Palestinian people, the Arab Group, and international nongovernmental organisations, including Amnesty International, lauded her during her

farewell appearance at the 62nd session of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in Geneva.

Presenting her final report, Mofokeng described serving as Special Rapporteur as “an honour of a lifetime”.

But her farewell was overshadowed by a stinging intervention from accountability organisation UN Watch.

Addressing the UNHRC, its executive director, Hillel Neuer, accused Mofokeng of having “praised Hamas, promoted prostitution in *Teen Vogue*, and called [former] British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak ‘filthy’”. His remarks

followed the release of UN Watch’s latest report, “From Watchdogs to Ideologues”, which argues that a growing number of UN Special Rapporteurs have abandoned impartiality in favour of political activism.

This week, Neuer told the *SA Jewish Report* that Mofokeng’s tenure would be remembered not for advancing the universal right to health, but for politicising it.

“Instead of acting as an impartial UN expert, she used her office to promote ideological causes, demonise democratic states, especially Israel, and engage in conduct that fell well below the standards expected of a UN Special Rapporteur,” he said.

“She frequently resorted to profane language and abusive attacks against those with whom she disagreed; publicly endorsed Hamas-linked figures; promoted Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions; and turned her UN platform into a vehicle for one-sided political advocacy rather than objective human rights analysis. That did lasting damage not only to her own credibility, but also to the credibility of the Special Rapporteur system.”

Neuer said Mofokeng’s legacy should serve as “a cautionary tale”.

“When UN mandate holders become political activists instead of independent experts, they erode public confidence in the UNHRC and weaken the credibility

of the UN’s human rights mechanisms,” he said.

“For so many of us in the international human rights community who once looked to South Africa for inspiration, this is yet another betrayal of Nelson Mandela’s legacy.”

Mofokeng, a South African medical doctor and sexual and reproductive health advocate, was appointed by the UNHRC in July 2020. Her mandate was extended in 2023 and ended in June 2026.

While supporters praised her

outspoken advocacy on sexual and reproductive health rights, critics accused her of abandoning the impartiality required of an independent UN expert through repeated attacks on Israel, inflammatory social media posts, and overt political activism.

Those concerns culminated in the HPCSA finding Mofokeng guilty of unprofessional conduct in October 2025 and fining her R10 000 for bringing the medical profession into disrepute through abusive and inappropriate language on social media.

The complaint, lodged by the South African Zionist Federation (SAZF), stemmed from social media posts in which Mofokeng

wrote “Fuck you Netanyahu” in response to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and later referred to Neuer as “You white man. Evil scum. Voetsek.”

The matter is now before the courts.

The SAZF confirmed this week that Mofokeng has instructed public interest law centre Section27 to approach the High Court to review and set aside both the HPCSA’s finding and the R10 000 sanction.

“One of the grounds for review raised is the immunities and privileges that Dr Mofokeng enjoyed as the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Health under the Diplomatic Immunities and Privileges Act,” SAZF national chairperson Craig Pantanowitz told the *SA Jewish Report*. “As the matter is therefore currently before the courts, it would be inappropriate for the SAZF to comment until the judicial process has been concluded.”

Mofokeng has meanwhile received public support from anti-Israel Gift of the Givers founder Dr Imtiaz Sooliman, who

Continued on page 3>>



Dr Tlaleng Mofokeng at OR Tambo International Airport after completing her six-year term at the UN

## As quiet as COVID

Photo: Lee Tankle



Suburban streets of Johannesburg were so quiet on 30 June, it was reminiscent of COVID-19 pandemic lockdown times

See story on page 2

  
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# Security in Jewish areas thankfully not tested

LEE TANKLE

Businesses, commuters, and security officials braced for a day of potential disruption as calls for nationwide protests circulated in the lead-up to 30 June. But as the day unfolded, much of the country experienced calm, with only scattered incidents reported.

Although demonstrations against illegal immigration took place, they were generally smaller than many had anticipated and had limited impact on daily life. Businesses did close to keep their staff safe, and many people treated the day as a public holiday while still being vigilant of any activity.

A coalition of groups, including March and March, Operation Dudula, the United South Africans Organisation, and other civic organisations organised

the protests. They are demanding that the government do more to identify and deport undocumented foreign nationals, strengthen border security, and enforce immigration legislation. Organisers maintained that their campaign was directed at undocumented immigration rather than foreign nationals generally and repeatedly called for demonstrations to remain peaceful.

"Thankfully, no protests impacted or affected our Jewish communal areas or spaces," said chief executive of CSO Liron Sanders. "We deployed various teams to ensure public safety as well as safety on the periphery of our areas, with no major incidents to report."

Alana Pugh-Jones Baranov, country director of refugee support organisation HIAS South Africa, explained that, together with its partner organisations in civil society, it had closely monitored the situation across the country on Tuesday. In the lead-up to the protests, it has been part of efforts to assist scores of terrified foreign nationals seeking safety and shelter outside consulates ahead of the 30 June deadline.

"Most of the planned marches across provinces were relatively peaceful and orderly, but we did receive numerous reports of looting of foreign-national-

owned businesses, and there were incidents in certain urban areas where large crowds had to be dispersed with rubber bullets, as happened in Pietermaritzburg this afternoon," said Pugh-Jones Baranov.

two people, including a 17-year-old, were injured during protests in Hillbrow.

Similarly, throughout Tuesday night, there were reports of criminal opportunism by smaller groups in Alexandra and

Hillbrow and surrounding areas.

Sean Jammy, deputy chief executive of CAP, explained that the team planned for this protest action for more than a month, enabling it to deploy a decisive, intelligence-driven response to any threat.

Throughout the day, the organisation kept people in Gauteng informed of protest activity, not only in CAP areas, but around the province. CAP noted that while there were demonstrations in areas peripheral to those it serves, there had been no protest activity

within CAP areas.

"Throughout today's protests, CAP worked alongside our partners in the security industry, the South African Police Service, and other law enforcement agencies to help keep our communities safe. We are grateful to all our stakeholders, whose ongoing support enabled us to fund and operate this response. As a community-owned non-profit, we direct donor resources towards keeping people safe rather than generating profit, and we remain committed to maintaining that safety in the days ahead," Jammy said.



CAP vehicles patrolling Johannesburg suburbs on 30 June

"Unfortunately, we did hear about some severe protesting in the Johannesburg central business district and Alexandra township, but thankfully the spillover didn't impact our community," said Sanders. CSO would remain operationally in the days after 30 June, he said.

There were reports that protests in Johannesburg's Yeoville and Hillbrow turned violent when residents in apartments threw rocks at demonstrators below and protesters raiding homes believed to have foreign nationals in them. Three suspects were arrested after

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## Why am I here and what must I do?

Torah Thought

Secular academia relies solely on natural, observable phenomena to explain the universe. G-d, being outside the realm of empirical, laboratory-tested evidence, is therefore omitted. This method of education, espoused by the likes of Spinoza, Darwin, and others, has enormous ramifications on one's *weltanschauung*, or world view. Judaism's view of reality is anathema to this.

Judaism says that nothing is random or accidental. That everything, every molecule and atom in the universe, is guided by Divine Providence; that every situation is designed and configured by G-d for a purpose. Nothing is a coincidence or happenstance.

Given therefore that one finds oneself where one is for a reason and purpose, the obvious and logical question to ask is, "Why am I here and what must I do?" The latter "what must I do" is the obvious follow-on question because G-d created us not to be bystanders and observers, but to be partners with Him in affecting outcomes in creation. G-d constructs the situation for a Divine purpose and we act in it to fulfil it.

This idea of confronting a situation by asking, "What is it that I am being called on to do here?" is depicted emphatically in an episode in the story of Noah. Noah had become paralytically inebriated and was shamefully exposed. Scripture says one of his sons, Cham, "saw his father's nakedness", while the

other two sons, Shem and Yefes, did not. They walked in backwards towards Noah so as not to see his nakedness ("and his nakedness they did not see"), and they then covered him.

Cham here depicts not living consciously with the question of "Why am I here and what must I do?" Shem and Yefes do and demonstrate this idea perfectly. They recognise that they are placed in a situation for a moral duty to be performed. Instead of using the situation for their own personal satisfaction – as did Cham, indulging in his father's nakedness – or being indifferent, shrugging their shoulders and moving on, they acknowledged the providence in their being there and hence responded to the challenge presented.

This idea is again clearly demonstrated in this week's portion as Pinchas sees the openly brazen immoral act taking place amid the camp by Prince Zimri of the tribe of Shimon as he cohabits with the Midyanite woman Kozbi.

Pinchas notices that no one has acted against this and, after calling out the problem to Moses and realising the paralyses of others, he takes action for which he is subsequently lauded and praised.

The Rebbe, both in the episode of Noah and in

**Rav Ilan Herrmann**  
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that of Pinchas, teaches that in G-d's world when one sees something, one needs to ask, "What am I being called upon to do here?"

The convenient thing is of course to remain idle, or walk away, or excuse one's involvement because "someone else will do it". Living consciously with the question of "Why am I here" means recognising the impetus to action.

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# Expats fear UK medical association's antisemitism move

CLAUDIA GROSS

When the British Medical Association (BMA) voted to review and potentially reject the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism, it deepened the fears that South African-born Jewish healthcare workers in the United Kingdom (UK) have felt since 7 October.

Some say they now question whether Jewish patients will continue to receive impartial care in Britain's National Health Service (NHS). But others believe the review offers an opportunity to improve how antisemitism policies are applied in increasingly polarised workplaces.

The vote, passed at the BMA's annual representative meeting in Brighton in June, calls on the union to investigate whether the NHS should continue to use the IHRA definition. Delegates also backed a separate emergency motion calling for a pause in implementing recommendations from the recently published Lord Mann review into antisemitism and other forms of racism in the UK health system.

For Kayla\*, a South African-born radiographer who works in a private diagnostic breast cancer unit in Luton, the vote reinforced concerns that prompted her to resign from her previous NHS post. After 7 October, she said, tensions in her department had become unbearable.

"On one particularly difficult day, I handed in my notice because I felt scared and unsafe," she told the *SA Jewish Report*. "Management promised to eliminate the threats, mostly aggressive WhatsApp posts on our work groups, and to be fair, those did stop."

She said the atmosphere nevertheless remained hostile. "I hated that I needed to take off my Hatzolah badge and any visible Hebrew from my car," she said. "The internal dynamics with most of the Muslim colleagues I work with have been tangibly hostile."

Kayla said an Israeli colleague had persuaded her to remain in her position for a time and "stand my ground", but she had ultimately decided to leave. "I am lucky to have another role that I can develop, but I am so sad that I leave like this," she said. Her

experience has influenced other personal decisions. "My daughter will give birth in January and she will have a Jewish doula and midwife for sure," she said.

The BMA's decision has reignited a long-running debate over how antisemitism should be defined within British institutions. Supporters of the motion argue that the IHRA definition can discourage legitimate criticism of Israel and create uncertainty around free speech. Opponents argue that it

harassment and ostracism against Jewish healthcare professionals," he said.

Barry\*, a 68-year-old who emigrated from Cape Town to Birmingham in 1986 and became a professor of medical ethics, views the debate through the lens of South Africa's history. "We left South Africa because institutional rules were manipulated to serve political whims," he said. "When the BMA treats a foundational framework for Jewish safety as up for debate, it signals that our security within the British establishment is entirely conditional."

Barry said reviewing an established definition of antisemitism during a documented rise in anti-Jewish incidents demonstrated poor institutional leadership. "You don't redesign the seatbelt while the vehicle is actively rolling over just because a few passengers complain that the strap feels restrictive."

Others say the review should not automatically be viewed as an attack on Jewish staff. Talia\*, a South African-born clinical psychologist working in Manchester, supports examining how the IHRA definition is applied. She stressed that rising antisemitism remained a serious concern, but believes implementation of the definition has sometimes discouraged legitimate discussion about the Middle East.

"Coming from South Africa, I know how critical open, democratic debate is for a healthy society," she said.

"We can absolutely protect Jewish NHS staff from genuine discrimination, which we must do, without creating an environment where healthcare workers are penalised for expressing ethical anxieties about geopolitical conflicts." She said many NHS employees had become anxious about discussing the Middle East because they feared disciplinary action.

Ronnie\*, who moved from Johannesburg to London in 2015 and now manages workforce diversity, equity, and inclusion programmes for a NHS mental health trust, also believes the current system can be difficult to apply consistently. "In human resources and trust management, we need policies that are practical, not ideological battlegrounds."

"Right now, the IHRA framework is handled with anxiety rather than understanding. A review shouldn't weaken protection. It should make it workable for managers to actually protect staff on the ground." Ronnie said many NHS managers lacked the specialist knowledge needed to adjudicate complex complaints involving the Middle East. "When a policy is too

complicated or politically charged for a middle manager to enforce consistently, the policy fails," she said.

Despite those differing views, many South African Jews working in Britain agree that antisemitism inside healthcare has become more visible since October 2023. Jewish birth worker BJ Woodstein, who lives in Norwich, said the BMA vote left her feeling vulnerable both professionally and personally. "It feels like betrayal. It is shocking and frightening. I feel vulnerable as a patient, parent, and birth worker. How will I be treated? Will I receive impartial care?"

Woodstein said prospective clients had withdrawn after discovering she was Jewish, while others questioned her views on Israel during consultations. "We may be moving towards a scenario where Jewish people only see Jewish doctors, nurses, midwives, and surgeons because of increased fears," she said.

Dr Fiona Sim, a public health physician

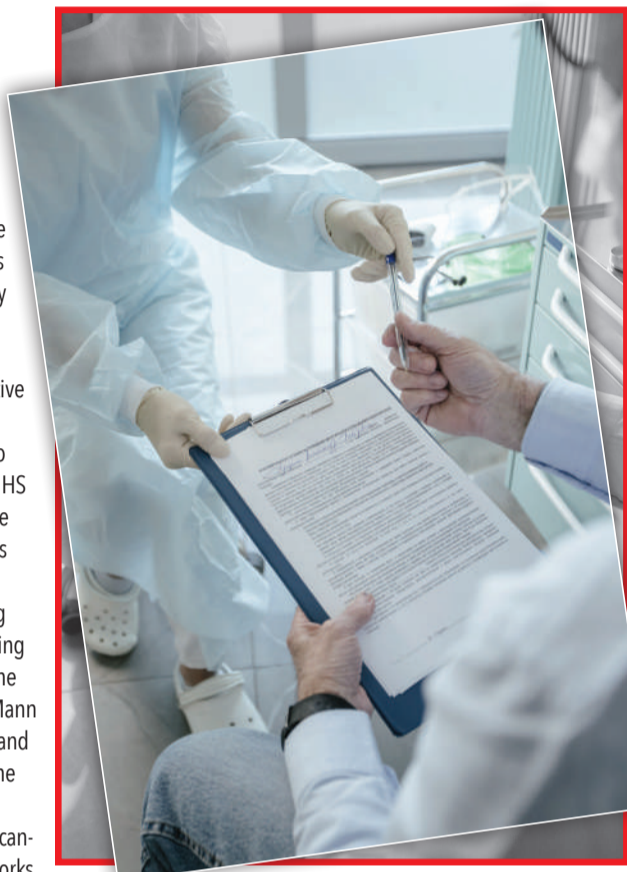
and former chair of the Royal Society for Public Health, described the BMA vote as "awful".

The Jewish Medical Association also condemned the decision, arguing that the BMA had no mandate to challenge a definition of antisemitism that has been adopted by the British government, NHS England, universities, local authorities, and numerous other institutions.

The BMA vote does not automatically change NHS policy because the union cannot direct the government or NHS England. However, it has exposed deep divisions within Britain's medical profession about how antisemitism should be defined and addressed.

For many South African Jewish expats working in the NHS, however, the debate is no longer simply about policy. It's about whether they can continue to feel safe and protected in the healthcare system they serve every day.

\*Names changed to protect identities.



## UN health rapporteur returns to a legal fight

>>Continued from page 1

has offered to assist her with her legal challenge to the HPCSA ruling.

Mofokeng's return to South Africa is therefore likely to coincide with a closely watched legal battle over whether her status as a UN mandate holder shielded her from disciplinary action by her professional regulator.

Anne Herzberg, legal adviser at Jerusalem-based NGO Monitor, said Mofokeng's tenure reflected "an all-too-common problem of Special Rapporteur activity that is not in keeping with the UN Code of Conduct."

"The one-sidedness of her approach and her highly offensive social media posts while serving all violate the Code, which requires Rapporteurs to carry out their work with objectivity, impartiality, and non-discrimination," Herzberg told the *SA Jewish Report*.

"They are also supposed to conduct themselves in a manner that does not bring the UN into disrepute. The fact that an outside standards body found Mofokeng to have acted unprofessionally should have been reason enough to dismiss her."

"Unfortunately, however, the UN has no mechanism to enforce the Code and the committee that oversees rapporteur conduct is self-policing and largely serves as a blocking back for bad behaviour. The failure to hold Rapporteurs accountable is a major reason the UNHRC is held in such ill regard."

The criticism follows a series of controversies that dogged Mofokeng throughout her UN mandate.

Most recently, Mofokeng demanded the release of Global Sumud Flotilla activists Saif Abu Keshek and Thiago Ávila after Israel detained them over alleged links to the Popular Conference for Palestinians Abroad, an organisation sanctioned by the United States Treasury for alleged ties to Hamas. Mofokeng - who interacted with both activists during their visit to South Africa - described their detention as unlawful and accused Israel of "abduction", drawing further criticism that she had again crossed the line from human rights advocacy into political activism.

She has repeatedly referred to Israel as "Israhell", insisted that "Hamas are not terrorists", and has been criticised for failing to publicly acknowledge or condemn the sexual violence committed on 7 October.

As Mofokeng leaves office, her supporters continue to hail her as a fearless advocate for global health and human rights. Her critics argue that her tenure will be remembered less for advancing the right to health than for fuelling questions about impartiality, accountability, and the credibility of the UN Human Rights Council itself.

Mofokeng had not responded to questions at the time of going to print.

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# The ‘forgotten’ far north of Israel

TALI FEINBERG

“When I look up at the sky, I have to figure out if what I am seeing is a bird or a drone,” says Adrienne Chonowitz, who made aliya from South Africa in the 1980s and has lived for decades on Kibbutz Ma’ayan Baruch, close to the Lebanon border.

“We are living in a continual nightmare,” she says. “While the rest of Israel went back to relatively normal life after the war with Iran earlier this year, that never happened for us living on the very northern border. We have lived in a state of almost perpetual war ever since 28 February 2026, the day Israel and the United States pre-emptively attacked Iran.”

Ironically, that date was a year to the day that Chonowitz moved back home after being evacuated in the wake of the 7 October massacre. She had exactly one year of relative quiet before Hezbollah entered the 2026 Iran war soon after it began. Israel continues to do battle with the terrorist organisation, which means that Israelis living on the northern border are on constant alert, with the threat of rockets and drones remaining ever-present. While the last few weeks have been relatively peaceful, soldiers were killed during a ceasefire and residents feel their ordeal is far from over.

What is even more difficult is that many of them feel “forgotten” by other Israelis, their government, Jews in the diaspora, and the world at large – all of whom seem unaware of what they endure on a daily basis. “It’s difficult for other Israelis to identify with our experience,” says Chonowitz. “For them, the war ended on 8 April, after a conditional ceasefire went into effect. But for us in the very north, life didn’t go back to normal.”

Chonowitz, a retiree who lives with her husband, Hilton, says that even for Israelis in the general northern region “the war is over”. But for those on the border overlooking Lebanon, “ceasefire is just a word, most of the time”.

She says the government reassured residents they would be returning to the “peaceful north”, but that hasn’t been the case. Her grandchildren, who also live on the kibbutz, often face school closures, and their lives continue to be disrupted. Her son’s house was badly damaged by Hezbollah rockets while they were evacuated. Thankfully, his home has been restored, but having to rebuild has been emotional.

Chonowitz’s daily life is also constantly disrupted. For example, she had to suddenly cancel a doctor’s appointment in Kiryat Shmona, made months ago, because of incoming rocket fire. “I even have to debate if I should risk going grocery shopping, because it’s not pleasant to travel under rocket fire and know that you may have to seek shelter while you are there,” she says.

Chonowitz feels fortunate that her home now has a *mamad* (safe room) to go to during the daily sirens, but many northern residents don’t have safe rooms. The residents of her kibbutz go to nearby Kiryat Shmona for their daily errands, but 90% of shops remain closed. “The residents



A damaged building in Kibbutz Manara, near the Israel-Lebanon border

of the north generally feel frustrated and abandoned,” she says.

Paul Mirbach, who made aliya from South Africa decades ago, lives on northern Kibbutz Tuval, but says it is “the towns further north that are feeling the brunt” of the conflict with Hezbollah.

“There have been missiles or drones launched at Karmiel recently, but nowhere near the intensity of Nahariya, Kiryat Shmona, Metulla, and the kibbutzim and moshavim on the border,” he says.

His mother lives in an old-age home in Karmiel. There are about 40 residents, all in wheelchairs. “At any given time, there’s a team of about six caregivers and nurses,” says Mirbach. “When a siren goes, there’s no time for the caregivers to wheel all 40 residents into the bomb shelter.”

Instead, they’re left where they are, “unable to do anything, helpless and exposed, praying that they don’t get hit,” says Mirbach. “Imagine their anxiety. Imagine the stress of their families whenever they hear that Karmiel is being targeted. These are the forgotten ones whose lives don’t count, who are never the focus. The non-stories, because they are old. This is an aspect of life here that never gets told.”

Professor Mooli Lahad, an Israeli psychologist and psycho-trauma specialist, wrote an article on the *Times of Israel* blogs on 3 June titled “Northern Israelis are paying the price for their resilience”. He says “the longer residents [in the north] showed their ability to cope with life under fire, the more politicians felt free to abandon them”.

He wrote that the government’s recent approval of an extra NIS 13 billion (R72 billion) to strengthen the north is welcome, “but its effect will be felt only in several years, and it cannot make up for the past. The pain is happening now, and the residents of northern Israel need the support of their fellow citizens.” People in the north are experiencing “a total loss of control, and a loss of the ability to predict tomorrow”.

“Stop demanding that these residents continue to be heroes,” wrote Lahad. “Give them the right to be human, hurting, exhausted, and angry. This, too, is resilience: the ability to say, ‘Enough. No more.’”

One organisation that hasn’t forgotten those on the border is Telfed, which supports South African *olim*, even long after they have made aliya. Telfed chief executive Dorron

200 South African families living in Israel’s north, with some on the border.

Telfed has supported these families throughout the wars and evacuations that began in October 2023, and continues to do so. “Telfed doesn’t try to take the place of government. Rather, we try to assist where the government will not,” Kline says.

For example, Kibbutz Manara, which has South African expats and is very close to the border, wanted to encourage young people to return home. It asked Telfed to assist, and

the organisation built a new outdoor braai area for the youth to enjoy. The area is also very cold, and the kibbutz’s rapid response team didn’t have warm coats, so Telfed purchased some for them. These are just some examples of the work Telfed does to assist those living under fire.

“Those who returned to the north after being evacuated went home and were greeted by more attacks,” says Kline. “There is a huge amount of uncertainty for them, not knowing how things will pan out. They are weary and worried, but the fact that they stay, continue to raise their children there, and live in such a state of flux is to be admired. It is a strong statement of belief in our future here, and we must continue to support them in any way we can.”

Kline says there are approximately

home. It asked Telfed to assist, and

## US rebukes SA for cosyng up to Iran and China

NICOLA MILTZ

Recent high-level diplomatic engagements with Iran and China have reignited debate over South Africa’s foreign policy, prompting sharp criticism from the United States and raising fresh questions about the government’s claim of non-alignment.

The controversy erupted after US Ambassador to South Africa Leo Brent Bozell III publicly criticised the African National Congress (ANC)-led government’s decision to host Iran’s Deputy Foreign Minister on 23 June and the visit of Deputy President Paul Mashatile to Beijing at the same time.

In a post on X, Bozell wrote, “The government of South Africa rolls out the red carpet for Iran’s Deputy Foreign Minister, while Deputy President Mashatile is in Beijing deepening ties with China. Pretoria calls this ‘non-alignment’. We call it what it is: a choice. The South African people deserve an honest conversation about who their government is choosing to stand with.”

The ambassador’s remarks represent one of Washington’s strongest public rebukes of Pretoria in recent months and come amid continuing tensions over South Africa’s foreign policy, including its deepening ties with China and Iran and its case against Israel at the International Court of Justice.

Mashatile’s visit to China focused on expanding trade, investment, and strategic cooperation, while reinforcing ties within the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Indonesia) bloc. At the same time, Deputy Minister of International Relations and Cooperation Thandi Moraka hosted Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Dr Saeed Khatibzadeh for bilateral talks in Pretoria.

According to the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (Dirco), Moraka reiterated South Africa’s long-standing position that international disputes should be resolved through negotiation rather than war. Khatibzadeh briefed her on recent developments following the memorandum of understanding between the United States and Iran, and South Africa expressed its willingness to support efforts to preserve the momentum towards peace.

The two deputy ministers also welcomed the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz, noting its importance for global energy and food security, particularly for African countries affected by disruptions to one of the world’s busiest shipping routes.

Dirco responded swiftly to Bozell’s criticism. In a strongly worded statement, the department reaffirmed that “as a sovereign nation, South Africa pursues an independent foreign policy firmly anchored in the principle of non-alignment.”

“We refuse to be drawn into geopolitical contestations or be pressured to take sides; instead, we prioritise inclusive dialogue, global peace, and our own national interests.”

Dirco further argued that criticism from Washington was inconsistent. “We note the inherent contradiction in being publicly scrutinised for engaging Iran and China, the very same states with which the United States itself continues to actively interact”.

However, critics argue the issue is not diplomatic engagement

itself, but the South African government’s repeated political alignment with authoritarian governments that are openly hostile to the West.

Benji Shulman, director of the Middle East Africa Research Institute, said, “These kinds of actions represent a continuation of South African foreign policy over the past 30 years since the ANC came to power. They maintain ties with the West on trade and aid, but politically and ideologically they elevate anti-Western governments and continually seek opportunities to strengthen those relationships.”

Shulman said Iran has enjoyed close access to senior ANC and government leaders throughout the Middle East conflict.

“Throughout the war, the Iranian ambassador had full access to ANC and government figures and has been very public about the support received from a variety of quarters,” he said.

“Now that the war has ended and there appears to have been an American push towards a negotiated agreement, Iran has greater political space to expand its international relationships. We are seeing that reflected in South Africa, while China also continues deepening its engagement with both the ANC and government.”

Sara Gon, a fellow at the Institute of Race Relations, said the symbolism of Pretoria’s recent diplomatic engagements should concern South Africans.

“We should be concerned because South Africa hasn’t rushed to repair or strengthen its relationship with the United States while clearly and actively pursuing closer links with China and Iran,” she said. “The US has made it clear that countries can maintain relationships with states that are not American allies without jeopardising their relationship with Washington.”

Gon said South Africa’s particularly close relationship with Iran appeared increasingly difficult to reconcile with its stated commitment to human rights.

“Iran is regarded as the world’s greatest exporter of terror through its proxy organisations. It commits serious human rights abuses against its own people and is governed without meaningful democratic accountability. By rights, this should be exactly the sort of country that South Africa’s foreign policy should treat with caution.”

Pretoria’s foreign policy increasingly appeared inconsistent with its own stated values.

“South Africa’s relationships with countries that have questionable human rights records have become the hallmark of its foreign policy.”

Gon said although Iran once supplied more than 40% of South Africa’s oil imports, those imports ended about a decade ago because of sanctions linked to Tehran’s nuclear programme. “Today, trade between the two countries is relatively modest, with South African exports to Iran valued at about \$6.1 million in 2025 and imports from Iran totalling approximately \$3.7 million in 2024.”

“Political ties, however, have continued to deepen. In 2023, South Africa and Iran signed a cooperation agreement aimed at developing and equipping South African oil refineries,” she said.

Whether viewed as principled non-alignment or a deliberate geopolitical choice, South Africa’s latest engagements with China and Iran have once again placed Pretoria’s foreign policy under scrutiny, with the strain in its relationship with Washington showing few signs of easing.



Iranian Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr Saeed Khatibzadeh and Deputy Minister of International Relations and Cooperation Thandi Moraka on 23 June 2026

Photo: Dirco website

# 'I felt safer in Gaza than Cape Town'

CLAUDIA GROSS

A Palestinian journalist who has spent years writing about conflict, dialogue, and peacebuilding arrived in Cape Town hoping to tell South Africa's story. Instead, after becoming the victim of two crimes within months, he left with a very different perspective on the country.

Karim\*, a freelance journalist from Gaza, came to South Africa in December intending to report on politics, society, and the country's growing role in international affairs. His work has appeared in publications including *The Washington Times*, *Moment Magazine*, *The Jewish Independent*, and *Ynet*. He has become known for writing about dialogue between Palestinians and Israelis and participating in peacebuilding initiatives.

His plans for South Africa extended beyond Cape Town. He hoped to travel throughout the region, reporting from neighbouring countries before eventually returning to the Middle East. Two incidents of crime changed the course of his visit.

The first happened in April while he was working from a café. After placing his belongings on a table, he briefly walked to the counter to order coffee. When he returned, his phone had disappeared. Although upset, he regarded it as an isolated incident.

The second experience proved more traumatic. In June, Karim was walking to a grocery store in Mowbray when a vehicle stopped beside him. Four men got out, confronted him, and robbed him of his phone. Using his laptop, he was later able to trace the phone's location through its tracking software. But he received little assistance from police, he said.

"I became just another statistic," he said. Karim rejects suggestions that the attacks were connected to his identity as a Palestinian or to his journalism. As someone who has reported extensively on conflict, he is careful not to draw conclusions unsupported by evidence. "I don't think it was political. I think it was random crime."

Even so, the incidents dramatically altered his

impression of the country. He said he struggled to understand why South Africans continue living with such high levels of violent crime. He told this reporter, "I think you should make aliya. It's safer in Israel than here, even with the conflict."

Although Gaza has endured war, displacement, and destruction, he said crime remains far less common there too in his experience. "In Palestine, there are bombs and missiles, but people don't steal from each other. People help each other."

He described a strong sense of community that persists despite years of conflict. "When people have nothing, they still look after each other," he said.

Karim found it difficult to reconcile that experience with life in South Africa, where he felt unsafe performing everyday activities like walking to a local shop.

Yet amid the disappointment, something unexpected happened. News of his falling victim to crime reached Democratic Alliance Member of Parliament Darren Bergman through another overseas journalist, who has also asked to remain anonymous. Within days, Bergman had contacted members of Cape Town's Jewish community to ask whether anyone would help a stranded Palestinian reporter who had been robbed twice.

The response surprised him. "They didn't ask who he voted for, what his politics were, or where he came from," Bergman said. "They just asked, 'How can we help?'" Members of the community quickly offered practical support.

One Jewish South African journalist arranged to

replace Karim's stolen phone. Another person offered free counselling. Others volunteered to help with his immediate needs, while Bergman offered him accommodation. For Bergman, those gestures became part of a larger story. "I think that's the power of this," he said. "People heard about a journalist from Gaza who needed help, and they simply helped."

Karim said the experience reminded him that acts of kindness often come from unexpected places. It

Another reflected on the Jewish festival of Sukkot, arguing that hospitality and openness remain essential foundations for peace.

He believes journalism should create opportunities for dialogue rather than reinforce division. And although his work has often placed him in politically sensitive environments, he insists on maintaining his independence. "I write what I see," he said.

Fortunately, Karim has not given up on South Africa altogether. He hopes to return in December to continue the reporting trip that was interrupted. However, he has chosen not to speak publicly under his own name about what happened. He told the *SA Jewish Report* that he had been advised that drawing attention to his experiences could complicate future visa applications if he wished to return to South Africa.

For that reason, he asked that his identity not be linked publicly to the incidents.

For now, he leaves South Africa with one memory that is stronger than the others. It is not the stolen phones or the frustration he felt after seeking police help. It is the people who reached out despite knowing little about him beyond the fact that he needed assistance.

For someone who has spent years writing about conflict and searching for common ground between people divided by politics, religion, and history, that response carried particular significance. "If people focused on our shared humanity, then the world would be a far better place," he said.

Karim's months in South Africa did not unfold as he had imagined. Instead of leaving with a notebook full of stories about the country, he left with a story of his own. It's a story of crime and fear, but also one of unexpected generosity.

\*The source has requested anonymity for security reasons.



reinforced his approach to journalism, in which he has tried to challenge assumptions about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by highlighting individuals rather than stereotypes.

His articles have explored cooperation between Israelis and Palestinians, questioned cultural boycotts, reflected on shared traditions, and examined the human cost of war through deeply personal stories.

One of his most widely read essays was written after his father was killed in Gaza. Rather than focusing on politics, he wrote about the danger of reducing people to statistics.

## Time to nominate the Jewish achievers of 2026

GILANA LAB

Nominations for the Jewish Achiever Awards 2026, in partnership with Investec, are officially open.

Who will join the ranks of South Africa's most remarkable Jewish leaders, innovators, philanthropists, entrepreneurs, and changemakers?

The search has begun for the individuals whose vision, leadership, and dedication have helped shape South African society and inspire those around them.

For 27 years, the Jewish Achiever Awards have stood as the community's highest recognition of excellence. More than an awards ceremony, it's a celebration of achievement, resilience, leadership, and the extraordinary contribution South African Jewry continues to make across every sphere of national life.

Over the years, the Achiever stage has honoured some of the country's most respected business leaders, innovators, professionals, philanthropists, and community builders. Their stories reflect not only personal success, but a commitment to creating opportunities, uplifting others, and leaving a lasting impact on South Africa. The awards have become synonymous with recognising those who embody excellence while remaining dedicated to the values of service, leadership, and community.

This year's awards continue that proud tradition.

Among the honours to be awarded are the Investec Professional Excellence Award, recognising exceptional achievement and leadership within a chosen profession; the Investec Business Leadership Award, celebrating visionary business leadership and impact; and the Europcar Women in Leadership Award, honouring

outstanding women whose influence has shaped business, public life, philanthropy, academia, the arts, and the broader community.

Entrepreneurial innovation will be recognised through the Eric Ellerine Entrepreneur Award, while the Ichikowitz Family Foundation Rising Star Award will shine a spotlight on achievers aged 30 and under who are already making their mark.

The awards also celebrate those whose greatest achievements are measured through service to others. The Bertie Lubner Humanitarian Award in Honour of Chief Rabbi Cyril Harris recognises compassion and commitment to improving lives, while the Mann Made Community Service Award honours individuals whose dedication has strengthened and enriched Jewish communal life.

Excellence in the arts, sport, science, and culture will once again be celebrated, while the prestigious Kirsh Family Lifetime Achievement Award in Honour of Helen Suzman recognises a lifetime of leadership, achievement, and service that has left an enduring legacy.

The Jewish Achiever Awards 2026, in partnership with Investec, will take centre stage on 1 November when the community gathers for one of its most anticipated annual events.

At a time when stories of division and uncertainty often dominate headlines, the Jewish Achiever Awards offer something different: a chance to celebrate excellence, recognise leadership, and honour individuals whose achievements remind us of what is possible.

The challenge now belongs to the community.

Whether it's a pioneering entrepreneur, an inspiring professional, a tireless volunteer, a groundbreaking scientist, an accomplished artist, or a humanitarian changing lives, the next Jewish Achiever could be someone whose story deserves to be told.

Nominate now on <https://bit.ly/ja26nom>



Former Jewish Achiever winner Robbie Brozin congratulates 2025's Women in Leadership winner Grace Harding



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# South African Jewish Report

## A quiet day, a loud warning

In the days leading up to Tuesday, 30 June, there was a heaviness in the air. It wasn't overt, but sat quietly niggling in our heads as we got on with our daily lives. It was an ominous worry about what was to come and what the so-called national shutdown was going to bring.

We had received the warnings. We had seen the messages flying around. There were fears of xenophobic protests across South Africa, of anger spilling into the streets, of all shops being closed, roads being blocked, people being targeted, and communities being hurt. And yes, as a Jewish community, we asked ourselves the question we have learnt to ask far too often: would this somehow find its way to us too?

It wasn't an irrational fear. In South Africa, and the world, we know how quickly a protest can become something else. We know how easily frustration can be redirected, how poverty and anger and political opportunism can become a dangerous mixture. We know, too, that when people begin speaking about "foreigners" as if they are not human beings with names, families, fears, and dreams, the ground beneath us becomes less stable.

We also had memory on our side – and memory is not always comforting. We remembered July 2021, when what began in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) and spread to Gauteng became days of looting, burning, blocked roads, destroyed businesses, frightened families, and lives lost. We remembered the images from KZN in particular: shopping centres gutted, supply chains broken, communities barricading themselves in, and people wondering whether anyone was coming to protect them. Once you have seen a country tilt that quickly towards chaos, you don't easily dismiss warnings as hysteria.

So we worried. We worried for immigrants who have already lived with too much uncertainty. We worried for business owners, workers, domestic employees, children, elderly people, and anyone who might be caught in the wrong place at the wrong time. We worried for our country because when any group is singled out and made to carry the blame for a nation's pain, the whole country is diminished.

And then 30 June came. And in so many suburbs, it was eerily quiet. Streets that people feared might become tense were super-calm and all but empty. It was reminiscent of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. So many shops stayed shuttered and for a country that so needs economic activity, there appeared to be none – or very little.

People peered at their phones, checked community groups, listened for sirens that did not come, and slowly exhaled.

Quiet didn't mean there was no pain. It didn't mean the fear was imagined. It didn't mean those who felt threatened were safe. But it did mean that what we feared would happen did not. It meant that, in many places, restraint held. Communities held. Protesters did not run rampant and use the opportunity to harm and destroy. The security organisations maintained law and order.

Was that R600 million the government allocated to prevent violence and protect the infrastructure necessary? If so, we deserve a clear accounting of it. Where did the money go? What exactly was done? What was learnt? In a country with so many urgent needs, transparency is not a luxury; it is part of trust.

There is something unsettling about being grateful for a day simply because it did not turn violent. Yet that is where we are. We are grateful that most people came home safely. Grateful that our suburbs did not erupt. Grateful that the Jewish community, like so many others, was not drawn into further fear. Grateful, but not complacent.

Because beneath the quiet lies something we cannot ignore. Xenophobia does not disappear because one planned protest passes without widespread chaos. The language that fuels it remains dangerous. The social conditions that make it persuasive remain urgent. The failures of governance, policing, border management, service delivery, and economic opportunity remain real.

The question we should be asking is if this is really about foreigners "taking" South African jobs, or is it about a devastating unemployment crisis and deep economic despair that have left too many people looking for someone to blame? Blaming the vulnerable for those failures is neither moral nor practical, and it will not create a single job or repair a broken system.

As Jews, we know what it means when a society decides that its problems can be solved by pointing at an outsider. We know what happens when fear is given a target. That knowledge should not make us inward-looking; it should make us more alert to the dignity of others. Our safety is bound up with the safety of every minority, every migrant, every person whose belonging is questioned by those who need someone to blame.

So perhaps the lesson of 30 June is that fear must not be allowed to lead us. It can make us prepare, stay informed, and protect one another. But it must not harden us. It must not make us suspicious of every stranger or indifferent to someone else's terror.

In the end, the quiet of the day was a gift, and maybe even a warning. It showed us what did not happen – and reminded us what still could, if we fail to confront hatred early, honestly, and together.

Government dare not simply celebrate a quiet day and move on. It must account for the money spent, explain what worked, and then turn with equal urgency to the reasons xenophobia takes hold in the first place: unemployment, poverty, corruption, failing services, porous systems, and the daily humiliation of people who feel abandoned.

Community leaders, faith leaders, civil society, and ordinary South Africans also have work to do. We must challenge reckless language wherever we hear it. We must refuse to forward fearmongering messages. We must protect people who are being scapegoated. And we must demand solutions that create work and restore dignity rather than slogans that turn neighbour against neighbour.

For now, we can breathe, but we are not done. South Africa needs a sustained commitment to confront xenophobia before it becomes violence, to fix the economic despair that feeds it, and to insist that no person's safety depends on whether they are considered "one of us".

Our future cannot be built on fear of the foreigner. It has to be built on the courage – and the discipline – to see one another as human, and to act before fear becomes fire.

**Shabbat shalom!**

**Peta Krost**  
Editor



## Trump's deals with Iran are not a betrayal of Israel

OPINION

JOEL POLLAK



Supporters of Israel have been dismayed by some of the recent actions and statements of the Trump administration with regard to a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with Iran. As one friend from Israel recently told me, "Our best friend is hurting us." This represents a fear that an agreement with Iran could leave Israel facing existential risks at the end of three years of war. Yet there are three important facts to remember about the context for current developments.

The first is the reason for US President Donald Trump's actions. Trump is facing midterm elections in November, at the halfway point of his second term. The opposition typically picks up seats in such elections and that could mean Democrats take control of one, or both, houses of Congress. Democrats have become extreme in their ideology and tactics, and would certainly impeach Trump and try to cut the war short. They will also try to cut off aid to Israel, or even join international boycotts.



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and US President Donald Trump

In other words, the midterm elections are themselves a battlefield in the war. To spare the war effort, and himself, Trump has to avoid a commitment of US ground forces and make compromises that bring down the oil price and reduce inflationary pressures. He will respond to Iran if the regime pushes its luck – as it is now doing – but if he presses too far, he could cripple himself politically, which would be good for Iran and bad for both the US and Israel.

Second, the US will ultimately win this war, because it has to do so. As the country celebrates its 250th anniversary, it is worth noting that the reason it became a great naval power and developed a strong expeditionary force – the Marines – centuries ago was to fight Islamic regimes that greeted American independence from Britain (and British protection) by seizing American ships, enslaving American sailors, and demanding tribute from the American government.

The Barbary Wars, as they were called, took place in two phases. At the end of the first, the US fought some successful battles but had to accept a compromise that didn't resolve the issue and that left some tribute in place. In the second war, the US was far stronger and was able to end the threat. It didn't accept that some remote Islamic power would be able to threaten the freedom of the seas, and it won't accept that now, even if there is a pause.

Third, the Trump administration has already delivered several victories that have benefited Israel and placed it in a uniquely advantageous position. The US destroyed much of the Iranian military. It supported Israel in its destruction of the Iranian leadership. And it has brokered a crucial agreement between

Israel and Lebanon that will allow the Israeli military to maintain a security presence in southern Lebanon as it clears out remnants of Iranian-backed Hezbollah.

The latter agreement appeared to be in jeopardy when the Iranians tried to link the MOU with Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon, and the Trump administration suggested that Israel might need to compromise on Lebanon to preserve the overall deal. Over several days, it became clear that Israel would never withdraw from Lebanon while Hezbollah remained; that this was an existential question and it would defy any MOU between the US and Iran on this point.

Put another way, the administration floated Israeli withdrawal as a trial balloon, and received a firm answer, not just from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu but also from the Israeli opposition. They, in turn, were conveying the will of the Israeli people, who have sacrificed their lives for nearly three years. This wasn't diplomatic posturing by Israel; it was a statement of fact that leaving

Iran's proxy in place meant ceding northern Israel, which Israelis would keep giving their lives to prevent.

There is another reason that supporters of Israel worry about the Trump administration's stance, and that is the fact that Trump and especially Vice-President JD Vance, who hopes to succeed him, have been vocally critical of Israel. Trump has earned enough trust that his criticisms

are taken in stride. But Vance, who has otherwise been supportive of Israel, appears to have taken some gratuitous swipes at Israel to appease the online antisemitic fringe.

That is happening as Democrats are electing rabid anti-Israel, and anti-American, socialists. In one case, congressman Dan Goldman lost a primary race to socialist Brad Lander. Both are Jews, but Lander has taken a virulently anti-Israel line. Goldman is only a tepid supporter of Israel, but that was enough. Not even his leading role in impeaching Trump could save him. The campaign was notable for antisemitism against Goldman by Lander's socialist allies.

So the concern is understandable. But the war will end in victory, even if Trump must back away for now, for domestic political reasons. Moreover, the success of the Trump-Netanyahu partnership will endure long after their respective administrations. Supporters of Israel should remain vigilant, but should be diplomatic in their criticism. That was the valid part of Vance's point, beneath his unpleasant language: don't make this harder for Trump than it already is.

• South African-born Joel Pollak is the senior editor-at-large and in-house counsel at Breitbart News and hosts Breitbart News Sunday. He was once the speech writer for then leader of the Democratic Alliance Tony Leon, and has a Master of Arts in Jewish Studies. Pollak has written several books, including *How Trump Won: The Inside Story of a Revolution*, and *The Agenda: What Trump Should Do in His First 100 Days*.

# Venezuela's Jews rally after quake shatters community

CLAUDIA GROSS

Late in the evening on 24 June, as Venezuelan Jews gathered with family, returned from synagogue, or settled in at home, the ground beneath them began to shake. Within a minute, two powerful earthquakes struck, leaving hundreds dead, thousands injured, and an already struggling Jewish community facing one of its greatest challenges in decades.

As rescue teams continue searching for survivors, the Jewish community has transformed synagogues and communal institutions into emergency shelters, mobilised volunteers, and launched an international appeal to help families who have lost everything.

The 7.2- and 7.5-magnitude earthquakes, the strongest in Venezuela in more than 125 years, devastated parts of Caracas, La Guaira, and surrounding areas. Jewish leaders say at least nine members of the community are dead or missing, while dozens of Jewish families are displaced after their homes were destroyed or declared unsafe.

"The community didn't suffer major losses regarding lives, but we have a lot of people with no home, obviously no livelihood," said Roberto Mishkin, a community leader. "We're working hard to organise and raise funds to relocate people to decent places and recover the homes that can be recovered."

Venezuela was once home to one of Latin America's largest Jewish communities, but years of political instability and economic hardship have reduced it to an estimated 5 000, most of whom live in Caracas. For many, the earthquake has added another chapter to years of hardship.

A community leader who requested anonymity told the SA Jewish Report his family had only just arrived home when emergency alerts appeared on their phones. "Less than 20 seconds later, it was a full-scale major earthquake," he said.

The shaking lasted about 45 seconds, though it felt much longer. "Our whole life changed. It's a whole different reality." His home was damaged and his family has temporarily moved in with relatives while he focuses on assisting others.

Mishkin says he heard a low rumble and thought his

air-conditioning was faulty. "Then everything started slightly shaking. Then everything started really violently shaking." He sheltered in a doorway before checking on his parents and heading directly to the community's emergency response centres.

The Jewish community had long maintained emergency protocols for disasters. Within hours, both its Jewish Community Centre (JCC) and communal headquarters had opened as shelters.

Around 400 displaced people spent the first night at the two facilities. Volunteers distributed food, water, blankets, and mattresses while leaders established an emergency operations centre. Although many families have since found temporary accommodation with relatives or friends, about 100 people remain at the JCC, known locally as Hebraica.

"We set up a communal kitchen so we can give breakfast, lunch, and dinner to the ones who need it," Mishkin said. Community leaders estimate about 80 Jewish homes have been destroyed, badly damaged, or remain inaccessible while engineers inspect buildings. "The number of displaced is going to grow," Mishkin said. "Every day more buildings are being evaluated."

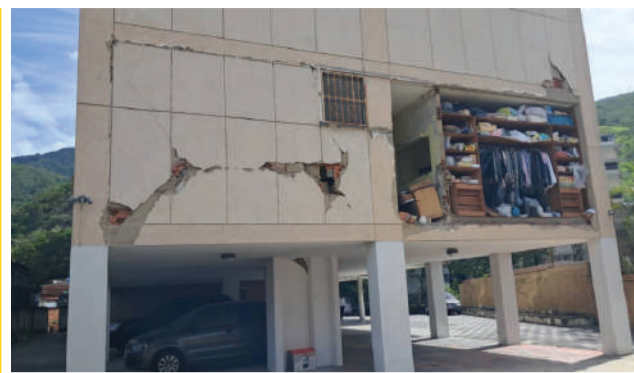
Several elderly residents and families with medical needs have been moved to communal care facilities or hotels. Even buildings that escaped major structural damage require repairs. "My synagogue has broken walls," Mishkin said. "Nothing major structurally, but everything needs fixing."

Dara\*, a 28-year-old Venezuelan, was working remotely from her boyfriend's apartment when the earthquake struck. "I was screaming, 'Oh my G-d, we're going to die,'" she said. "I was just thinking the building was going to come down."

After the shaking stopped, the pair grabbed their shoes and ran into the street with their neighbours.

"We all know someone who lost a family member or a friend, or lost their home and can't go back," she said. "If one person is hurt, we're all hurt."

The emotional toll extends beyond Venezuela's borders. Jonathan Melul, who was born and raised in Venezuela and has lived in Israel for the past six years, learned about the disaster through his family's WhatsApp group. "I couldn't really work on Thursday," he said. "I



An apartment rendered unliveable by the earthquake

found it challenging to focus." His family's relief that they weren't affected was tempered by uncertainty. "My grandmother's carer is searching for her kids," he said. "They are missing following the earthquake."

Kevin Hassan, a Venezuelan Jew who moved to South Africa last year, has spent the days since the earthquake in constant contact with relatives and friends. "My whole family, my mother, my father, and others, are still in Venezuela," he said.

"When it started, my family told me the ground shook for what felt like forever. Things were falling off the walls, everyone was running for doorways and stairwells in the dark." He said aftershocks left many too frightened to return home. "People have been sleeping in the streets, in cars, in any open space, too scared of the next one to sleep under a roof."

Hassan said Los Chorros, one of Caracas's main Jewish neighbourhoods, suffered extensive damage, with many buildings left unsafe.

Despite the small size of Venezuela's Jewish population, its response to the quake reflected its enduring strength, said Hassan. "Within hours there were dozens of WhatsApp groups going. People were checking on each other, organising help. Friends and family are coordinating food from the United States, Panama, and wherever the diaspora landed. Everybody is helping everybody."

That includes Israel, which has sent a 16-member team comprising specialists from the Israel Defense Forces Home Front Command, the Foreign Ministry, Magen Disaster and Emergency Management, Ready for

Rescue, and SmartAID to work alongside local search and rescue teams. Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar described the deployment as a humanitarian act, saying helping people in need "is not related to politics". Venezuela broke diplomatic ties with Israel 17 years ago.

Dara said volunteers from across Venezuela have worked side by side searching collapsed buildings, collecting donations, and supporting displaced families. "What has been so moving to me is seeing everyone in Venezuela

helping one another," she said. "Even though we don't have much as a country, we have a lot as a community."

Despite widespread poverty, donation centres quickly filled. A GoFundMe campaign for rebuilding the Jewish community had raised \$1 101 480 (R18 million) by the time of going to print.

Mishkin warned that rebuilding would present an enormous financial challenge. "Most of the people who lost their homes are never going to be able to afford to fix them on their own," he said. "The community has to step up and help."

"We're asking the international Jewish community for help" he said, welcoming the assistance already arriving from Israel and elsewhere.

Dara said recovery would be like building the country again. "It's going to take months, even years. Keep us in your prayers. Keep us in your thoughts. Every bit of help is needed."

\*Source has requested anonymity for security reasons.

## Similarities between Venezuela and SA

OPINION

DAN BROTMAN



Venezuela's Jewish community was known as one of the most vibrant and cohesive in all of Latin America. Numbering 25 000 at its peak in the 1990s, the community descends mostly from immigrants who arrived from Europe after World War II, as well as from Morocco after the 1976 Six-Day War in Israel.

The community was roughly half Ashkenazi and half Sephardic, but unlike other Jewish communities in Latin America – such as Mexico and Panama, where the two groups are quite distinct – Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews married each other, went to school together, and shared the Hebraica campus, a sprawling Jewish country club offering Olympic-grade sporting facilities, Jewish schools, kosher restaurants, and sporting activities.

Since the 1998 election of Hugo Chávez as president, 80% of the community has emigrated. The economy collapsed, the government adopted an increasingly anti-Israel stance, cutting diplomatic relations with Israel and expelling the Israeli ambassador in 2009, and kidnappings in broad daylight became common. Caracas subsequently became one of the most dangerous cities in the world, with a per-capita homicide rate comparable to those of major South African cities.

Most members of the Venezuelan Jewish community emigrated to Miami in the United States, Panama, Mexico, and Israel. Like many fellow Latin American Jews in Miami, they have sought to recreate the Jewish way of life they left behind – much as South African Jews have done in Australia – settling among a large Spanish-speaking Jewish population only a three-and-a-half-hour flight from Caracas.

As in South Africa, almost everyone in the Venezuelan

Jewish community has a child, sibling, or other close relative living abroad. In many cases, the parents are the last family members in the country, while their children and grandchildren are scattered across the world.

The mass emigration has forced those who remain to make difficult decisions about Jewish infrastructure that was built for a much larger community. During my visit, I saw both an Ashkenazi and a Sephardic synagogue that had been closed within the past year because the community had shrunk so dramatically. As in South Africa, some synagogues have closed altogether, while others struggle to make a *minyan*.

having elderly parents in the country whom they feel responsible for, running a successful family business, or working in a licensed profession, such as medicine or law, that cannot easily be relicensed elsewhere.

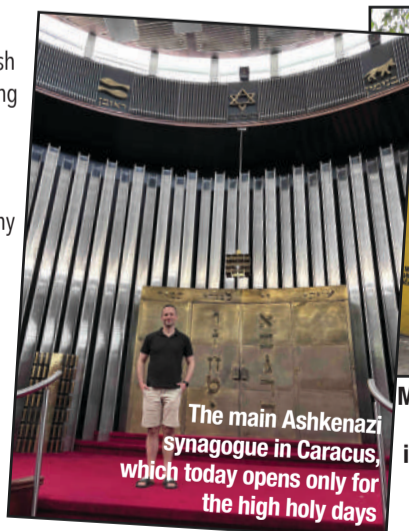
The number of community members who now need financial assistance has increased dramatically, and a feeding organisation now provides monthly food packages to 300 family units.

I attended a Shabbat dinner at the home of a Chabad rabbi in his late 20s who had arrived in Venezuela several years earlier. My fellow dinner guests were all under the age of 35, which is unusual in a community where relatively few young adults remain. Almost all of their peers now live in Miami, although many had left Venezuela themselves to attend university in the United States.

Because white-collar salaries in Venezuela remain extremely low, a legacy of years of hyperinflation and economic instability, many young professionals who return do so either to work in family businesses or to be closer to loved ones while earning foreign-currency incomes through remote work for overseas companies. This allows them to maintain a standard of living largely insulated from the realities of the Venezuelan economy.

Like South Africa, mass emigration has reduced the number of key donors in the community, many of whom are feeling squeezed. The community is having to decide what to prioritise: maintaining synagogues or expanding social services. The stand-alone pre-school at Hebraica was recently closed and relocated to the main school because there were too few children. One young man I met told me that his graduating class at the Jewish school had numbered 140 students. Today, the average class size is down to around 20.

Continued on page 11>>



The main Ashkenazi synagogue in Caracas, which today opens only for the high holy days



Murals portraying Chávez alongside revered figures and martyrs, including Jesus and former leaders of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps

The main Ashkenazi synagogue seats 1 200, and its ballroom can accommodate 500 guests. Today, it is open only for high holy day services. I was told that in the 1990s, the synagogues were full and the ballrooms were constantly in use, sometimes hosting several weddings a week. Today, a synagogue is fortunate if it hosts four weddings in an entire year.

So why did the 20% of the Jewish community who remained choose to stay? Reasons vary, but some include

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|  | <b>BAT YAM</b><br>New investment opportunity, walking distance to stunning beaches. Part of the city's impressive urban renewal. 2, 3, 4 Rooms                        |
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# Fifty years on, Entebbe still captures Jewish hearts

CLAUDIA GROSS

As Israel marks 50 years since the Entebbe rescue, newly declassified government documents have shed fresh light on one of the most daring hostage rescue missions in military history. For many South African Jews, however, the operation has remained vivid thanks to a six-minute film produced by Johannesburg's Sydenham Shul a decade ago.

Released to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the rescue, *Miracle at Entebbe* has since attracted more than a million views on YouTube.

The film recounts how in 1976 Israeli soldiers rescued more than 100 hostages held by terrorists who had hijacked an Air France flight en route from Tel Aviv to Paris and diverted it to Entebbe Airport in Uganda.

For the shul's Life Rabbi Emeritus Yossy Goldman, it was important that the remarkable story not be forgotten. "It was our production," he said. "I was the rabbi and I was also the producer of the film, and very proud of it."

The idea emerged while Sydenham Shul was organising a concert featuring American Jewish singer Benny Friedman. "Because it was around the time of the 40th anniversary, we decided to do something to link it," Goldman said.

Although several documentaries and feature films had already been made about the rescue, Goldman wanted something concise that audiences could watch before the concert. "We wanted to keep it short," he said. "We were quite ruthless in editing it down to six-and-a-half minutes, which was no easy feat."

Goldman enlisted filmmaker and historian David Fleminger to help tell the story. "Rabbi Goldman is very passionate about Entebbe," Fleminger said. "He wanted the community to be reminded about what an amazing event Entebbe was, what a miracle it was that the audacious plan actually was executed correctly."

Goldman prepared the initial script before Fleminger transformed it into a visual narrative using archival footage from documentaries, feature films, and historical recordings. "He commissioned me to write an overview script," Fleminger said. "I used existing footage that I found online from various documentaries, movies, and various other sources, and edited together essentially a new retelling of Entebbe."

Although Fleminger's career has focused largely on corporate productions,



Rescued from Entebbe Airport 50 years ago

the project appealed to his lifelong interest in history. "It's always nice to take a story and retell it so that it's accessible," he said. There was never an intention to offer a new interpretation of the operation. "This wasn't an academic history," he said. "It was a retelling of the story in the most engaging way that we could."

For Fleminger, storytelling is essential to keeping history alive. "History shouldn't just be about dates and facts," he said. "It should be a narrative that engages us and inspires us. History isn't something that happened in the past. History is something we live with every day. The more we understand, the more we appreciate our history, and the better prepared we are for the future."

For Goldman, Operation Entebbe grabbed his imagination from the start. "I lived through it, I did a lot of reading about it, and I researched it before we did the film."

He credits his assistant, Ingrid Seeff, for her invaluable work in helping the film project come to fruition.

He believes the rescue represented far more than military excellence. "First

of all, is that G-d is watching over us," Goldman said. "As much as we admire the bravery, the courage, the grit, the *chutzpah*, the brains of Israel and the military strategists, and the commandos, they themselves are the first to acknowledge that there was somebody up there guiding us."

He recalled one story in particular that resonated with him. One of the Israeli pilots described stopping his aircraft earlier than planned for no apparent reason. Afterwards, the crew discovered a large crater further along the runway. "He has no explanation for what put that idea into his mind," Goldman said. "His words were, 'Somebody up there was watching over us.'"

Goldman also said the operation demonstrated the courage of Israel's political leaders, who were deeply divided before the mission. "There were fiery debates in the Cabinet room," he said. "Some said, 'Let's go for it.' Some said, 'You're crazy. It's reckless and suicidal.'" Despite those concerns, the Cabinet unanimously

approved the rescue mission.

"I would say the Entebbe rescue was Israel's finest moment," Goldman said. "The whole Jewish world was proud and the whole non-Jewish world was absolutely in awe."

The film's reach has exceeded anything its creators expected.

After it was released, Goldman asked Israel's ambassador to South Africa to forward it to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, whose brother, Yonatan, led the mission and was the only Israeli soldier killed. "A few weeks later, I got the most beautiful personal letter on gold-embossed prime minister stationery thanking us for doing this," Goldman said. "He watched it and was emotional watching it."

The Entebbe mission has subsequently been renamed Operation Yonatan.

Today, as renewed attention is paid to the mission on its 50th anniversary, Goldman believes it continues to speak to Jews everywhere. "I don't think it's anything unique to South African Jews," he said. "I think it's all of us, wherever we are, in Israel or in the diaspora." Its enduring message, he believes, is simple. "With faith and fearlessness, we can achieve the impossible."

## Peptides: Friend or foe?

OPINION

DR ANTON MEYBERG



Longevity medicine has rapidly moved from the fringes of healthcare into mainstream medical discussion. Peptides, exosomes, amino acid therapies, and mitochondrial medicine are now dominating conversations in wellness, sports medicine, metabolic health, and anti-ageing research. Whether one agrees with the movement or not, modern medicine is evolving at an extraordinary pace.

Over the past few months I have explored the world of peptides more closely, both scientifically and clinically. The experience has been eye-opening. It is becoming increasingly difficult to ignore the growing body of evidence, anecdotal experience, and patient demand surrounding these compounds. While scepticism in medicine is healthy and necessary, dismissing the entire field outright may ultimately prove short-sighted.

The problem, however, is that the peptide industry currently sits in a complex and controversial space. The debate is often reduced to a simplistic argument surrounding US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approval. Many peptides are indeed not FDA-approved. Yet medicine has always evolved ahead of regulation. Numerous supplements and therapies commonly used today, including creatine, vitamin D, dehydroepiandrosterone (DHEA), and even testosterone in certain settings, exist in similar regulatory grey zones.

Unlike traditional pharmaceuticals, many peptides are naturally occurring amino acid chains already present within the human body. They function primarily as signalling molecules rather than as foreign chemical agents. This also explains why many are difficult to patent, limiting large-scale pharmaceutical investment and leaving much of the research and clinical use fragmented.

The real concern at present is not necessarily the peptides themselves, but rather the uncontrolled and often dangerous grey market surrounding them. Social media has created an environment where wellness influencers, gym trainers, and unqualified individuals are prescribing substances with limited

understanding of pharmacology, endocrinology, or long-term risk.

This is where the true danger lies.

Poorly manufactured peptides obtained through unofficial sources may contain contaminants, inaccurate dosing, or toxic compounds, including heavy metals and bacterial endotoxins. The consequences can range from severe nausea and headaches to anaphylaxis, systemic inflammatory reactions, and organ injury. Patients often assume that because something is marketed as natural or regenerative it must automatically be safe. That assumption is deeply flawed.

If peptides are to have a legitimate future in medicine, they must be approached responsibly. Proper sourcing, quality control, and physician oversight are essential. Ironically, many

people already use peptide-based medications

without realising it. Insulin remains one of the most important peptide therapies ever developed. Oxytocin is another example. More recently, GLP 1 receptor agonists such as semaglutide and tirzepatide have fundamentally changed the management of obesity and metabolic disease.

Semaglutide opened the door. Tirzepatide expanded on this by targeting both GLP 1 and GIP receptors, producing even more significant weight loss and metabolic improvement. These drugs are no longer simply obesity medications. Their effects on inflammation, cardiovascular disease, and addictive behaviour are becoming increasingly important.

Retatrutide, currently one of the most promising emerging therapies, adds glucagon receptor activity to the equation, increasing energy expenditure and fat metabolism. Early trial data has demonstrated unprecedented weight-loss results approaching 30% in some patients. If these outcomes continue to hold true, obesity management may look completely different

within the next decade.

Beyond metabolic medicine, regenerative peptides such as BPC 157 and TB 500 have garnered enormous interest in sports medicine and injury recovery. BPC 157 appears to stimulate angiogenesis (blood vessel formation), collagen formation, and local tissue healing, while TB 500 may assist with broader cellular repair and recovery pathways.

Yet caution remains critical. Any compound that potentially stimulates blood vessel formation or cellular growth must be approached carefully, particularly in patients with active malignancy or significant cancer risk factors.

Mitochondrial peptides such as MOTS C and SS31 are also attracting attention for their potential role in energy production, recovery, and exercise performance through ATP optimisation. Similarly, growth-hormone secretagogues including Tesamorelin, CJC 1295, and Ipamorelin are increasingly utilised in longevity medicine, although they require careful patient selection and monitoring due to their metabolic and endocrine effects.

At present several principles should remain non-negotiable.

First, peptides should be obtained only through reputable and properly regulated compounding pharmacies with strict quality assurance standards.

Second, patients should be extremely cautious of products marketed online at unusually low prices or labelled not for human consumption.

Third, anyone considering peptide therapy requires proper medical evaluation, baseline blood work, and appropriate screening investigations before treatment begins.

Last, peptides should never replace evidence-based conventional medicine or surgery where these remain clearly indicated. They are not miracle therapies. They are tools. In the correct setting and under appropriate supervision they may offer substantial benefit. Used irresponsibly, they carry very real risks.

Medicine has always advanced through innovation, debate, and responsible scepticism. Peptides are unlikely to disappear from that conversation any time soon.

And perhaps the final point worth reflecting on is: if these compounds truly had no physiological effect, organisations such as the World Anti-Doping Agency and professional sporting bodies would hardly have invested so much effort in banning them.

• Dr Anton Meyberg is a specialist physician and pulmonologist in private practice, which is largely responsible for the Intensive Care Unit at Linksfield Clinic in Johannesburg.



# The *mensch* who was also a famous dancer

GILANA LAB

To the Spanish dancing world and fans across Spain, he was the beloved and acclaimed dancer Enrique Segovia. To family, friends, and the South African Jewish community, he was simply Geoffrey.

Sir Geoffrey Neiman passed away on 22 June, his name having been synonymous with Spanish dance for decades. He went from being a young boy in Yeoville, Johannesburg to performing on stages across the world, becoming one of the foremost ambassadors for Spanish dance and helping to create an educational syllabus that continues to shape generations of dancers internationally.

His contribution to Spanish culture earned him the Order of Isabella the Catholic, one of Spain's highest honours bestowed on a non-Spaniard.

The public knew the accomplished dancer, teacher, and choreographer, says his life partner of more than 61 years, Brian van Rheede. He, however, knew the man who never sought recognition. Although Geoffrey's career brought international acclaim, Van Rheede says he remained deeply uncomfortable with praise. "He was very self-effacing," he says. "Geoffrey wasn't into compliments."

Even after receiving the knighthood from Spain, Geoffrey didn't embrace the title. "When people wanted to pay him compliments, he'd shrug his shoulders," Van Rheede says with a smile. "When people used to call him 'Sir', he'd sort of lift his nose."

Growing up in the late 1940s, Geoffrey became captivated by the sound of Spanish music and castanets drifting from a dance studio across the road from his home. He began taking lessons with the acclaimed South African dancer Mercedes Molina, and his talent developed at an astonishing pace. Within five years, the legendary Spanish dancer Antonio Ruiz Soler arrived in South Africa on tour and invited the teenage Geoffrey to audition. "Antonio was so flabbergasted that this talent was here that he took him to Spain," Van Rheede says.

This launched a career few South African dancers have matched. Geoffrey joined the internationally renowned company of Lucero Tena, performing around the world and establishing himself as one of the leading figures in Spanish dance.

Like many performers working in Spain, he adopted a stage name, "Enrique Segovia", chosen by his mentor, Molina. Under this name, Geoffrey built an international reputation before returning to South Africa, where he devoted himself to teaching and preserving the art form through the Spanish Dance Society's syllabus.

Today, that syllabus is taught across numerous countries, something Van Rheede believes meant more to Geoffrey than any personal accolade. "The legacy is carrying on," he says. "People are doing the syllabus, and it's growing all over the world."

Veteran Spanish dancer and teacher Vivienne Katz-Hamburger remembers the first time she met Geoffrey. "It was like a pop idol had walked in," she says. "It was amazing just to see him."

Years later, after joining the same company and performing alongside Geoffrey, she discovered that the dancer she had admired from afar possessed none of the ego that often accompanies such success. She performed a routine at the South African Spanish Dance Championships accompanied only by *palmas*, the

rhythmic hand clapping that is part of traditional Spanish dance. "Standing quietly behind the curtain, helping provide that accompaniment, was Geoffrey himself," she recalls.

"I never heard him lose his temper once. He never spoke down to anybody. It didn't matter if it was someone backstage or one of the dancers. He spoke to everybody as if they were on his level."

Geoffrey and Van Rheede became known for opening their home to friends, particularly for Friday dinners that often stretched late into the night. "My favourite memory would probably be us going over to them for dinner on a Friday night and just laughing the entire meal," Katz-Hamburger says.

While Geoffrey's contribution to dance changed the lives of countless students and teachers across the world, it was his generosity that left the deepest impression. "My favourite memory of Geoffrey was his incredible modesty, his incredible ability never to say no to somebody who needed anything, and his ability to share his knowledge with the world," Van Rheede said.

Siblings Jodi Fittinghoff and Adam Thal met the couple more than 40 years ago after their family moved from Zimbabwe to Johannesburg and became their neighbours. "From that moment on, Geoff and Brian embraced us with a love that knew no boundaries," Fittinghoff says. "They never had children of their own, yet they loved us as though we were their own, and we loved them just as deeply."

Geoffrey and Van Rheede also opened up a world beyond the home they shared. "They took us to incredible theatre productions, dance performances, and concerts, shaping our appreciation for the arts from

a young age," she says. "More than that, they taught us kindness, generosity, loyalty, and unconditional love. They enriched our childhood and helped shape the people we are today."

"To us, Geoff wasn't just an internationally respected Spanish dancer or an icon in the dance community," Fittinghoff says. "He was family in every way that mattered. He was humble, quiet, honest, and a *mensch*. Everybody loved him for his genuine kindness."

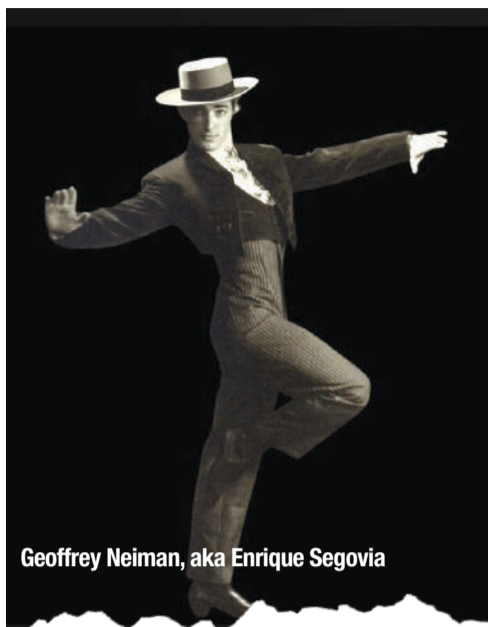
Fittinghoff speaks of the rare partnership Geoffrey shared with Van Rheede, a relationship the siblings grew up watching and admiring. "Their home was always filled with laughter, the best meals, interesting conversations, wonderful friends, and an incredible sense of warmth. Life with them was exciting, cultured, and full of joy."

What stood out most to her, though, was the unwavering devotion between the two men. "They were true partners in every sense of the word, always supporting, encouraging, and caring for each other. Their relationship was built on kindness, loyalty, and unwavering commitment."

"Geoff ended every conversation on a meaningful note," she says. "Every phone call, without fail, ended with, 'G-d Bless'. Those two simple words reflected who he was, a man of faith, kindness, and genuine care for the people he loved."

Although Fittinghoff and Thal never had the chance to see Geoffrey perform professionally on stage as Enrique Segovia, they grew up surrounded by evidence of the career that made him a legend, photos, and videos of performances.

What they witnessed instead were quieter, unscripted moments that no theatre audience ever saw. "Whenever music began to play, Geoff would quietly make his way onto the dance floor," she said. "Simply because dance was part of who he was. With the effortless grace that comes only from a lifetime of dancing, he would add a flick of the wrist, a perfectly timed foot stamp, or a few elegant steps. They were small moments, but they were mesmerising."



Geoffrey Neiman, aka Enrique Segovia

## Reading Rachel Goldberg-Polin's book

BOOK REVIEW

SAUL JASSINOWSKY



Since 7 October, we've been offered books, talks, and documentaries about the atrocities of that day and the anguish of the hostage families. It is fair to ask whether we need another.

Rachel Goldberg-Polin's *When We See You Again* answers that question within the first few pages.

This isn't simply another account of 7 October, neither is it merely Hersh Goldberg-Polin's story. It's a mother's story. More than that, it's a meditation on faith, resilience, and the extraordinary power of purpose when everything else has been stripped away.

I've had the privilege of hearing Rachel speak twice, her husband, Jon, once, and spending time with Rachel personally. What struck me in those encounters

everything will work out, but as the determination to keep showing up, to keep praying, to keep fighting, even when the outcome is unknown.

She draws on Torah, Talmud, philosophy, literature, and psychology, but never in a way that feels academic. These are not references made to impress the reader; they are the tools she reaches for to make sense of a reality that often defies understanding.

The heart of the book, however, is Hersh.

Rachel doesn't simply describe the son she loved. She introduces us to the young man who inspired so many around him. His optimism, curiosity, humour, and compassion leap off the page. Long before 7 October, Hersh was captivated by Viktor Frankl's

*Man's Search for Meaning* and the idea – originally expressed by philosopher Nietzsche – that "he who has a why to live can bear almost any how".

For Hersh, this wasn't just an inspiring quote. It was a way of living.

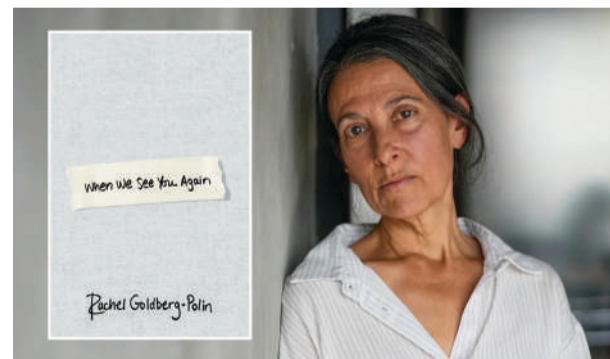
What makes that philosophy so powerful is its application in the tunnels of Gaza.

One of the book's most moving passages recounts what former hostage Or Levy later shared about his time in captivity with Hersh. He describes

how Hersh repeatedly returned to Frankl's message, helping those around him find purpose even in a place designed to extinguish it. His resilience wasn't performative. It became a lifeline for others.

Reading those pages gave me goosebumps.

Levy was later one of the guests we welcomed to South Africa through The Base and Jewish National Fund (JNF) South Africa Hostage Healing Project, and he has become a friend. During one of my conversations with Rachel, we reflected on Levy's visit and the impact Hersh had on him, not only during captivity but afterwards as he rebuilds his life. It reinforced something she captures so beautifully throughout the book: freedom is not the end of the story. The headlines move on, but healing is painfully



is exactly what comes through in her writing: extraordinary strength wrapped in extraordinary humility. Rachel never chose to become the voice of the hostage families. Circumstance thrust her into that role, and she carried it with grace, dignity, and remarkable moral clarity.

What makes this book so compelling is that it isn't written from the comfort of hindsight. Rachel divides her life into "The Before" and "The After". Through diary entries, speeches, and deeply personal reflections, she allows readers to experience the relentless uncertainty, the rumours, the fragile bursts of hope, and the crushing disappointments almost as she lived them.

There are no easy answers here. No attempt to turn unimaginable pain into neat life lessons. Rachel writes honestly about faith, not as certainty that

Continued on page 11>>

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# Expats bring the green and gold to LA

LEE TANKLE

Thousands of kilometres from South Africa, pockets of green and gold filled the stands to cheer Bafana Bafana on in their historic Fifa World Cup round of 32 encounter with Canada.

The match in Los Angeles marked South Africa's first appearance in the knockout stages of a Fifa World Cup, and for many South African expats, the chance to witness such a moment was simply too significant to miss. Although Bafana Bafana's campaign ended in a narrow 1-0 defeat, the experience of being there to support the team made the journey worthwhile for many fans.

Danna Sachs, an expat hairstylist living in Santa Monica, California, explained that once she had found out that South Africa would be playing in Los Angeles, she had known she had to be there.

"It's a no-brainer because I'm going to go support my homeland. But the tickets were insanely expensive. So I just kept looking every day, every hour, give or take. I would just go through and look at the tickets. And by Saturday, they were slowly coming down," she said. She managed to get affordable tickets the morning before the game.

Similarly, Brad Silberman, an expat living in Los Angeles, explained that he had planned to watch the game at a bar with family and friends. This was partly because if he had wanted to take his family of four to watch the match, it would have cost more than \$4 000 (R65 600). But the evening before the game, he checked the price of tickets and they had dropped enough to make going possible.

"It genuinely felt like I was meant to be there. I already had South African friends meeting at 08:00 to paint our faces and arms with the South African flag, dress in our Bafana gear, and enjoy the build-up together," he said.

"From the moment we met that morning, the atmosphere was incredible. There's something special about being surrounded by fellow South Africans when you're living overseas. Strangers instantly become friends. We were singing, laughing, taking photos, and proudly wearing our green and gold. It didn't matter where we came from, our race, religion, or background; for those few hours, we were simply South Africans united behind one team. That feeling carried right through into the stadium, where the energy was absolutely electric," he said.

Daniel Seeff, who has lived in the United States since he was 19, explained that many South Korean fans in Los Angeles had expected their team to face Canada in the round of 32. However, after South Africa defeated South Korea, those supporters suddenly found themselves with tickets they no longer needed. "When South Africa beat them, they were all trying to get rid of their tickets for very little," Seeff said.

"I was actually able to get my tickets directly from fifa.com. A whole section of tickets were released three days before the game."

He described the game as one

of the highlights of his life. The atmosphere in the stadium was electric, and everyone was so excited and so appreciative to be there.

"Moments like this remind you where you come from," said Silberman. "Hearing the South African accents, singing the songs, seeing all the flags and jerseys, it instantly takes you back home. I've always been patriotic, and being surrounded by so many proud South Africans made me realise how much I miss that sense of community. It's in my blood."

Saul Hirschhorn, an expat living in California, felt the same way.

"Living overseas, you don't often get to experience that feeling of being surrounded by thousands of fellow South Africans. Hearing everyone sing the national anthem together and proudly wearing the South African colours reminded me of home," he said. "The South African fans were incredibly positive throughout the game. There was a genuine feeling that everyone believed the team could

pull off something special."

"It was unbelievable to be in the environment of a World Cup game where your birth country's team is

still an undeniable energy.

"They had a good crowd there. We did the fan walk, there was a lot of singing, and it was just very colourful. It was great. The atmosphere was amazing even though the Canadians definitely outnumbered us, because

a lot of Mexican supporters in the crowd were singing Mexican songs and a lot of them were very much behind South Africa, which was great," he said.

Yoni Rosenthal, who moved to New York in 2025, explained that he had been lucky to get tickets to the game through a family member,

as he knew he wanted to go and support his home country in this historic game. "Walking to the stadium and hearing *Shosholozo* and the anthem was really emotional. Hearing about how the mood was back in South Africa was also amazing. Sport truly does uplift our country like nothing else can. I felt so proud and grateful to be wearing my South Africa shirt and to be in the moment," he said.



Brad Silberman (left) and his friends at the game

Danna Sachs at the game

playing for the very first time in a knockout round. It was incredible. It was just beyond. I don't think the smile left my face until the very last second of the game. It was electric," Sachs said.

Anthony Leib, who has lived in San Diego for 30 years, explained that, though the Canadian fans far outnumbered the South African supporters, there was

obviously, they come from Vancouver. But it's funny because

shirt and to be in the moment," he said.

## Lucky soccer fan won a trip of a lifetime

LEE TANKLE

For most football fans, attending a Fifa World Cup is a dream. For 18-year-old former King David High School pupil Adam Schlosberg that dream became a reality when he was named one of the winners of Sport Minister Gayton McKenzie's Mzansi to the World Cup Lucky Fan Competition. This earned him an all-expenses-paid trip to Mexico to watch Bafana Bafana compete on football's biggest stage.

"The funny thing is that I had completely forgotten that I had entered the competition. After my name was announced by the minister, I only found out three days later when I received a phone call telling me that I had won. My first reaction was, 'Great joke!' I only started believing it when I saw the video clip of the minister actually calling out our names," he said.

The competition attracted thousands of entries from football lovers across South Africa, with winners chosen for their passion, authenticity, and personal stories. Schlosberg was among 16 supporters to receive a fully sponsored World Cup experience, including flights, accommodation, meals, and match tickets to watch South Africa's opening tournament fixture in Mexico.

"Seeing a World Cup match in person was a dream come true, even if the result and performance on the field weren't quite what I had hoped for," he said.

After being in Mexico for quite some time and seeing Bafana Bafana progress beyond the group stage for the first time, Schlosberg ensured that he was in Los Angeles to see the game. "I bought my match ticket at 03:00 and went straight to the airport with nothing but a Woolies bag, my passport, power bank, and phone," he said.

Schlosberg managed to stand out from the crowd at the opening game with his makarapa hat covered with Castle beer cans. Mexican fans stopped him on the streets, and he went viral on social media.

The makarapa is one of the most recognisable symbols of South African sports fandom. Originally adapted from the hard hats worn by mineworkers, they are decorated with bright colours, national flags, team logos, and creative designs to show passion for local teams. Fans from different backgrounds wear makarapas to support a common team, particularly the national sides such as Bafana Bafana and the Springboks. The makarapa gained international attention during the

2010 Fifa World Cup, becoming an iconic image of South African fan culture alongside the vuvuzela.

Schlosberg explained that he wore the makarapa to the game to represent South African culture in the best way he could.

"It was a bit of a DIY [do-it-yourself] project. The idea came after seeing some of the other Lucky Fan winners with their own makarapas, and I thought it would be a great way to show off our South African spirit and culture," he said.

Media commentator Dan Corder said in a video posted to his social media, "Apparently, this young gent is going viral in Mexico for smuggling *dop* into the game on his hat. Honestly, the spirit of South Africa, we cannot be stopped, and we cannot be denied. When it comes to *jo!*, we're going to *jo!* the way we like, whether you like it or not. This honestly makes me feel so patriotic."

Schlosberg also tried to make another makarapa with beer cans, but wasn't allowed in with it and instead drank the beer outside.

He said more than 100 people had asked to take photos with the makarapa. "People absolutely loved it, and it became a real talking point wherever we went.

"Getting so much attention because of the makarapa has been quite surreal. What started as a small idea between friends has ended up having a much bigger impact than I ever expected. It's been a lot of fun, and it has even made me think that maybe creating football content is something I could see myself doing in the future," he said.

Although he didn't wear his makarapa to the final Bafana Bafana game, Schlosberg explained that the energy there was out of this world.

"I got to my seat in time for the national anthem and was singing it proudly. The match started, and South Africa had a good game, although we could have pushed more. We are still proud of the players; they've made history," he said.

Schlosberg said that he had seen tons of South African expats in the stadium, but said that he had been surrounded by South Koreans who had prebooked their tickets, thinking their country would be represented in the game instead.

He also attended a fan park in Toronto to watch the Bafana Bafana and South Korea game, and while there, he and other South Africans were dancing, singing, and teaching people *Shosholozo*.

"After we had won, it was jubilant, and we all partied late into the night," he said.

Schlosberg is a lifelong football fan, encouraged by his father, and has been a Tottenham Hotspur supporter since he was six years old. In South African football, he supports Chippa United.

In addition to watching Bafana Bafana kick off at the Fifa World Cup on 11 June, Schlosberg attended the Legends match in Pachuca, visited the Fifa Museum,

explored the Mexican pyramids, and experienced Lucha libre wrestling.

Schlosberg described the whole experience of being a lucky fan as unreal and something that he will never forget.

"The whole vibe with the lucky fans was sensational; they taught me all the chants, and it was a once-in-a-lifetime experience. The atmosphere in the Azteca was the best sight I've ever had. I closed my eyes and just wished I could be here forever," he said.

"I'm not a special person, but just an

ordinary fan just like everyone else, and Gayton Mackenzie and the sponsors changed the lives of every single lucky fan who got the opportunity to go to Mexico. It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience being able to watch the World Cup here for the first time in my life."



Adam Schlosberg at the opening game

## The world's least prepared protester

**W**e might be good at weddings. We might even be world-class at Barmitzvahs. And if there's a *kumzitz* anywhere within a 50km radius, we'll somehow find ourselves singing in harmony around a guitar. But on 30 June I realised something. As Jews, we are simply not built for protest marches.

The revelation came when I heard that the demonstrations were expected to begin at 10:00 and wind down at around 15:00. Five hours. My first thought wasn't about traffic disruptions, security concerns, or the constitutional right to protest. It was lunch.

What exactly do people pack for a five-hour march? Surely no one just leaves home assuming food will somehow happen. There has to be a sandwich. Perhaps a protein bar. Maybe a flask. Someone, somewhere, has definitely packed biltong.

And suddenly I wasn't thinking about protest. I was planning an outing.

Of course, there is the footwear. Back in my student days, when we marched against the apartheid government, footwear wasn't about comfort. It was about making a statement. We all wore Doc Martens. They were heavy, impractical, and completely unsuitable for covering any meaningful distance. But they looked right. Nothing said "Amandla!" quite like sore feet.

Today I'm older. Wiser. More aware of my podiatrist's opinion. I briefly considered wearing my On Clouds, but that felt a little too "I'm protesting on my way to Pilates". Instead I'd probably settle on a comfortable pair of Cole Haans. They communicate exactly the right message: "I feel strongly about this issue, but I'd also like to avoid plantar fasciitis."

Then comes the packing. Sunscreen. A hat with proper UV protection. A litre of water. Two if it's particularly warm. Ventolin inhaler, because if the pharmacies have closed early and the looting has started, it's always better to be prepared. Panado.

### INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



Phone charger. Portable battery pack. Wet wipes. Hand sanitiser. Reading glasses. An extra layer in case it gets chilly later.

By this point I'm no longer attending a protest. I'm preparing for a weekend in the Drakensberg.

And then there are the practical Jewish questions. Will there be *Mincha*? Will we be home before *Maariv*, or will we do it there? And is there somewhere to sit? Will there be toilets? If there are toilets, are they clean? Will there be shade?

What time are people planning to leave? Because if everyone leaves at 15:00, the traffic is going to be impossible.

I suspect that's why Jews don't really do marches. We'd never actually get started. We'd still be standing in the parking lot comparing backpacks. One person would be handing out sunscreen. Someone else would insist everybody takes another bottle of water. A mother would remind complete strangers to put on a jersey because "you never know". An aunt would produce enough sandwiches to feed the entire front row. Someone would ask whether there was perhaps a shorter route.

And why there isn't a Discovery Vitality tent?

And before the first slogan had been shouted, we'd have formed three committees, elected a treasurer, discussed catering, postponed the march until after lunch, and scheduled a follow-up meeting to evaluate whether marching was really the most efficient way to express ourselves.

Which, come to think of it, may explain why Jewish history has produced so many lawyers, doctors, and columnists. But so few professional protesters.

## Similarities between Venezuela and SA

>>Continued from page 7

Hatzalah can no longer afford to help pay for needy community members to take out private medical aid, and instead sends doctors to their homes to see whether it is possible to treat them there instead of sending them to dilapidated state hospitals.

Like South Africa, Venezuela's government has maintained a very pro-Palestinian position, most visible at Chávez's mausoleum, which features the Venezuelan and Palestinian flags side by side next to his coffin. However, members of the Jewish community were emphatic that they don't face day-to-day antisemitism from the general population.

There are definitely parallels between the exodus of the Jewish communities of Venezuela and South Africa, which have respectively shrunk by 80% and 60%. Both experienced mass emigration in the 1990s and 2000s, although this began decades earlier in South Africa.

This has forced two incredibly organised and resilient communities to balance maintaining buildings, keeping Jewish schools running with fewer pupils, meeting increased demand for social services amid the deterioration of public services, while at the same time experiencing very little inbound migration.

If either community were to disappear, it would be

a tragedy, as they are both among the most organised Jewish communities in the Spanish- and English-speaking worlds. Both have also grappled with being strongly Zionist communities, while living under governments adversarial towards Israel, yet neither community experiences the day-to-day antisemitism that one increasingly encounters in North America, Western Europe, and Australia. Those who remain in both communities tend to be more religious, and Venezuela's community is now majority-Sephardic, as a higher percentage of its Ashkenazi members have emigrated.

As the Western countries to which so many community members emigrated grapple with rising antisemitism, it raises a broader question: do the destinations that South African and Venezuelan Jews once viewed as safe havens still offer the security and stability they sought when they left their homelands? Or will future generations find themselves searching for new homes once again?

• *Dan Brotman is a journalist and world traveller, currently based in Montreal, Canada. He is currently working on a documentary about shrinking Jewish communities around the world. You can follow his travels on Instagram at @danbrotman.*

## Reading Rachel Goldberg-Polin's book

>>Continued from page 9

slow, often measured in tiny victories that the outside world never sees.

Yet this isn't why the book is important.

It's important because Rachel refuses to let Hersh become defined by the way he died. She insists that we remember the way he lived.

That may be the book's greatest achievement.

It is not a political book, although politics inevitably surrounds it.

It is not simply a memoir, although it is deeply personal.

It is a book about what happens when love is stronger than despair, when faith survives unanswered questions, and when purpose becomes the only thing capable of carrying a family through the unimaginable.

I closed the book with tears in my eyes.

Not because I learned how Hersh's story ended – I already knew that – but because Rachel had made me feel that I had come to know him.

And perhaps that is the greatest triumph of *When We See You Again*. In a world that too often reduces hostages to numbers and headlines, Rachel restores Hersh's humanity. She reminds us that behind every photograph is a son, a brother, a friend, a dreamer – a whole world.

• *When We See You Again* is available in South Africa through The Base and JNF South Africa. Order your copy at <https://jnm1.io/hershbook>

• *Saul Jassinowsky is vice-chairperson of the South African Zionist Federation, an executive committee member of JNF South Africa, and chairperson of Brothers for Life South Africa alongside serving in a number of other leadership positions across the South African Jewish community.*

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

## Our guards must stay up

**A**ny relief we feel following 30 June should be qualified, as the rhetoric and intimidation left a sense of real fear across our country. We also need to acknowledge that lives were lost, property was damaged, vulnerable people attacked, and thousands were forced to flee their homes. The democratic right to protest is a crucial element of any democratic society, and as a community we respect and honour this right. However, we reject without question violence, intimidation, and criminality that is perpetuated under the guise of protest.

In the lead-up to 30 June, and throughout the day, the South African Jewish Board of Deputies worked closely with our KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) Council president, Alana Pugh-Jones Baranov, who also serves as the South African director of HIAS. Formerly the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, HIAS is the international Jewish humanitarian agency that stands for a world in which forcibly displaced persons find welcome, safety, and opportunity.

HIAS is rooted in the Jewish values of *tzedek* (justice) and *tikkun olam* (repairing the world). HIAS South Africa opened its national office in Durban in October 2023. It works with its local partners to provide free legal assistance to refugees and asylum seekers; run attorney training workshops and "know your rights" campaigns; run mental health and psychosocial support workshops for refugee women, youth, and LGBTQ+ refugees; and to advocate against xenophobia.

Alana has spent much of her career working with refugee, asylum seeker, and migrant advocacy groups, protecting and advancing their rights in this country. Her networks with other civil society organisations allowed us to track, in real time, where the need was most acute and to respond accordingly. HIAS SA and our KZN office were on the ground providing relief

### ABOVE BOARD

Karen Milner



from the local community in that deeply affected province. Alana also identified areas of need in Cape Town and assisted with connecting groups on the ground there, such as the Union of Jewish Women and the Mensch Network, while our Johannesburg office dealt with urgent needs on the East Rand. This is our community at its best: organised, capable, and present when it matters. In any crisis, the Board prioritises a process of analysing needs on the ground so that relief is effective and relevant.

Tuesday 30 June did not happen in a vacuum. Much of the underlying anger has its roots in the government's failure to deliver basic services, and this has opened a door to a rage that is understandable in its origin but misplaced in its scapegoating of foreign nationals.

For the past three weeks I have tracked, commenting in this column with growing unease, the conspiracy theories linking these disruptions to our community. That unease was warranted. The rhetoric has swiftly unravelled into something far uglier, including a video now circulating in which a commentator claims that Action SA is "funded by Israelis" and that former Johannesburg Mayor Herman Mashaba installed an "Israeli spy machine" inside the city council, the clear inference being that this funding is working to divide South Africans.

The conspiracy theorists who suggest that there is Israeli interference in South African local affairs are simply trying to divert attention from South Africa's real problems and lay them at the feet of a country they are determined to libel. This is a campaign driven by hate and should be rejected with the contempt it deserves.

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

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# 'This Bafana side has the makings of something special'

LUKE ALFRED

Stan Matthews, the former director of football for SuperSport United, has only praise for Bafana Bafana for reaching the last 32 of the World Cup for the first time.

The anguish of the 1-0 loss to Canada in Los Angeles on Sunday night is one he shares with the rest of us, but he says, in mitigation, that this is a young team who did a nation proud. With the right environment, the national side will only get better, he believes.

"In a way this 'local is lekker' side, most of whom still play in the Premier Soccer League (PSL), is a great advert for local football," says the man who has also recently been an adviser to Siwelele FC, SuperSport's new incarnation. "Bar one or two of the older players, who'll retire, this side has a real opportunity to develop into something quite special.

"Sure, I was disappointed we couldn't beat Canada, but I think after that points deduction in qualifying, and the problems with the team's visas before the World Cup, this was very heartening, the Mexico game excepted, of course. I'm a big fan of what Hugo Broos brought to this team. I have unbelievable respect."

Matthews, who still sits on the PSL executive, as well as recruiting and liaising with a Western Cape club about young upcountry talent, doesn't want to be overly critical. He does, however, bemoan the fact that the national team aren't penetrative enough in the final third.

"We don't have a [Mo] Salah, a [Cristiano] Ronaldo, or a [Lionel] Messi. There's just that lack of something special in front of goals," he says, a statement with which few would disagree.

"In the strategic hallways of South African football, I think that's a conversation that they really need to be having. Look at Mamelodi Sundowns. Even they can't find a quality local striker. That's why they're heading across to South America to fork out \$3 million [R49.2 million] for a South American."

Matthews points out that this World Cup was for him the highlight of a long and distinguished career in local football administration – and one that compares favourably with his experience of 2010. Shortly after South Africa hosted the World Cup 16 years ago, SuperSport United sold defender Bongani Khumalo to Tottenham Hotspur. At the time the move was hailed as a momentous one for local football, and although Khumalo spent his entire career at Spurs out on loan, his sale was an event about which Matthews remains proud.



"The fact that seven players in this World Cup – and that's not counting the physiotherapist and the goal-keeper coach – came through SuperSport United structures as 15- and 16-year-olds made it a very personal World Cup for me," he says.

"We picked up [Bafana centre-back] Ime Okon when he was playing for Randburg in the Friendship Cup. He could have qualified for Nigeria, his brother sprinted for Nigeria, but he chose to play for South Africa. Thalete Mbatha came from Highlands Park, Thapelo Maseko came from Sebokeng in the Vaal. These guys all lived in the club's Midrand House. They have wonderful stories to tell. In the house they were basically brought up by cooks

and cleaners."

One of the best of those stories concerns Bafana skipper Ronwen Williams, another SuperSport Academy product. Williams' parents were "magnificent", Matthews says, because they were endlessly supportive while their son appeared to be standing still, sometimes loitering in the second or even third team. "There's a lesson there for Jewish parents," says Matthews. "Rodney and Rowena [Williams] stood by their boy. They never threatened to move clubs. They didn't complain and never demanded to know why Ronwen wasn't cracking it. They're heroes and heroines in my book. It's that kind of backstory that made it such a memorable tournament for me."

Bafana's Oswin Appollis is another with a salutary yarn. Matthews says Appollis, who grew up in Bishop Lavis in Cape Town, initially struggled to make the transition to the SuperSport Academy as a young tyro. His academic work suffered and his football, frankly, "went backwards". Appollis was anything but happy.

"He struggled, yes, but he persisted. Look where he is now. Playing in the shop window of the world."

Speaking about the World Cup in a more general vein, Matthews says he doesn't easily understand the benefits of a 48-team competition. "I just don't see the point of some of the teams," he says.

On the other hand, it's interesting to see how most teams find a way to be competitive. He certainly sees a narrowing of strength and talent at the World Cup bar some obvious exceptions.

When asked to name names of those he expects to be there towards the end or thereabouts, Matthews says he doesn't really know. "I quite like Colombia, they're quite an interesting team," he says. "And I would love a South American team other than Brazil or Argentina to do well. Spain, France, and Germany, of course. And as far as African teams are concerned, I think that Senegal and Morocco will fly the flag, maybe Ghana."

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