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## In the aftermath, we rise

A message from Israeli President Isaac Herzog

As Israelis and Jewish communities around the world mark the anniversary of the atrocities carried out by Hamas terrorists on 7 October, and while 101 hostages remain held in brutal captivity by terrorists in Gaza, President Isaac Herzog has sent a message to Jewish communities and friends of Israel taking part in vigils, memorials, and ceremonies all over world.

In his 7 October message, the president stressed the resilience of the Israeli people and the importance of standing united and strong against antisemitism across the globe. "Today marks a full year since the earth shook, since the worst of human brutality and hatred ripped apart our sense of safety and changed our world forever. A year since our women, children, and old people were hunted down in their beds, burned to death, beheaded, raped, and shot. A year since the gathering of our beautiful young people turned into a scene of carnage, torture, and death. A year since hundreds of our people were brutally dragged into captivity, dead and alive.

"And we must be honest, here, now, when the passage of time should be able to offer comfort and some sense of closure, the earth shakes still. Our wounds still cannot fully heal because they are ongoing. Because hostages are still being tortured,

executed, and dying in captivity. Because they and their families are still living in the loss and the terror of 7 October right at these very moments. Because tens of thousands of families still cannot return home. In many senses, we're all still living in the aftermath of 7 October.

"It's everywhere in our country. It's

also in the antisemitism that came charging forward throughout the world in the wake of the war with Hamas. It's in the ongoing threat to the Jewish state by Iran and its terror proxies, who are blinded by hatred and bent on the destruction of our one and only Jewish nation state. It's in the tangible fear, uncertainty, and anxiety about the future, all of these are here with us still.



Israeli President Isaac Herzog at the Nova festival site on 7 October 2024

"But friends, the divider we can create in time so as to remember still carries so much meaning. This time, one year later, is an invitation to come close to the pain and grief, to look at it with open eyes and open hearts, remembering what we have lost, which reminds us also who we are. We are a people with the power to keep standing up again and again against hatred. To get back on our feet from the ashes of tragedy. To fight and to survive, to heal and rebuild. And in truth, this year of so much heartbreak and devastation, which has plagued Jew, Muslim, Christian, Druze in my nation and Jews all over the world and other friends, this year has compelled us to return to the core truths of our peoplehood. It has compelled us to reconnect with one another, and to recommit ourselves to the path of self-reflection, collective responsibility, and social justice that are the spiritual legacy of our people.

"And we really have been there for one another this year in beautiful expressions of love and solidarity. We haven't abandoned our deep longing and aspiration for peace with our neighbours. And we hold onto this intention still, even as we insist that as Jews, we deserve to feel safe and to be safe, regardless of where on earth we may live.

"We will emerge from this difficult time, we will overcome the hatred, and we will rebuild. With a vital spirit that has defined us, we will come together to recover again and again. Inspired by the courage of bravery and the beauty of everyone we lost, we will not stop believing that a better world is possible."

## Torah Thought The right path

Rabbi Matthew Liebenberg – Claremont Wynberg Hebrew Congregation



Several years ago, I officiated at the funeral of a lady named Neilah.

Intrigued by this unusual name, I asked her family for some background. They explained that she was born on Yom Kippur, towards the end of the day, and what better name for her than the climactic service of the day, Neilah?

There's a certain irony to this. Little Neilah, when she entered this world and began her life, was given a name that would forever remind her of her end.

From the moment we're born, we're moving inexorably towards a goal, a destination. We are forever trying to reach our private "neilah", when the gates close and our striving must end. We may not actively be focused on that goal, but it's always in our subconscious, driving us, motivating us, leading us onwards.

What's that goal, that "neilah"? In the Torah's description of the Temple service of Yom Kippur we read, "From the assembly of the children of Israel, he, the *Cohen Gadol* [high priest] shall take two he-goats for a sin offering." The Talmud points out that the two goats had to be identical in every way – appearance, height, and price. Yet they didn't share similar fates. One was prepared as a sacrifice, and its blood sprinkled in the inner chambers of the Temple. The other was dispatched to a dry and barren wilderness, to a lonely and unceremonious death. That second goat was the proverbial "scapegoat". The *Cohen Gadol* confessed upon its head the sins of Israel, and sent it into the wilderness, where it was cast over a cliff. Two identical goats, but two very different fates.

I will not attempt to explain the mysteries of these sacrifices, but I believe we can extract a lesson from them. The two goats were brought as a communal offering. They represent all of Israel, every Jew. They begin life identically. When they enter the Temple precincts, their fates are unknown, either could be the goat that is "for Hashem", or the bearer of many sins, ending its life in a parched land. Only the lottery of the *Cohen Gadol* will determine their fate.

Moses closes his monumental sermon to Israel with these words: "See, I have placed before you today the life and the good, and the death and the evil, and you shall choose life!" Every Jew is offered two choices: to follow a path of good that will lead to eternal life or a path of evil, that leads to spiritual death. G-d will not force our hand, but He does offer guidance, He tells us to choose life. We are the goats, identical at birth, with our fates undecided, but later in life, we "draw lots" that determine our own path. Will it be a path of good and life, or a path of evil and death? After a year in which we have witnessed so much pain and suffering, so much death and destruction, let's choose life!

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# Fighting hatred with song and an emotive tribute

LEE TANKLE

The sight of Jews gathering in song while a large crowd of aggressive anti-Israel activists swore at them, tore down their posters, and threatened them is one that will forever be etched in the memories of those who gathered at the specially designed October 7 Square in the forest of Great Park Synagogue on the afternoon of Sunday, 6 October.

While members of the crowd initially felt fearful about the onslaught, a young 21-year-old Habonim leader, Greg Landau, calmed them and got them singing in response. The louder and more aggressive the protesters shouted, the more beautiful the singing.

"They won't even let us mourn in peace," said Gavin Rome, a local advocate, who was there with his family to bear witness to the events of 7 October and the ongoing war with Hamas.

"Various community organisations united to put together a powerful memorial space – October 7 Square – in which we could express the day's meaning and impact," said Karen Milner, the national chairperson of the South African Board of Jewish Deputies (SAJBD). "The exhibition was open to the public from 12:00 to 19:00, and concluded with a vigil from the Habonim youth movement. The Square was well-attended and appreciated by the community."

The tall trees decorated with yellow ribbons offset the horror of the exhibits set up in their shade. The exhibition, put together by the SAJBD in collaboration with local schools, community members, and organisations, presented a tapestry of stories depicting the atrocities of 7 October 2023.

It was modelled on Hostage Square in Tel Aviv, where "people come, they bring exhibits and displays to honour those who lost their lives or suffered through the ordeal and to give a voice to the hostages still being held captive," said Wendy Kahn, SAJBD national director.

However, though the community and many others from all backgrounds and interests came to pay homage to what happened on 7 October 2023, what emerged later as a blip on the radar of the event had an impact on those there at the time.

People inside the "square" were confronted by passersby in cars hooting aggressively and waving Palestinian flags. The Community Security Organisation (CSO) was aware that an anti-Israel protest was happening on Glenhove Road at 17:00, and a large crowd was gathering on the bridge not far from the event.

Stephen Goldberg, the vice-chairperson of CSO in Gauteng told the SA Jewish Report, "They had the



Photo: Neil McCarthy



Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

At the 7 October Square in Houghton this week

usual paraphernalia of Palestinian flags, there were a few Hezbollah flags among them, and keffiyehs. They started by protesting on the bridge, singing, 'From the river to the sea' and 'Free Palestine' and all the usual slogans they use. They were abusive and aggressive."

As the protesters travelled along Glenhove Road, coming closer to the entrance of Great Park Forest, the crowd got louder and more abusive. The protesters then stood outside the fence screaming, chanting, and

hurling abuse and threats.

"Quite a few of them were shouting at our people, saying, 'We want to fuck you up,' and 'We want to kill you,'" said Goldberg.

A community member who asked to remain anonymous told the SA Jewish Report that while walking around the Square, the noise of the protesters took over from the crowd at the exhibits.

"Listening and seeing the horrifying stories of what happened that day hit me in the gut," he says, "but it was overlaid by the fact that two metres away there was a crowd of protesters screaming and shouting. All I could hear was protesters saying,

Continued on page 9>>

## Interfaith leader violently attacked by anti-Israel mob

TALI FEINBERG

Bleeding profusely from her hands after being viciously attacked by an anti-Israel mob on Friday, 27 September, Cape Town academic and interfaith leader, Dr Azila Reisenberger (72), continued to hold an Israeli flag and stand calmly as the mob hurled antisemitic abuse at her.

Reisenberger, who faced shouts of "Jews must go away"; "Jews must all die"; and "Pity they didn't finish Jews off in Europe", opened a case of assault with the South African Police Service (SAPS), and then went to a doctor who cleaned the wounds, bandaged them, and prescribed antibiotics to prevent infection. Two weeks later, she still doesn't have full function in her hands, and it's painful to move them. She was also hit in the face, and is still bruised.

Born and raised in Israel before moving to South Africa in her 20s, Reisenberger decided to support her Christian Zionist friends who have been standing outside Parliament in support of Israel every Friday for 25 years. When she arrived, she saw they had chosen not to do so that week as they had been viciously attacked the previous week. She decided that she would still stand with her Israeli flag, but as soon as she got out of her car, anti-Israel protesters, who also now protest there weekly, tried to rip it out of her hands, injuring her.

The mob surrounded her, pushed her, destroyed her flag, and hurled abuse, but Reisenberger remained calm, telling them that just because they were shouting, it didn't make their words true. She told them she understood that they felt they need to stand with their brethren like she stood with hers, but there was no need to be abusive or call for the other side to be killed. "You can

wave your flag, and I can wave my flag," she said. But the mob showed their true colours by forcing her flag from her hands and setting it alight.

However, this sprightly grandmother simply took out another, bigger flag and continued to hold it with steadfast resilience. She walked across the road, but was followed by the mob, who continued to surround her, prod her with flags, be abusive, and try to provoke her.

The police arrived, and advised her to leave as it was too dangerous, but she refused, saying that to do so would impinge on her freedom of expression. Parliamentary guards arrived, and ensured the mob returned her flag to her – it wasn't fully burnt. The guards then protected Reisenberger while taking photographs of the mob.

After standing calmly for an hour but still bleeding, Reisenberger chose to leave when she was ready. Since that day, she has faced harassment from anonymous emails. However, she says, "I'm not scared of anything. I want to tell everyone, especially the younger generation, to stand up for what you believe in. I was happy to stand alone with my flag. You don't need other people to join you if you know you need to do something. If you believe in something, just do it. Maybe that's the Israeli way."

An established author, respected women's rights activist, academic, marriage officer, and interfaith leader, Reisenberger says she's shocked at the vile and extremist anti-Israel rhetoric she's seeing in academia and women's rights spaces.

As a long-term lecturer in Hebrew literature, gender, and sexuality, and gender and religions at the University of Cape Town (UCT), she's horrified at former colleagues now calling for the

Continued on page 4>>

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# Marching for terrorism disguised as activism



TIM FLACK

OPINION

On 5 October 2024, a parade of moral degradation took place in the streets of Cape Town. Under the misleading banner of a "March for Palestine", what unfolded wasn't a call for peace or an outcry for justice. Instead, it was a brazen celebration of the very organisations responsible for the most heinous acts of terror.

This was no protest for human rights; it was an open endorsement of Hamas, Hezbollah, and other groups that thrive on the blood of innocent civilians, particularly Jewish ones.

The scene was chilling. Massive banners depicted the leaders of Hamas, Hezbollah, and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, men known not for their advocacy of peace, but for their orchestration of massacres.

The photo at the heart of this spectacle shows smiling women holding up a sign reading, "Death to Israel"; "Death to Zionism," complete with bloodied handprints. This photo captures exactly what was proudly paraded at the so-called "March for Palestine" to Parliament, a march laughably framed as one to "end genocide". Instead of a solemn stand against supposed atrocities, what do we see? Smiling women holding up a placard that screams "Death to Israel"; "Death to Zionism", complete with the sickeningly symbolic bloodied handprints, a nod to the barbaric lynching of Israelis by Abdel-Aziz Salha. And behind them? A massive banner showcasing the so-called "Axis of Resistance", featuring the familiar faces of those who lead Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and Hezbollah, groups that have repeatedly orchestrated terrorist attacks against civilians.

Slogans like "Viva Hamas" and "Viva Hezbollah" weren't expressions of solidarity with the oppressed; they were the rallying cries of those who endorse the mass murder of Jews. All this under the pretence of protesting "genocide". It wasn't a march for peace or justice, it was a hate-filled celebration of terror and violence, dressed up in the morally bankrupt language of activism. The hypocrisy would be laughable if it weren't so disgustingly dangerous.

Megan Choritz from South African Jews for a Free Palestine, a South African Jew, and self-proclaimed anti-Zionist, gave a speech on the stage. She did so in front of a massive banner emblazoned with the words, "We are all Hamas." Her participation at this event reveals an astounding moral blindness.



"We are all Hamas" banner on display in Cape Town on 5 October

Equally disturbing were the words of Nazier Paulsen of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), who brazenly declared, "We are Hamas, we are Hezbollah, we are the Houthis." He went further, demanding the expulsion of the Israeli ambassador, who was in fact withdrawn from South Africa by Israel almost a year ago, and the prosecution of South Africans who serve in the Israel Defense Forces. He also proclaimed Israel as an illegitimate state that has no right to exist. This is a man who openly aligns himself with terror groups responsible for countless civilian deaths, and he does so without shame or reservation. It's this showboating we South Africans have become accustomed to when it comes to the EFF.

One cannot overlook the participation of Dr Imtiaz Sooliman, the founder of Gift of the Givers, who, when given the platform, chose not to call for peace but

to echo antisemitic conspiracy theories, railing against Jews and their supposed control of the world. The fact that this rhetoric, once relegated to the darkest corners of history, is now proudly broadcast in public is beyond alarming. Gift of the Givers runs a relatively large clinic in Khan Yunis called KhuzaClinic, a few kilometres from Kibbutz Nir Oz, one of the hardest hit Kibbutzim on

7 October 2023. One in four residents of Nir Oz were murdered. And what of the Muslim Judicial Council's Sheik Riad Fataar, who whipped the crowd into a frenzy by declaring, "We are all Hamas." This was no slip of the tongue. It was a calculated alignment with an organisation dedicated to violence, terrorism, and the destruction of the Jewish state. His words were met with thunderous applause.

The presence of PAGAD (People Against Gangsterism and Drugs), a group with a notorious history of violence including the bombing of South African synagogues like Wynberg Shul, should remove any lingering doubts about the true nature of this event. This wasn't a protest. This was a rally celebrating hatred and terror.

Let's not kid ourselves. This wasn't a march for peace. This wasn't a call for

justice. This was a public glorification of those who revel in the slaughter of civilians. To disguise it in the language of human rights is not only dishonest, it's also profoundly dangerous. The real tragedy here is that mainstream South African organisations like the Congress of South African Trade Unions and Gift of the Givers lend a thin veneer of legitimacy to this madness by associating themselves with it. By standing beside those waving Hamas and Hezbollah flags, they embolden the extremists and legitimise an agenda steeped in hatred.

The timing of this rally, on the eve of the anniversary of Hamas's barbaric massacre of Israelis on 7 October 2023, only adds to the grotesque irony. Instead of condemning these atrocities, South African organisations march in celebration of them.

It's time for the world to wake up to the reality of what this "March for Palestine" really is: a gathering of extremists, parading under the false flag of human rights, with the aim of sowing hatred and glorifying terror. And if we remain silent, if we continue to let this grotesque masquerade go unchallenged, we will be complicit in allowing evil to triumph.

In the words of Edmund Burke, "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing." It's time for good people to stand up and expose this for what it truly is: a hate-fuelled endorsement of terror.

• *Tim Flack is a seasoned communications professional with a diverse background spanning military service, media, public relations, and safety and security. He is a firearms activist, and owns the Cape Town-based public relations firm Flack Partners PR.*

## Interfaith leader violently attacked by anti-Israel mob

>>Continued from page 3

eradication of Israel – her homeland – and spouting hatred and conspiracy theories on social media.

She believes that the interfaith connections at UCT have been eroded, and she has friends who were once close colleagues who have turned their backs on her. She's deeply concerned about the extreme narrative at UCT. "The discussion is no longer about peace, it's about annihilation of the Jewish state. These are thinking people, yet they don't recognise the evil, the horror," she says.

Reisenberger's daughter, Tali Anderssen, says she and her family were away at the time, "and didn't even know my mom was going to go to Parliament until she told us afterwards. I was proud that she was going to support the longstanding Bridges for Peace group that regularly stands outside Parliament. My mom has been friends with many of them for years, as they have such a wonderful, peaceful love for Israel. Unfortunately, she was alone that day, and it's horrifying that she could be so blatantly assaulted in front of the precinct, with no real intervention. There's been such thuggish behaviour by pro-Palestinian groups, and seemingly no recognition that any other views are allowed other than their own."

Adrienne Jacobson, the chairperson of the Cape South African Jewish Board of Deputies (Cape SAJBD), says, "The previous week, also outside Parliament, the same aggressive pro-Palestinian group attacked an elderly Christian man, stealing his Israeli flag, slapping him in the face, and kicking him in the stomach. He, too, sustained injuries and will also be opening a case with the SAPS. There's also a video of the incident.

"The Cape SAJBD condemns in the strongest terms the

deviation from the South African ethos of peaceful protest into physical and verbal assault by certain pro-Palestinian groups," says Jacobson. "Freedom of expression is a constitutionally enshrined right of every South African, and for these groups to deny individuals these rights and compound this by committing criminal acts, is unacceptable. We have engaged with SAPS and the City of Cape Town to act against these hoodlums and ensure that they don't attack anyone else in the future. We may have differing opinions about the Middle East, but it doesn't validate or justify the use of hate speech and violence.

"We call on our government leaders, including the African National Congress [ANC], to condemn the violence against fellow South Africans. Regardless of the ANC's political position against Israel, it must support its own citizens' constitutional rights to freedom of expression."

South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) spokesperson Rolene Marks says, "The SAZF condemns the attack on a Jewish woman outside Parliament with the contempt it deserves. We call on authorities to take swift action to investigate and prosecute this crime.

"We urge the government, the ANC, and President Cyril Ramaphosa to refrain from their repeated anti-Israel statements that are devoid of fact, and serve only to increase volatility and division within South Africa and do nothing to bring peace to the Middle East," Marks says. "By choosing to accuse Israel falsely of genocide at the International Court of Justice, the government has created an environment that's not safe for Jewish people in South Africa. It should refrain from repeating falsehoods against Israel, and ensure that South Africa is a place that's safe and accepting for all who live in it, including Jews."



Dr Azila Reisenberger

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# ANC rewrites history to suit its narrative

TALI FEINBERG

As South African Jewry mourned the first anniversary since the worst massacre of Jews since the Holocaust, South Africa's president Cyril Ramaphosa changed the historical facts in a statement he made on 7 October 2024, which begins with him claiming that 7 October, "marks one year since the start of an onslaught against the Palestinian people that has thus far claimed more than 43 000 lives".

He made no mention that the only thing Israel did on that day was try to rescue its citizens from unspeakable brutality and acts of genocide. He went on to say, "The violence that has been committed by Israel against Palestinians over many decades intensified after an attack on Israel by Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups on 7 October last year," effectively blaming Israel for the massacre.

Ramaphosa went on to say that Israel had fewer victims than the Palestinians, and called for the hostages to be released, almost excusing himself by saying "we cannot help but be moved" by their plight. He then equivocated Hamas criminals held in Israeli jails with innocent Israelis held hostage by Hamas terrorists. He made no mention of Hezbollah's unprovoked daily rocket attacks on Israel over the past year, framing Israel's response as aggression.

The chairperson of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, Professor Karen Milner, says, "The ANC [African National Congress] is rewriting history with the sole aim of hurting South African Jewry. A year ago, on 7 October, when Hamas brutally killed, raped, burnt, murdered, and kidnapped innocent Israeli civilians, leaving more than 1 200 dead, it refused to condemn Hamas and show any sympathy for the victims. One year later, the ANC is still refusing to acknowledge Hamas's atrocities.

"The lack of compassion the president has for the victims of 7 October is stark, and a devastating reminder to the Jewish community about how little he cares for Jewish lives. Once again, we cannot help but lament

the missed opportunity for South Africa to play a real role in this war-torn region by being an honest broker in seeking peace rather than being a Hamas apologist."

Ramaphosa's comments on 7 October are outrageous, says South African Zionist Federation spokesperson Rolene Marks. "Blaming Israel for Hamas's attack is nothing short of victim-blaming, twisting the truth about what happened that day. The timing of this insensitivity was deliberate, and gaslights Jews. Instead of fostering unity, the president sows division."

Ramaphosa's comments came after the ANC hosted a vigil on 6 October which it said "paid tribute to the 42 000 Palestinian civilians who lost their lives between October 2023 and October 2024", neglecting to mention that almost 18 000 Palestinians killed in the war were Hamas combatants, according to the Israel Defense Forces.

The event was hosted with anti-Israel groups that call for the obliteration of Israel through violent means. Participants held signs saying, "Israel has no history, only a criminal record."

At the vigil, Ronald Lamola, minister of international relations and cooperation, said, "We know apartheid when we see it", and that it was clear that "Israel are the aggressors" in the conflict. His comments come after press releases from his department on 28 September and 2 October, in which the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (Dirco) stated, "The government of South Africa expresses its profound concern regarding the recent escalation of extrajudicial

killings in the Middle East, most notably the tragic assassination of [Hezbollah leader] Hassan Nasrallah."

It also condemned Israel's targeted pager attack on Hezbollah terrorists, saying it "warrants strong condemnation from the international community. Such attacks on civilians constitute a grave violation of international human rights and humanitarian law".

South Africa has never condemned Hezbollah's indiscriminate rocket attacks on Israelis since 8 October, including the murder of 12 Druze children.

Dirco went on to blame Israel for Iran's missile attack on 1 October, saying, "The continued occupation of Palestine has denied the Palestinian people their enshrined rights of self-determination and statehood, which remains a prerequisite to restoring peace and security in the region."

On 7 October, the ANC repeated the lie that all Palestinians who have died in the Gaza war were defenceless civilians, and that Israel attacked Gaza on 7 October. "This day marks a year since the Israel massacre of 42 000 unarmed Palestinian civilians, journalists, and the displacement of millions by the genocidal Israel government," it said.

Said Milner, "Since 7 October 2023, the ANC has consistently lauded the perpetrators without recognition of the worst massacre of Jews since the Holocaust. The party has consistently bashed South African Jews for its own political expediency.

"We mourn the loss of all innocent lives on both sides. However, the ANC has demonstrated intense denialism in its refusal to acknowledge that innocent Israeli lives were needlessly taken, unprovoked, on 7 October, and in

terror attacks since that day," says Milner. "If the ANC was genuinely worried about the lives of innocents, it would pressure its friend, Hamas, to release the hostages and ensure the war ends."

Says Marks, "The ANC government didn't even bother to condemn Iran explicitly for its blatant act of war against Israel. It didn't hesitate to mourn Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah's death, calling it a tragedy. This shows, beyond doubt, that the ANC stands with rogue states and terrorist organisations. It's preposterous that the president of a country that accuses Israel of genocide sides with Hamas and Iran, which have both clearly stated their goal of eradicating Israel and the Jewish people."

Local political analyst Daniel Silke says Ramaphosa's statement "is entirely in line with the broader shift in South African foreign policy. After years of increased influence from Iranian and Palestinian agencies that operate in and out of South Africa, the country's foreign policy is now myopic, not prepared even to acknowledge the suffering of Israelis."

It's also part of "a broader foreign policy battle within the ANC, where some wish to distance themselves from the West and move towards a new non-aligned BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia, and the United Arab Emirates), post-United States (US) world. Israel is a useful pawn to critique the West, given that it is seen as a proxy of the US. This corresponds with the Iranian view, and South Africa's close ties with Iran play into this."

In addition, "South Africa has been emboldened by global sentiment," Silke says, "and this kind of statement reflects the ANC's ease with its more radical approach."

However, "It's a shame that Ramaphosa has failed to show any empathy with the Jewish community in South Africa," says Silke. "He can retain his views on Israel, but he can also show an understanding of the depth of feeling that exists within the Jewish community. Yet, he has failed to express any empathy."



At the ANC vigil on 6 October

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## Ramaphosa rewriting history

I totally understand that the president of South Africa has chosen a side in Israel's war for its survival. I guess, somehow, that this is his prerogative as a human being. I, too, have one side I support. The truth is though, as a Jew, I don't have a choice. Israel is intrinsically linked to me and every other Jew, and the survival of the Jewish state is my survival. Besides, it's clear from those around us that unless we condemn Israel, which few Jews will ever do, we are lumped together as "genocidal maniacs" or "baby killers".

I digress. President Cyril Ramaphosa and his party, the African National Congress (ANC), may choose who they support, which they made clear years ago, but they don't get to rewrite history. That's not their right, nor their prerogative. History is an absolute.

When Ramaphosa makes a statement to the nation on 7 October, exactly one year after Hamas massacred our people, and negates the occurrence of a violent massacre, that's unconscionable. How dare he! In his "From the Desk of the President" missive, he literally says, "7 October marks one year since the start of an onslaught against the Palestinians that has thus far claimed 43 000 lives." He then proceeds to undermine anything that might have happened to Israel to warrant it fighting back, by calling what was a depraved, violent genocidal massacre a simple "attack on Israel".

Where was our dear president when the horrific videos and images that were sent out with pride and glee by the Hamas operatives themselves showed their brutality, murder, rape, and all the devastation they wrought? Where was he when the world was horrified at what happened? Are Jewish lives irrelevant to him?

Mr President, you have no right to negate what was the worst atrocity in Jewish history since the Holocaust. You don't get to change the facts of our lives and that of our people.

I so clearly recall when Ramaphosa became president, he told our community how important we were in shaping South Africa. "Members of the Jewish community are to be found, and have excelled, in almost every field of social, scientific, and economic endeavour," he said. "Though small in number, the South African Jewish community is significant in its influence and capabilities, and in the contribution it has made, and continues to make, to building this nation."

He went on to say how inextricably linked we were to the rest of the population. He then told us that it was important for the government to engage with Israel on issues in the Middle East. "And where we think incorrect policies are being pursued, we actually need to go and talk to the people and gain access, argue our point, and find consensus."

So much for that, Mr President. Instead, you negate our suffering and that of our people. I'm not sure what happened to you, but this isn't acceptable. You are inviting trouble in an already troubled situation. You make out that Israel has no reason to defend itself.

Let me tell you something. If Israel is to survive – which it will – its soldiers have no choice but to stop those who want to destroy us from doing so. It's as simple as that. Not one Israeli mother wants to send her son or husband to war. Surely you can understand that? Do you honestly, in your heart of hearts, believe that Israel wants a war on seven sides? Do you truly believe that Israelis want to be fighting when they could be living a good life? Do you believe Israelis in the north and south want to be living in little rooms far from their homes because their areas are being bombarded daily by Hezbollah and Hamas, and now Iran?

Mr President, you actually know this community well as many of our business leaders supported your rise and advised you. So, you know well that we aren't a warring people. We are a people who just want to get on and have decent lives, ensuring that we give the best we can to our children. We aren't devils! Neither are our brethren in Israel.

But when terrorist organisations, which have taken hold of entire countries, challenge Israel's right to survive as a country, don't think that it won't fight back. It will and it is, but Israel isn't what the world should be worried about.

Think about what you are doing by negating the devastation of 7 October. Look around you, and think about what your words do.

Perhaps Ramaphosa and the ANC should have spent some time at the October 7 Square in Houghton. On Sunday and Monday, 6 and 7 October, Jewish communal organisations held the most spectacular exhibition which they made – with a great deal of hard work and creativity – to resemble Hostage Square in Tel Aviv. It was the most moving and solemn experience for all who went there. And people poured in from all walks of life, and felt the sadness we are experiencing here and in Israel. They were willing to hear us, not just negate us and what happened in Israel because it didn't fit their favoured narrative.

There was a Jewish businessman who suggested to his staff, who weren't Jewish, that they might want to go and see it for themselves. Every single one of them went and did not regret it. And that's just one of many such beautiful stories.

The one glitch in this commemoration was a horde of aggressive anti-Israel rabble rousers who caused trouble at the square. (See page 3.) What resulted from their hatred was Jews gathering with pride, and singing so loud, the swearing and threats were drowned out. What a proud moment for us!

Strength to our community, which has shown its bravery, camaraderie, and togetherness in this troubling time! Shabbat Shalom and may you all be inscribed in the Book of Life!

**Peta Krost**  
Editor

We will not be publishing for the next two weeks because of the chaggim, but will be back on 31 October.



## South Africa at a moral crossroads

OPINION

ROWAN POLOVIN



One year after the 7 October massacre, the most horrific attack on Jewish people since the Holocaust, South Africa stands on the precipice of moral failure. The leadership of the African National Congress (ANC) has transformed our once-proud beacon of hope and reconciliation into a political proxy against Israel, betraying our democratic values and undermining global peace and security.

Ordinary citizens and political parties in the new government of national unity must confront this moral abdication and steer South Africa back towards its principles of democracy, humanity, and equality.

The ANC government's response to the 7 October atrocities goes beyond mere political misstep; it represents a shocking abdication of moral responsibility. From the outset, the ANC-led government brazenly aligned itself with the perpetrators rather than the victims. This moral bankruptcy has now reached new depths, with the ANC issuing a directive for "commemorative activities in solidarity with Palestine" on 7 October 2024, a callous erasure of Israeli suffering that lays bare the government's skewed perspective.

President Cyril Ramaphosa and his leadership, brazenly donning keffiyehs, levelled scandalous charges of genocide against Israel while victims' bodies still lay unburied. Former Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, Dr Naledi Pandor, took this unconscionable stance even further. She not only made a call of support and solidarity to Hamas leaders, but a mere two weeks after 7 October, visited Iran, the puppet master of regional terror and the architect of the seven-front war against Israel.

This unconscionable position is no momentary lapse, but a calculated strategy. South Africa has willingly positioned itself as another proxy of Iran, opening a new front in the war against Israel – the front of delegitimisation.

By leveraging its status as a democratic nation with the moral legacy of fighting apartheid, Pretoria has become the politically palatable mouthpiece for those who seek Israel's destruction. The government's decision to bring genocide charges against Israel in the International Court of Justice (ICJ) marks the nadir of this moral descent.



At the ANC's final election rally in May 2024

Photo: Ian Ossendryver

announced South Africa's imminent filing of its memorial to the ICJ case. In light of these actions, it's crucial that pro-Israel parties within the coalition assert their influence to reshape South Africa's foreign policy.

Their goal should be to steer the country towards a policy of dehyphenation between Israel and the Palestinians. This approach would allow South Africa to cultivate relations with Israel independent of the Palestinian issue, enabling our country to benefit from Israeli technology and innovation in line with India and other countries who have taken this position.

Meanwhile, the ongoing hypocrisy of our government's position is staggering. While unabashedly bashing Israel, it cannot bring itself to condemn Hezbollah's relentless rocket assaults on Israeli civilians or Iran's unprecedented launch of 200 ballistic missiles at Israel. The strongest condemnation it can muster is "concern" about "hostilities", invariably followed by blaming Israel for the escalation.

This moral bankruptcy extends beyond rhetoric. The ANC-controlled City of Johannesburg's proposal to rename Sandton Drive to Leila Khaled Drive – a transparent attempt to antagonise both the United States (US) and the Jewish community – exemplifies the petty vindictiveness that has replaced principled governance.

The contradictions in South Africa's foreign policy are glaring. While aligning itself with the enemies of the West and undermining Israel at every turn, the government simultaneously lobbies the US to continue with the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act and maintain positive trade and diplomatic relations. This schizophrenic approach not only damages our international credibility, it jeopardises our economic interests.

Moreover, the government's stance makes peace between Israel and the Palestinians less attainable. By failing to condemn terrorism and refusing to hold Hamas accountable for its actions, South Africa emboldens extremists and undermines moderate voices on both sides, prolonging the conflict and increasing suffering for all.

The tragedy of this situation is compounded by its disconnect from the sentiments of the average South African.

Our on-the-ground experiences consistently indicate that most citizens don't share the government's obsessive hostility towards Israel. The recent national elections, in which the ANC suffered a resounding defeat despite making virulent anti-Israel sentiment a core part of its platform, confirmed this gulf between the government and the people.

The government's actions over the past year haven't just betrayed its Jewish citizens, they have also trampled upon the very democratic values that are the bedrock of our society. This past year has forced many to question their place in a country that seems increasingly hostile to their identity and beliefs.

Yet, in the face of this pressure and cynical emotional manipulation, the South African Jewish community has stood firm. Our support for the nation-state of the Jewish people in our historic homeland isn't a matter of choice, it's part of our sacred identity. We won't be swayed by the moral confusion of our detractors, nor will we apologise for our steadfast Zionism.

As we commemorate the victims of 7 October and stand in solidarity with those still held captive, we must also recognise that South Africa stands at a crossroads. Will the ANC-controlled foreign relations department continue down this path of moral bankruptcy, aligning Pretoria with those who perpetrate and celebrate violence? Or will our country reclaim its position as a voice for justice, peace, and reconciliation?

The choice is clear. South Africa must step back from the brink, reassess its position, and return to the values that once made us a beacon of hope for the world. We must condemn terrorism unequivocally, support Israel's right to self-defence, and support the goals and vision of the Abraham Accords in the Middle East. Only then can we begin to restore our moral standing and play a constructive role on the global stage. Our future as a respected member of the international community depends on it.

Since 7 October, the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (Dirco) has devolved into little more than a Hamas propaganda outlet. It eagerly spreads terrorist lies, falsely accuses Israel of Hamas's crimes, denies Hamas's atrocities despite mounting evidence, and even slanders Jewish leaders as fabricators of these horrors. This stance makes a mockery of South Africa's purported commitment to human rights and international law.

The formation of a government of national unity has introduced a glimmer of hope, with several coalition parties supporting Israel. However, Ramaphosa, Dirco, and the international relations minister persist in their unwarranted attacks on Israel.

At the United Nations General Assembly on 24 September 2024, Ramaphosa devoted more than a quarter of his allotted time to criticising Israel indiscriminately, repeating the baseless "genocide" accusation, and lauding the ICJ case.

This week, on the anniversary of 7 October, Ronald Lamola, the minister of international relations and cooperation

• Rowan Polovin is national chairperson of the South African Zionist Federation.



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# Daughter of murdered SA expat reclaims kibbutz life

GILLIAN KLAWSKY

The verse “a time to be born and a time to die” in Kohelet (Ecclesiastes), which speaks of there being a time and season for everything, has always struck a chord with Liora Ben Tsur. Yet, she never could have imagined how deeply these words would resonate when, on 7 October 2023, she lost her beloved mother just one day after giving birth to her own daughter.

Ben Tsur’s South African-born mother, Marcelle Taljah, was visiting her daughter’s home on Kibbutz Ein HaShlosha on the Gaza border for a few days over the 7 October holiday weekend. There to help Ben Tsur’s husband, Dor, look after the couple’s two older children while their baby sister was being born, she stayed in a guest house on the kibbutz.

The South African Zionist Federation and the Israel Centre were scheduled to bring Ben Tsur to South Africa on 7 October, 2024, but her flight was

cancelled. She spoke to the *SA Jewish Report* from Israel.

“On 6 October 2023, my mother came to visit me in hospital and to see my newborn, Asif,” Ben Tsur recalled. “She held her for the first and last time. In Hebrew, the meaning of ‘Asif’ is ‘last fruit before the winter.’”

When at 06:30 the next morning rockets were fired into Israel, Ben Tsur was in Assuta Hospital in Ashdod with baby Asif. “I contacted my husband, and he told me that he and the kids were going into the shelter and that he’d contact me later. I asked him if my mother had come and he said, ‘Not yet.’”

From the multiple WhatsApp messages she received from her friends, Ben Tsur soon realised that Hamas terrorists had infiltrated the kibbutz.

“They asked me to help them, to save them because I was one of the only ones outside of the kibbutz that day. I didn’t have contact with my family. I realised I needed to open a war room.

I had Asif in my right hand and the phone in my left hand.” As a reporter, Ben Tsur had worked as an army correspondent, and so began calling all the military numbers she had saved on her phone.

Yet her heart sank when a policewoman on the other end of the line eventually told her, “I’m sorry, the soldiers we sent to you are now dead.” Realising that her family and friends were truly alone, Ben Tsur called her brothers, Betzalel and Yedidiya, for help.

Guiding her brothers via WhatsApp, Ben Tsur kept in touch with a pregnant friend who was also her neighbour. “She called and told me that they had terrorists inside their house. I realised that the house they would go to next would be ours. I told my brothers to run to Dor and the children. Dor came out with a knife, and my brothers gave him a gun to protect himself and saw that the



Betzalel Taljah, Liora Ben Tsur, Marcelle Taljah, Yedidiya Taljah, and Shira Mandel

children were fine.”

Now en route to the guest house searching for their mother, the horrified brothers suddenly found her body in a pool of blood. “She’d been hit by a lot of Kalashnikov bullets,” said Ben Tsur. “Searching for something to hide her

body so that it wouldn’t be kidnapped by terrorists, my brothers saw that she was holding snacks for my children next to her heart.”

This epitomised the grandmother that Taljah was. “She really loved all her grandchildren, and was always bringing juice and sweets to give them,” Ben Tsur said. “In the days before 7 October, she was jumping with my kids on the trampoline. I said, ‘You’re 65, why are you jumping on the trampoline with the children? Be careful with your knee.’ She was always telling me that life is short. She was right.”

At 16:00 on 7 October, Ben Tsur received a call from Dor confirming her worst fears – her mother had been murdered. “I was screaming. My shouting was louder than the newborn babies in the hospital. In that moment, I realised that I was an orphan. My father had died in 2015 in a tractor accident.”

Though Ben Tsur’s parents met in Israel, they both came from South Africa and had farming backgrounds. Together, they established Taljah Farm on Mount Hebron and imported sheep from South Africa. Today, Ben Tsur’s brothers and niece run the farm.

“My mother was an only child after years of her parents trying to have a baby,” said Ben Tsur. “She decided in her 20s that she wanted to make aliya, but her parents wanted her to stay in South Africa. She told us the story of going into the field where her family farmed. She touched the grass, and asked G-d for a sign whether or not to make aliya. She saw that every blade of grass had a drop of water on it, and told herself that if G-d was taking care of every blade of grass, he would also take care of her, so she moved to Israel by herself.”

Working on various kibbutzim, Taljah also studied Torah. “She connected with Israel and Judaism, and she wanted to build a family of proud Jews in Israel,” said Ben Tsur. She recalls that once, when she asked her mother to take her to get a South African passport, she told her there was no way she was leaving Israel.

“She said, ‘I didn’t come here to Israel so you would go back to live your life in South Africa. You should stay in this country and build your life here.’”

With this in mind, Ben Tsur and friends from her region in the south called Otef Aza (the Gaza envelope) have started a movement called *Atid Le’Otef* (Future for the Otef). “We want to build trust, rehabilitate the region, and take people home. After the loss of my wonderful mother, I told myself we needed to do everything we could to get back home.”

## Tribute videos shed light on victims’ life stories

TALI FEINBERG

Born in Israel and raised in South Africa before returning to live in the Jewish state, clinical psychologist Lihie Gilhar says that in the wake of 7 October, “I was in a place of utter disbelief, searching for a way to make sense of the unimaginable.”

This led her to create a project called “Bring Them Light”, where she makes videos about every victim of 7 October that are then posted on social media. In addition, she created a monument that was unveiled at the Habima Theatre complex in Tel Aviv on 5 October, with a lightbulb for each victim, symbolising their everlasting light.

“I recall seeing the videos of Naama Levy and Shani Louk, and I just couldn’t accept that this would be their legacy, that this is how the world would remember them,” Gilhar says from her home in Tel Aviv. “As time passed, it became clear to me that while attention had rightfully shifted to the war and the soldiers, the victims were being lost. I couldn’t bear to allow such a tragedy to fade into the background. This project was my way of ensuring that those who were brutally murdered are remembered, their light shining through the darkness of these events.”

The idea to create tribute videos came after Gilhar received approval to create a memorial monument at the Habima Theatre complex. “I started researching each individual, but as I gathered names, I realised that simply attaching a name wasn’t enough. I found myself searching for photos, stories, anything to breathe life into these memories, but the initial video I created felt flat and lifeless. It was then that I knew that I had to do more.”

She decided to reach out personally to every family. “I wanted to hear their stories, receive photos and videos, and allow them to tell me about their loved ones in their own words. My goal was to create a true life story for each individual so people could get to know them as they really were, beyond just a name.”

The creation of each video begins with families sharing photos and videos with Gilhar. “I then conduct a personal phone interview, where I ask them to tell me everything they want the world to know about their loved one. In some cases, the pain is too overwhelming for parents, so I often speak to siblings. After the interview, I transcribe the conversation, translate it into English as it’s very important the stories spread around the world, and carefully craft their story from those heartfelt words.”

Once the story is written, a video is created. Assisted by South African *olah* Carrie Sandler Elbaz, “we match the text with images and videos that capture each chapter of their life, ensuring that the visuals align with their personal journey. The music is also deeply meaningful, as we use songs they loved. It’s then sent to the family for feedback. Once we have their approval, the video is finalised and uploaded.

“This meticulous process ensures that each tribute isn’t just a video, but a deeply authentic reflection of their life. It allows their story to be told in a way that honours their



The ‘Bring Them Light’ memorial

memory and gives families a lasting legacy to share with the world.”

Bringing the lightbulb monument to life was “perhaps the most challenging part of this journey, even more so than creating the emotional videos,” says Gilhar. “It required funding, logistics, and navigating obstacles. I had never undertaken something like this before, and it was daunting. I was given a specific target by the person constructing it, and the pressure to meet that goal was immense. Despite the difficulties, I pushed through. I still struggle to find the words to express what it feels like to see it become a reality.”

Gilhar spent her early years in South Africa, immigrating with her parents when she was two. At 19, she returned to Israel. She later spent more time in South Africa studying. “I eventually left South Africa due to concerns about crime, and haven’t returned in 17 years, though my family remains there,” she says.

“We are still in the process of collecting donations to continue sharing these crucial stories as all the work has been voluntary. We’re working to secure funding to establish the monument as a permanent installation.” To support the project, Gilhar urges us “to help spread awareness globally”. She hopes this could help bring the monument to South Africa. “Furthermore, we’re seeking financial support to sustain our efforts. Together, we can ensure that the victims’ legacies are shared with as many people as possible.”

Sandler Elbaz, who made aliya from Johannesburg, says, “I chose to help because I feel it’s crucial to memorialise these lives in a way that offers comfort to their families and preserves their memories for future generations.”

Her main contribution has been creating the tribute videos, “which takes a significant amount of time and effort as I strive to condense the essence of their lives into five or six-minute videos. It can be emotionally difficult to read about their lives and learn who they were, as I work

to portray their stories respectfully and meaningfully. Additionally, I’m building the website for the project, which will serve as a central hub for all the tributes.”

The most rewarding aspect of the project has been the messages Gilhar has received from families expressing gratitude. “Knowing that we have honoured their memories in such a meaningful way is profoundly fulfilling and validates the effort we’ve put into this endeavour,” she says.

Meanwhile she continues to work as a psychologist, including treating soldiers. “A common thread in my sessions is disbelief. In Israel, there’s a prevailing notion of resilience that often leads people to suppress harsh realities. Pervasive uncertainty and pain are palpable. There’s a constant sense of shock and lack of control.”

The Instagram account where Gilhar posts the tribute videos has received a lot of hate, which she carefully monitors. For example, one recent comment said, “October 7th was fully justified.”

“I struggle to comprehend the extent of hatred we are facing,” she says. “We haven’t fully processed our losses because we are preoccupied with defending our existence. My recommendation is to unite. It’s through solidarity that we can tap into our collective strength.”

“I began this journey not realising how profoundly it would change me,” Gilhar says. “These past months have been some of the most challenging of my life. Every spare moment is dedicated to trying to capture the essence of these extraordinary souls.

“This project became my life’s work. I gave it every part of me. There were moments when I was pushed to the edge, but what kept me going were the stories of these beautiful people, ensuring that their families knew they weren’t forgotten. Now, seeing these lights shine, I cannot find the words to describe what it means to me. This project was born out of love, and it’s that love that has carried me through.”



# 'Time is stuck' – Nir Oz survivor speaks

ELKA COHEN

"It's hard to think that in one devastating day, our lives were changed so dramatically," says Lotus Lahav (22). Both she and her mother, Irit Lahav (58), are survivors of the Nir Oz massacre, after spending a terrifying 12 hours hiding under a table in the saferoom of their home.

Built for bombs not gun-firing Hamas terrorists, "We quickly realised that the door of the saferoom could easily be opened from the outside," recalls Lahav, who remembers every detail of the day as though it just happened.

"We managed to think quickly, and tied a vacuum cleaner pipe to an old rowing oar." Because their improvised locking mechanism worked, they are both alive today.

Lahav is the third generation of her family born and raised on Kibbutz Nir Oz. Her grandparents were founding members, and she describes the small, tightknit community of 415 people as "a true extended family, all so involved in each other's lives".

Nir Oz was a place of freedom, where doors were never locked, and neighbours' doors were always open.

"I lost so many people that day – friends, classmates, neighbours, the parents of friends," she says. "Even thinking about those I wasn't as close to but saw every day – the mailman, the lady who served us food in the dining room, teachers – all murdered."

The remaining members of the devastated community are still suffering inconsolable grief one year later, with 117 members either kidnapped or killed, and 20 hostages taken from the kibbutz still unaccounted for in Gaza.

"We will never feel the same

freedom again – not on our kibbutz, nor in our country," she says. "So many members of our community will never come home, even if the hostages do. Life will never be the same."

Sixty percent of the homes on the kibbutz were destroyed, and the entire community was relocated to a moshav just outside

way, but with 20 hostages from our kibbutz still in Gaza, it's just too fresh to make any decisions, and we don't want to make any mistakes."

Lahav has returned to Nir Oz on a few occasions, but only to attend funerals and memorial services, saying, "I think about the many children from the kibbutz who haven't been home in a year. They need some kind of closure too."

According to Lahav, the Nir Oz community believed peace was the only solution. "We all believed families in Gaza shared the same hopes we did – to live our lives peacefully, working and spending time with family. But on 7 October, we discovered this wasn't the case because the people that came into Nir Oz and [the rest of] Israel weren't only Hamas soldiers but Palestinian civilians, who were

also there to kidnap us, steal TVs, wallets, jewellery, and whatever else they could find, from homes where people were either hiding or dead. They took videos and pictures in celebration. I could never celebrate the death of another human being, no matter how much I hate him. Witnessing this behaviour from Palestinian civilians broke our idealised picture. The difference in our moral codes became clear that day.

"Our people still believe in peace, but it's different now. It doesn't come from a place of trust. Our priority is to make sure this won't happen again."



Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

Lotus Lahav from Kibbutz Nir Oz

Tel Aviv. "It's not what we're accustomed to, but at least we're all together," Lahav says.

"It will be at least two to three years before we can go back to the kibbutz to start rebuilding our lives. In the meantime, while we wait to return, everyone is involved in decisions about the rebuilding of our home.

"There are two opinions among us," she says. "Some think we should destroy what's left and rebuild as fast as possible, others think we should wait. There's lots of talk about creating a memorial site from the remaining homes to document this tragedy in some

## Fighting hatred with song and an emotive tribute

>>>Continued from page 3

"We don't want your kind here!"

The protesters vandalised banners reading, "Oct 7, unleashing Jew Hate", and "Bring Our Children Home" with images of the Bibas children who are still being held hostage by Hamas a year after being abducted. First, they spray painted the banners, then proceeded to tear them down. They also vandalised the bollards and fence between the shul and the road, painting swastikas on the posters and fence.

The CSO decided it wouldn't allow the protesters to pass a certain point to avoid escalation into violence.

It was then that Landau encouraged all those in attendance to stand together and sing the songs *Acheinu*, *Hatikvah*, and *Am Yisrael Chai*.

"There were Palestinian protesters on Glenhove Road standing there shouting, chanting, and flying their flags, trying to intimidate the community inside the exhibition," Landau told the *SA Jewish Report*. "Suddenly, we realised that we weren't going to stand there and watch. We would join in and sing, we would shout, and we would chant and be proud. We would be proud to be Jewish, and proud to be there. We weren't going to

let our tragedy, 7 October, be drowned by hatred and people trying to silence us."

Ronit Sarakinsky, a mom of three boys who was wearing an Israeli flag around her neck and yellow-ribbon earrings said, "We all formed a little circle, put our arms around each other, and sang.

"I went from feeling angry, vulnerable, threatened to one of the proudest moments I felt as a Jew. We were dancing and singing. The louder they got, the louder we got," said Sarakinsky. "I broke the line and formed a circle. My back was facing them. So instead of us facing them, it was us, the Jews, facing each other in our circle."

One community member said he felt like this was the best response to the situation – "connecting as a community, singing and playing together, and creating a level of unity and harmony".

Hannah Duchon, a 17-year-old student at King David Linksfield, said that even though she was fearful of the protesters, the fear was replaced by pride to be part of something so beautiful. "I cried to myself," she said, "asking why we had to be confronted by such hate when we were just trying to come together as a community to honour those we have

lost. Coming together like this made me happy because I saw that at the end of the day, the world is hateful, but we can make something beautiful together to spite the haters."

For one anonymous community member, the effects of the protest and the community's response added to the poignancy of the exhibition as a whole, as many came face to face that day with the hatred that plagues Israel.

Similarly, Daniel Rome, a 22-year-old economics student who is on the *va'ad poel* (steering committee) for Habonim said, "It was appalling but unsurprising to come into contact with those protesters protesting our vigil. It was nothing short of an antisemitic attack that tried to make us feel afraid."

After the protesters left, Habonim *madrichim* continued their vigil. "It left everyone feeling unified, and was a special closure of the day with our vigil with a yellow ribbon acting as a *ketovet* [statement] for the community to see," said Rome.

The following day, people streamed in to pay their respects. With so many people wanting to see the exhibition, the SAJBD kept it open for a third day.

Going back to her experience on 7 October, Lahav says, "We could hear the gunfire and chaos outside, and I was very scared. But when they came into our home, I made the choice to find peace in accepting my death. It seemed to be our fate, and there was nothing we could do about it. My mother and I said our goodbyes that day in the saferoom. We were lucky to be together."

When Israel Defense Forces soldiers finally came to rescue them at around 18:00, Lahav remembers a soldier kissing her mother on the forehead. "He was just so happy to open the door and find people who were still alive."

The soldiers collected whoever remained, and that night, they all slept together in the kibbutz kindergarten. "I was shocked to see how many people came in injured, covered in ash and blood – all of them still barefoot and in their pyjamas. But more of a shock was to see how many of us weren't there," she says.

That night and for the long weeks that followed, Lahav couldn't sleep alone. But within the first two months following the attack, she managed to complete her military service and decided to start working at a law firm that represented victims of the massacre.

"Work has been the best thing to help me stay active and carry on with life. Helping others helps me not to be drawn into sadness and grief every day. I'm doing the best that I can to help, and it still doesn't feel like it's enough," she says.

Lahav describes her first trip to South Africa as "an honour". She was brought here through an ongoing joint initiative between The Base community and the Jewish National Fund.

"It's crazy to think that a year has passed, but still it feels like time is stuck. Without our hostages back home, we just can't move forward. I pray for their return and for the safety of our soldiers, but until this war is over, the real healing cannot begin."



### BIENNIAL GENERAL MEETINGS CHEVRAH KADISHA GROUP

Johannesburg Jewish Helping Hand & Burial Society  
(Chevrah Kadisha)  
Jewish Community Services  
Sandringham Gardens  
Our Parents Home  
Arcadia Jewish Child And Youth Care Centre  
The Society For The Jewish Handicapped  
(Selwyn Segal)  
Kadimah Occupational Centre  
The Society For The Jewish Deaf

All members of the above societies are cordially invited to attend the Biennial General Meetings of these organisations to be held

**Thursday, 14th November 2024 at 15h00**  
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# Outpouring of support: global Jewry one year on

OPINION

Chaim Weizmann, who was to become Israel's first president, was once asked why Jews insisted on settling in Palestine when there were so many other countries in the British empire that would be easier to make their home.

"That's like my asking you why you drove 20 miles to visit your mother last Sunday when there are so many old ladies living on your street," Weizmann answered.

There has been nothing easy about Israel's 76 years of existence, and this past year has been more difficult than any in most memories.

One year on from the attacks of 7 October 2023, Israel remains engaged in a war on several fronts. Iran, which we should remind ourselves shares no border with the Jewish state, fired nearly 200 ballistic missiles into Israel on 1 October to send Israeli citizens nationwide into shelters and safe rooms just a day before they were to celebrate the start of a new year. Antisemitism has surged across the world to levels not seen since the Holocaust, presenting a clear and present danger to many Jewish communities. And, of course, 101 Israelis remain in Hamas captivity, with each passing day giving a little less hope that they will ever return safely to their families.

Yet, this commemoration falling almost poetically between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, the 10 days traditionally reserved for reflection and introspection, provides an opportunity to take stock of our collective response as a global Jewish community. Although we must be clear-eyed about the unprecedented challenges before us, we should allow ourselves a measure of pride and a moment of sombre satisfaction as to how we have met this defining moment in the history of our people.

Since 7 October, more than 30 000 Jews from around the world have made aliya. Jewish Agency offices also report a significant increase in the opening of files,



Sleeping bags from the United States with handwritten notes for soldiers

the first step in the process leading someone moving to Israel. Thirty-one percent of the new *olim* are between the ages of 18 and 35, and an additional 20% are younger than 17 years old.

This year has also been marked by a tremendous outpouring of support for Israel from every corner of the Jewish world. This unprecedented generosity has allowed The Jewish Agency for Israel to assist hundreds of thousands of Israelis in their hour of need. With the donations given both directly to us and through our partners like Keren Hayesod and The Jewish Federations of North America, we have provided grants to more than 10 000 Israeli victims of terror; given 83 million shekels (R380 million) in small business grants to Israeli reservists; aided 14 000 disadvantaged young Israeli teenagers; supported 2 200 lone soldiers; and provided many more services to the elderly, new *olim*, the Druze community, and many other sectors of Israeli society.

Consider The Jewish Agency's Fund for Victims of Terror. This is our commitment

to provide immediate financial assistance within 24-48 hours of the attack and long-term trauma and financial support if needed to every victim of terror in Israel regardless of race, religion, or background. The fund was actually established during the second intifada, and aided nearly 9 000 recipients before 2023. Since 7 October, the number of recipients has more than doubled.

I have had the privilege of meeting more than two dozen recipients of aid from the fund. What always strikes me is that they rarely remember the amount of money they were given. Some, but not many, remember where the money was spent during those foggy days after suffering from the attack and the loss of loved ones. But nearly every one of them can recite word for word the speech that they heard from the Jewish Agency employee who presented them with the support. "This isn't from the Jewish Agency. This is from Jews from around the world, from the United States, South America, Europe, South Africa,

and Australia, and we're standing with you at this time."

Finally, beyond aliya and financial support, global Jewry has found countless additional ways to express its solidarity with Israel. The Jewish Agency's thousands of *shlichim* (Israeli emissaries) are working with Jewish communities from more than 66 countries to support Israel during this crisis. From rallies to missions to meetings with government officials and other interlocutors, the global Jewish community hasn't approached this level of mobilisation since at least 1973.

It goes without saying that the act of showing solidarity with Israel is not an easy one and doesn't come without risks. Yet, despite all the pressure and an understandable desire to lay low during this tempest, the global Jewish community has refused to be silent. And it's being noticed in Israel more than ever before. Indeed, many Israelis who had previously not thought very much about global Jewry now realise the important advocates and allies that we are. The day 7 October was a horrible date, but it was a clarifying one, and for the first in a long time, there's a unique opportunity for connections between Israelis and the rest of global Jewry.

Perhaps before 7 October, many of us in world Jewry were guilty of making a mistake that our parents and grandparents would never have made: we took Israel's existence for granted. As we gather in our respective synagogues on the holiest day of the year and ask G-d to forgive us for our sins against Him and our fellow human beings, let's resolve never to make that mistake again.

• Dan Elbaum is head of North America at The Jewish Agency for Israel, and the president and chief executive of Jewish Agency International Development.



DAN ELBAUM

# Amidst expanding war, what are the chances for peace?

OPINION

A year after the 7 October brutal Hamas attack on southern Israel, the conflict has expanded to six other arenas as Islamist militants have been attacking Israel from Lebanon, Iraq, Yemen, Syria, and the West Bank. In April 2024, Iran joined the attacks directly, launching two waves of projectiles towards the Jewish state. The last one, comprising more than 180 ballistic missiles, was launched on 1 October 2024.

Israel responded by bombing targets on all fronts, and launching a ground assault into Lebanon in late September 2024. Israel also successfully targeted some of the leaders of these non-state militants, including Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah, and the head of Hamas's political bureau, Ismail Haniyeh.

As these lines are being written, Israel is considering how to respond to the latest Iranian attack.

Amidst what seems like an ever-expanding war, what are the chances for peace in the region? Though hard to see between the smoke and fire, there are perhaps a few rays of hope.

First, Israeli-Arab wars have usually been a prelude to a more stable arrangement. The most important breakthrough in Israeli-Arab relations, the 1979 Israeli-Egyptian peace accord, was preceded by the 1973 Yom Kippur War, in which thousands of Israelis and Arabs were killed. War, after all, is the ultimate reminder of the costs of not securing peace. Moreover, it alters the

calculations of all parties and, through the crisis, opens new political possibilities. It further creates a space for a new narrative, or a fresh look at reality by the broad public, including a willingness to accept compromises that were unacceptable prior to war. For example, the missile barrage we are facing from Iran – situated 1 500

km from our borders – reminds us that the nature of the threat has changed and a new response is warranted.

After the Iraqi missile barrage on Israel in 1991, many Israelis realised that holding on to an adjacent territory couldn't protect Israel from missiles fired from such a great distance. This new mindset contributed to public support in Israel for a negotiated solution with the Palestine Liberation Organization, which was secured by 1993. The missile attacks now were probably partially thwarted due to Israel's alliance with the United States and relationships in the region. This is expected to create greater awareness of the importance of a regional alliance with other moderate actors in the region.

Second, despite the war, Israel's peace accords and diplomatic relations in the region haven't been severed. Israel still has peace accords and/or diplomatic relations with Egypt, Jordan, and the

Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, Morocco, South Sudan, and Sudan. One year into the conflict, the interests that drove these relationships are still strong enough to maintain them, despite Israel's wars with other actors in the Middle East.

Third, the war, as well as the continued relationship with moderate Arab states, has brought into sharper focus the nature of the conflict. There is a broader clash in the region between a vision of militant political Islam as the solution for the internal challenges of states, and a vision of a pragmatic, often state-run, moderate version of Islam. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is an arena, maybe even a side arena, of this broader conflict. For militants, it presents an opportunity to weaken some Arab regimes by criticising their governments for their relations with Israel. This internal Arab-Muslim dynamic further suggests that new alliances could be created, most notably between Israel and the moderate Arab states. Down the road, this could further open the path for deeper mutual acceptance. The UAE has perhaps taken this latter vision most seriously as it pertains to the Israeli-Arab conflict. In February 2023, it inaugurated the Abrahamic Family House, which hosts a church, a mosque, and a synagogue, a vivid reminder of the common elements of the three religions. It's a model that shows these faiths can live in harmony and aren't bound to be in everlasting conflict.

Fourth, wars also open new lines of communication. The clash often brings practical issues that require interaction between belligerents: the need to co-ordinate humanitarian assistance to affected populations, prisoner exchanges, and messages about red lines. These aren't grand political moves, but they create an opportunity for enemies to communicate.

Finally, the war is unfolding in a region that shows

broader signs of easing of tensions. The two large civil wars that haunted the region in the previous decade – in Syria and in Libya – have subsided. Turkey, which had a confrontational posture for much of the 2010s, has reached out to numerous actors in the region, including its rival, Egypt, in an effort to reconcile and co-operate. Numerous Arab countries, most notably Saudi Arabia, are reforming their own societies and prefer not to expend resources on unnecessary external conflicts. Indeed, Saudi Arabia and Iran, mortal foes at times, have resumed diplomatic relations.

It's not easy, perhaps impossible, to chart a clear path between these hopeful perspectives and a stable, peaceful Middle East. Moreover, the region is dynamic, and some of these trends are tentative and fragile.

In order to chart a clear path for peace, the region requires brave and visionary leadership and effective international support. This will be particularly challenging, as the United States, the most important international actor in the region, enters a highly polarising election season.

Yet, as we welcome the new year, we're reminded that our national anthem is *Hatikvah*, "The Hope". Yes, the horizon is challenging, but it is hope that carried us thus far, and it is hope that will carry us forward. Amidst the pain and smoke, some broad structural features may offer a better year, all this while looking truthfully at existing reality. After all, as Baruch Spinoza wrote in *The Ethics*, "There's neither hope without fear, nor fear without hope."

• Dr Ehud (Udi) Eiran is senior lecturer in international relations at the University of Haifa and former assistant foreign policy advisor to former Prime Minister Ehud Barak.



Peace negotiations between Israel and Egypt in 1979

Photo: Sa'ar Ya'acov



DR EHUD (UDI) EIRAN



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TO GIVE. TO LOVE. TO LIVE.

# Going south again – a profound sense of sorrow



ROLENE MARKS

A beautiful bougainvillea is in full bloom. Its purple leaves bring a burst of colour. Behind the vibrant bush, a house has been decimated, scorch marks all over what's left of it. The occupants incinerated. Kibbutz Nir Oz should be a little piece of heaven on earth in the western Negev. Instead, the kibbutz bears testament to the hell that visited this idyllic part of Israel along with others on that Black Sabbath.

Walking through the kibbutz, I caught the unmistakable stench of death. Did I imagine it? No, said our host, it never goes away. Every house tells a story of the horrors that happened inside it. I look at the reactions of the members of the foreign press who have joined two of us Israeli journalists, and wonder if they internalise the magnitude of the carnage here. One turns to another with a smile, and says, "A little bit of destruction for this community." I give him a look that could freeze the Negev desert at high noon. This is holy ground.

Batsheva Yahalomi, whose husband, Ohad, remains captive in Gaza, took us into her looted house. In the corner of the passage are scorch marks where a grenade exploded. Ohad was wounded before being taken captive. Is he still alive? Her 12-year-old son, Eitan, was also taken. His story of captivity is devastating. Eitan was held on his own, beaten, branded, and forced at gunpoint to watch the GoPro footage that Hamas gleefully shot on the day. He wasn't allowed to cry. Today, Eitan tries not to go to sleep because the nightmares return. Clumps of his hair are falling out.

We walk through Nir Oz, guided by Rita Lipschitz, the daughter-in-law of Oded, who also remains in captivity. Oded used to ferry cancer-stricken children from Gaza for their chemotherapy as part of the "Road to Recovery" programme. Rita hopes he is being held by someone who might recognise his good deeds for Palestinians.

Overhead, we hear the symphony of war, the unmistakable sounds of artillery shells fired, and the growling of a fighter jet. My phone buzzes with an update from the Israel Defense Forces a little later – we struck a major terror target in Gaza.

We get to the house of the Simantov family. Their shining,

smiling faces beaming at us from posters on the wall. Only the family dog survived. We finally get to the kibbutz kindergarten, passing memorials to members of Nir Oz who fell in defence of their home.

I see Ariel Bibas's name by the hook for his little school bag. I fall apart. The walls of the kindergarten are black with soot, and it's difficult to breathe, the air is so thick and hot. Imagine what it was like that Black Sabbath. You can see where shots were fired and grenades thrown, setting fire to a place of learning, safety, and joy. Yifat Zeilar, Shiri Bibas's cousin speaks. The tears roll down her face and her voice cracks with sorrow.

"My family, my cousin, and the love of her life, Yarden, and their two beautiful boys were taken from us on 7 October

last year. My cousin was barefoot, holding her two boys with a blanket. I'm standing here today in a kindergarten. It's where Ariel used to go to kindergarten.

On 7 October, a hand grenade was thrown into this kindergarten. We don't know if

they're alive or not. I'm here to ask for your help. I

want to hold my cousin again. I want to hold those children again. I

want to tell them that I'm sorry," she cries.

Entering Kibbutz Kfar Aza for a second time this year is emotional. Though some families have returned, the kibbutz's trees are heavy with unpicked fruit and there is signage for the residents that remain captive in Gaza. Bullet holes pockmark houses, and the path to the "young generation" neighbourhood is ominous. Walking past the armoury where the *kitat konenut* (anti-terrorist first-response team) engaged in heavy battles with Hamas terrorists, guide Shahar Tzuk points out the grass embankment. "On 7 October, the grass was full of the bodies of Hamas terrorists," she says.

Tzuk continues, pointing at her modest house, the rainbow flag of the LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer

or questioning) community outside. "If I was home, they would have killed me for sure.

When I came back to the house afterwards and started moving stuff around, my parents yelled at me to stop because Hamas had booby-trapped fridges, cupboards, everything. I found faeces on my couch, so did others. They really wanted to humiliate us as much as possible."

Flies still hover around the neighbourhood that was once the vibrant corridor of starter homes for the young people of the kibbutz. They remain burnt, destroyed, and decorated with signage that tells the story of who was murdered inside. Sivan Elkabetz's house on the corner has been opened by her parents as a testimony to the slaughter that ensued. The walls and ceilings are pockmarked from grenades, bullets, and the devastating inscription from disaster-response team ZAKA on the door reads, "Human remains found on the sofa."

Simcha Greiniman strikes me as a man whose eyes should twinkle. Engaging and kind, Greiniman is the spokesperson for ZAKA, the non-governmental organisation whose holy work it is to recover the remains of the dead so that they can be buried with the dignity afforded by a Jewish burial. His eyes are haunted and sad. In a short address at the Nova site, he describes in vivid detail not just the horrors that he and his team of *tzaddikim*, Jewish and Muslim, witnessed as they gently recovered bodies. He speaks of the ridicule he faced from organisations like the United Nations, where he testified on behalf of the women and girls who were sexually violated. Where was his rape kit to prove that sexual violence occurred, they asked.

I've been down south many times. I've visited the towns, kibbutzim, the Nova site, and driven the killing road, Road 232, countless times. This visit left me with a profound sense of sorrow. It engulfed me like a black fog of despair. Maybe it was the timing, mere days from the anniversary, which I thought I was emotionally prepared for, but clearly wasn't. Maybe it was the frustration at the lack of empathy shown by the foreign press.

On 7 October 2023, something fundamentally changed in our Israeli DNA. We are tougher, harder, and much more emotionally vulnerable. The calendar told me that it has been a year since 7 October 2024, but Israelis are still on 7 October 2023. I have a feeling we will be there for a while.

• *Rolene Marks is a Middle East commentator often heard on radio and TV, and is the co-founder of Lay of the Land and the SA-Israel Policy Forum.*



Kibbutz Nir Oz



Kibbutz Kfar Aza

## Simchat Torah: is it still joyous?

OPINION

Rabbi Leo Dee, the survivor of a devastating terror attack during Pesach 2023, offers a brave solution to the question of how to celebrate Simchat Torah this year.

It's a question rabbis in Israel and all over the world are asking themselves. On the one hand, it's a festival, a day when it's forbidden to give eulogies and to mourn. On the other, it's the anniversary of the most tragic attack against humanity since the Holocaust. Can we dance again? Can we celebrate again? How should we respect the victims?

This conundrum was first discussed more than 2 500 years ago, when a national tragedy occurred on Rosh Hashanah: the assassination by Jews of the appointed Jewish leader, Gedaliah. What did the rabbis do? They created a fast day after Rosh Hashanah, delaying the commemoration until after the festival was complete. Sadly, in our past, Jews have encountered suffering and bereavement many times on festival days, and so the rabbis have established a number of creative solutions. But the overriding principle has always been: a *simcha* is a *simcha* is a *simcha*.

My wife, Lucy, and daughters Maia and Rina were murdered on the first day of *chol hamoed* Pesach. Technically, their *yahrzeit* falls each year during the festival. However, I was told that the correct practice is to bring it forward each year by two and half weeks, and to commemorate our loss at the end of Adar. On the first *yahrzeit*, my kids and I found this to be an inspired solution because we would be devastated to be mourning while the whole Jewish people was celebrating Pesach.

When the seventh day of Pesach fell a few days after we had buried Lucy, Maia, and Rina, and the *shiva* was postponed until after the festival, I found myself in shul. The chazan started to recite the festive Hallel prayer, which is usually sung with joyful tunes. Since the whole



Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visits Rabbi Leo Dee at his shiva house

community had just attended two funerals for my family, the mood was subdued, and the chazan began to recite the Hallel quietly without song. I rose and whispered in his ear, "Please sing!" Because a *simcha* is a *simcha* is a *simcha*.

So, for rabbis in the diaspora who are wondering how to celebrate this Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah, I'd like to suggest something. On 7 October, our enemies had a simple objective: "From the river to the sea!" Their goal was to massacre us, and scare us out of our homeland. In short, genocide.

There's an important principle of common sense. If a wise person who wants the best for you suggests you do something, you should probably heed her advice. Conversely, if a psychotic person who wishes for your demise suggests you do something, you should probably do the opposite!

This is a case of the latter. If our genocidal enemies want us to leave the land of Israel, then we must do the converse.

That's why I would like to suggest that rabbis all over the world urge their communities this year to start an aliya committee. An aliya committee consists of a group of three or more families, who are considering aliya in the future, who get together once a month and invite speakers to inform the whole community about school options, work possibilities, housing, options for seniors, and university courses in Israel. I know that Mizrahi, Nefesh b'Nefesh, and their partners would be delighted to provide relevant

speakers throughout the year, probably for very little cost. This is a very simple project to implement.

Jews have humorously summed up our holidays: "They tried to kill us, they failed, let's eat!" We have always used our dark sense of humour to help us get through dark times. How about this year we update the definition of a Jewish holiday to, "They tried to exile us, we won, let's learn about aliya!"

Let's make this Simchat

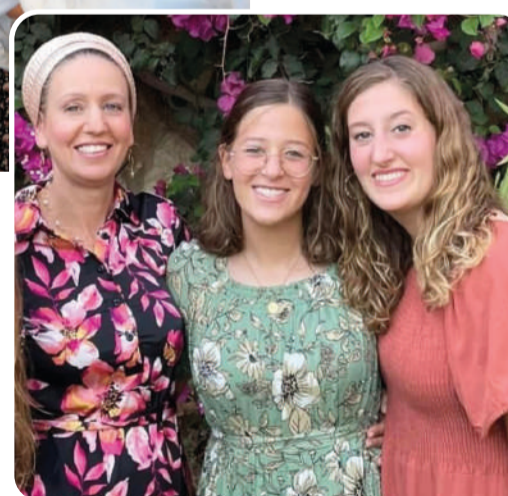
Torah a day of true joy, a day of supporting Israel in the most tangible way possible, by promoting immigration to the most incredible country with the most impressive people and the brightest future. *Chag sameach!*

• *Rabbi Leo Dee is an educator living in Efrat. His book Transforming the World: The Jewish Impact on Modernity was republished in English and Hebrew in memory of his wife, Lucy, and daughters Maia and Rina, who were murdered by terrorists in April 2023.*



RABBI LEO DEE

Photo: Amos Ben Gershon (GPU)



Lucy, Rina, and Maia Dee

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# An unfriendly world, 50 years on

OPINION

DR DAVID BROCK KATZ



It's uncanny how 7 October 2023 changed the world in much the same manner as 6 October 1973. The parallels and congruencies between these cataclysmic events are apparent. Israel was left reeling after massive intelligence failures on both occasions, necessitating the Israel Defense Force's (IDF's) desperate efforts in what amounted to a fight for the survival of the Jewish state. However, with 50 years separating these two events, there are significant differences which have severe consequences for not only Israel but the Jewish nation at large.

The massacre on 7 October resulted in the murder of 1 200 Israeli citizens. The enormous death toll of Jews shot in a single day hasn't been seen since the Nazis deployed their Einsatzgruppen in a homicidal Holocaust of extermination. Hamas captured more than 250 Israeli hostages. It proudly released footage of the death, mayhem, and destruction it had wrought during its bloody cross-border incursion, which served to exacerbate Jewish misery. Hamas's actions were not only designed to wreck the Abraham Accords, but to deliver the ultimate humiliation to Israel and highlight the IDF's impunity in protecting its citizens. In a single shocking action, Hamas registered a massive military and propaganda victory, which, like 50 years previously, severely damaged the reputation of the IDF.



Unlike the Yom Kippur War, on the eve of Hamas's attack, Israelis were politically divided. Israel experienced many months of rowdy protest against the government's push for wide-ranging judicial reform. In an unprecedented action, fighter pilots belonging to an elite Israeli Air Force squadron joined in the protest and pledged not to attend training. The fabric of Israeli society seemed to unravel as the external threats to its existence receded. One by one, Arab nations, fearing the might of Iran, made peace with the Jewish state. Unlike October 1973, the descent into open warfare against Israel's enemies didn't completely galvanise Israelis behind their government. The fractures in Israeli society and the constant threat to the hostages' lives delayed the IDF's invasion of Gaza by many weeks, allowing Hamas to regroup and organise a stiff resistance.

The sheer audaciousness and lethality of Hamas's attack left the Israelis confused, divided, and slow to react. Still, it was the international reaction to the massacre that confounded Jews in Israel and the diaspora the most. The global media's muted

"outrage" over 1 200 murdered Israelis almost immediately turned, and it began to blame Israel for the tragedy. Massive pro-Palestinian demonstrations rocked the capitals of the West before the IDF took one shot against

During the Yom Kippur war



Photos: Israeli Government Press Office

Hamas. The short span of goodwill created for Israel in the wake of Hamas's crimes against humanity rapidly dissipated. Increasingly, Western media outlets began a relentless campaign of condemning Israel and its right to launch an offensive into Gaza. As Gazan civilian casualties mounted, an inevitable consequence of urban warfare, so too did the anti-Israel vitriol propaganda machine of the Western "anti-Zionist" lobby. The depth and breadth of Jew hatred, hiding behind the cloak of anti-Zionism, took many Jews by surprise. The world hasn't witnessed such a widespread spike in antisemitism since the demise of Hitler's Reich. At times, Israel's

staunchest and most important ally, the United States, seemed to waver and hesitate in the face of a relentless left-wing mobilisation of all its resources against Jews and Israel. American university campuses were no longer safe for anyone who identified as Jewish or made common cause with Israel. The terror against Jews was repeated at many academic institutions around the world.

Fortunately, the IDF eventually rose to the occasion. Its military doctrine, which relied too heavily

on technology, lay in tatters. The first signs of the revitalisation of fighting spirit were the extraordinary stories emerging of off-duty personnel bravely confronting Hamas insurgents without receiving any orders to do so from a paralysed higher command. Reports ranged from over-aged, retired generals to an all-women tank company hunting down terrorists. These early acts of individual heroism signalled an end to Israeli passiveness. The IDF quickly reinvented its urban warfare doctrine and, using a combined arms approach with boots on the ground, entered the urban jungle of Gaza. Slowly, inexorably, and carefully, the IDF rooted out Hamas from its extensive tunnel system and concrete fortifications. Unfortunately for thousands of civilians, Hamas's defensive doctrine included the use of civilian structures and proximity to schools, hospitals, religious sites, and residential areas as a fundamental component of its resistance to the Israeli incursion.

Emerging from the maelstrom of a year's worth of vicious house-to-house combat was a veteran IDF that had overcome the worst of a dangerous enemy and had re-written the book on urban warfare.

Having subdued the threat of Hamas, if not entirely removing it, the IDF turned to

the undeclared war with Hezbollah on its northern border. Sixty thousand Israeli refugees from the north were a testament to the concerted daily rocket attacks that had to be endured from Lebanon since 8 October 2023. In avoiding a fully-fledged two or three-front war, Israel had taken a muted approach to the daily Hezbollah missile attacks and an enormous missile and drone attack from Iran in April 2024. On 19 September, an incredible intelligence-driven operation resulted in thousands of Hezbollah commanders being put out of action via exploding paggers. In one fell swoop, Israel decapitated the command-and-control structures of Hezbollah. Targeted and precision aerial strikes have assassinated Hassan Nasrallah and his successor, Hashem Safieddine. Acknowledging that airstrikes alone cannot defeat a resolute enemy, the IDF has placed boots on the ground and invaded south

Lebanon.

Jews have experienced the lesson of naked Jew hatred, particularly against the state of Israel. Antisemitism is no longer the preserve of the far right, and the latest war against Jews is being waged from the far left. The IDF, caught unawares a year ago, has been primarily responsible for rebuilding security in a nation under siege and restoring respect from its enemies for its considerable military prowess. More importantly, it has demonstrated that Jews must ultimately rely on their own resources for their survival.

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

## Lithuanian election puts diaspora centre stage

HOWARD SACKSTEIN

More than 4 000 South Africans have had their Lithuanian citizenship restored to them, and with the benefits of citizenship comes the responsibility to elect strong, credible, and supportive leaders in the Lithuanian Parliament.

This year, Lithuanians in South Africa have so far voted for both a new president and in European parliamentary elections. Many people are overwhelmed by the frequency of elections.

New elections, scheduled for next week, will determine the composition of the Lithuanian Parliament.

What makes the Lithuanian parliamentary elections special is the election of a Lithuanian diaspora representative, whose job and responsibility it is to look after the interests of Lithuanians living abroad. Lithuania may be one of very few countries which offers its ex-pat community such a privilege. South Africans must take advantage of this opportunity.

Dr Dovilė Jakniūnaitė, a professor at the Institute of International Relations and Political Science of Vilnius University and the head of the Institute's International Relations Department, was in South Africa recently. She explained that the Lithuanian Parliament is elected every four years and this year, elections will be held on 13 October 2024.

In South Africa, voting will take place at the following locations at the following times:

- **Cape Town:** Bagraims Attorneys, 5 De Lorentz Street, Tamboerskloof, Gardens, Cape Town, on 8 October from 12:00 to 16:00;
- **Pretoria:** at the Lithuanian Embassy on 8 October from 13:00 to 17:00; 10 October from 13:00 to 17:00; and 13 October from 10:00 to 19:00; and
- **Johannesburg:** at Beyachad on 13 October from 11:00 to 16:00.

Those who want to vote by post should have already registered at [www.rinkejopuslapis.lt](http://www.rinkejopuslapis.lt) by 21 September 2024. Those who had difficulty registering, should contact the Lithuanian Embassy at [kons.za@urm.lt](mailto:kons.za@urm.lt).

People voting in person need to bring their Lithuanian passport or identity card.

For the second round, on 27 October, there are indications that voting abroad may not be possible.

Said Jakniūnaitė, "The actual electoral system in Lithuania is pretty complex. We have a mixed system. Half of the parliamentarians – 70 representatives – are elected off party lists using proportional representation, and 70 representatives come from districts or constituencies. One member of Parliament is elected from each constituency. For those Lithuanians who live abroad, you have one person in

Parliament specifically representing the Lithuanian diaspora.

"Voters will receive two ballots – one proportional representation ballot, and one for the diaspora constituency", Jakniūnaitė said. "Currently, we have three parties in government in coalition. They are right-liberal parties with Homeland Union, considered a conservative party, and the prime minister's party leading the coalition. Then we have two smaller liberal parties, the Liberal Union and Freedom Party."

However, the political scientist said, "In these elections, we are expecting a change. Lithuanians

Dr Dovilė Jakniūnaitė



usually change governments every four years. The opposition parties could get some kind of coalition in a plurality of seats, without a clear majority. It's likely that the centre-left Social Democratic party may form the next government."

Given the number of elections this year, many voters have election fatigue and Jakniūnaitė is expecting a lower turnout than usual.

Both major parties are generally supportive of Israel. After 7 October, all the major parties in Parliament were vocally supportive of Israel and condemned Hamas. Support for Israel seems entrenched in Lithuanian politics, however the Social Democrats may fall more in line with European Union policy but are still generally supportive of Israel while recognising the humanitarian challenges in Gaza.

According to Jakniūnaitė, the big issues in these elections are Russian expansionism; unemployment; education; and salaries, specifically teachers' salaries. Increased defence budgets are also likely to be an issue.

Litvaks (descendants of Lithuanian Jews) have traditionally come out *en masse* to vote in Lithuanian elections, and we hope this week's elections have a similar appeal.

# Well-meaning do-gooders destroyed the Palestinian dream



HOWARD SACKSTEIN

OPINION

Not every critic of Israel is a raging antisemite, although let's face it, many are.

The anti-Israel coalition has been cobbled together as a broad partnership of unrehabilitated Stalinists; leftist fascists; neo-Nazi racists; radical jihadists; woke vegans; anti-Western anarchists; and a group of meandering misfits desperately searching for any cause that would accept them.

One of my school classmates who told our first reunion that she couldn't wait to get married so she could get rid of her "Jewy" last name, has today reinvented herself as both a failed actress and a "Jew for Palestine". This weekend, pictures circulated of her in front of a sign at a protest in Cape Town proclaiming, "We are all Hamas".

Protests were also spearheaded by a decrepit current Communist and former minister of intelligence who led 28 South Africans to their death at what became known as the Bisho Massacre. Needless to say, the social media warrior and national laughing stock, Carl Niehaus, joined the fray.

For many jihadi Muslims around the world, the sight of Hamas cruelty and barbarism was too much to process. In one of the greatest contradictions that never gets pointed out, they simultaneously both denied the savagery of the 7 October 2023 attacks and believed that Israel deserved it. Despite Hamas documenting its bloodlust, the jihadi world rallied to its defence, hoping that their protests could overwhelm the screams of those they had massacred.

It was the same fascists who attempted to disrupt the memorial for the victims of 7 October at the Great Park Synagogue this past weekend, as they tore down banners commemorating the victims of Hamas's grotesque violence. I'm reminded of the prophetic words of Jon Polin and Rachel Goldberg-Polin before the Democratic National Convention in Chicago: "In a competition of pain, there are no winners." A few weeks later, their son, Hersh, was executed, shot dead by a bullet to the back of his head by his Hamas captors in Gaza.

But there's another group who actively support the

anti-Israel cause. It's the well-meaning do-gooders and human rights activists who perceive the Palestinian people as an oppressed group yearning for freedom and independence. I know, because I, too, have been a "peacenik" my entire life.

But the Palestinians they believe in are a fantasy. Their Palestinians are peace loving, human rights adhering proponents of coexistence. Their Palestinians aren't callous murderers, racists, homophobes, and torturers. Their Palestinians don't take hostages, decapitate babies, or massacre children at a rave. Their Palestinians must, under all circumstances, be protected. These are the Palestinians which African National Congress (ANC) first deputy secretary general, Comrade Nomvula Mokonyane, called on all ANC structures to come out to support.

For these do-gooders to survive in their fantasy

## For these do-gooders to survive in their fantasy world, history begins long after 7 October.

world, history begins long after 7 October, it begins with Israel's counter-attack on Hamas in Gaza. To survive this fantasy world, they must ignore Hamas's racist charter; its massacring of opponents; its raping of women; its hostage taking; its ruthless, callous murdering of civilians; its execution of opponents by throwing them off buildings; its hanging of gay people from lampposts; and its oppression of women.

For them, Palestinians must be protected no matter what principles you have to abandon.

In truth, it's these do-gooders who have destroyed the Palestinian dream, and they are the ones to blame for the destruction of Gaza.

On 7 October 2023, there was one of the most brutal and sadistic attacks on a civilian population in modern times. On that day, close to 5 000 Hamas terrorists and their "civilian" collaborators invaded Israel; slaughtered grandmothers in the streets; shot Holocaust survivors;

decapitated babies; massacred children in front of their parents; killed parents in front of their children; raped women; cut off the breasts of victims; and killed more than 360 youngsters at a rave. By the end of that day, close to 1 200 Israeli, mostly civilians, had been massacred and 251 had been taken hostage to Gaza.

As the fog of the Palestinian genocide of the Israelis lifted, there was little doubt that Israel had few options. She would mete out justice to those responsible, her army would dismantle Hamas, Israel would restore its deterrent power, and the state would do whatever it took to return the hostages held by Hamas in Gaza.

Up to 20 000 Hamas terrorists have been killed together with countless Palestinian civilians. Much of Gaza has been destroyed.

But it didn't have to be this way!

The so-called do-gooders and human rights activists could have stopped the destruction. If they had a shred of moral fibre, they would have

loudly proclaimed their horror and disgust at the Hamas attack; women's rights groups would have stood up for the raped Israeli women; and human rights advocates would have unequivocally called for immediate justice for the victims. They would have demanded the immediate and unconditional release of the hostages.

But they didn't! They remained silent!

Not surprisingly, the South African government did the same. At the National Executive Committee (NEC) meeting of the ANC, immediately after the Hamas massacre, NEC members donned Palestinian keffiyeh headscarves and failed to mention either the Hamas invasion or the taking of hostages. A number of South Africans had been murdered on 7 October, even more had been taken hostage. The ANC was silent! It didn't care!

Shortly thereafter, it was announced by Hamas that South Africa's jihadi minister of international relations

and cooperation (Dirco), Dr Naledi Pandor, had called Hamas to congratulate it on the success of its "Al-Aqsa Flood" attack, a statement denied implausibly by Pandor.

Rather than demanding justice for the victims, the South African government decided to take the victims to court at the International Court of Justice in The Hague. Bought by the coffers of Iran, and encouraged by the jihadi dreams of the Pandor family and Dirco Director-General Zane Dangor, the country became a proxy puppet of Iran.

Suddenly, condemning attacks on civilians depended on context, as did the rape of women. If the human rights activists had a shred of moral clarity, they should have demanded that Hamas surrender; lay down its weapons; offer its soldiers to be tried for war crimes; and return the hostages. If they had done this, the war could have been over in days.

But instead of assuming the moral high ground, they conspired to protect Hamas, conflating the barbarism of the attack with the freedom of Palestine.

This emboldened Hamas provided it with cover and encouraged it not to capitulate to Israel, and by so doing, they forced Israel into a long battle in Gaza, with door to door, hand-to-hand combat, building by building, tunnel by tunnel, searching for the perpetrators of 7 October and desperately seeking hostages to rescue.

The result of the do-gooder's bravado has been the destruction of Gaza.

But the Lesbians for Palestine are incapable of self-reflection, the woke academics who live in theoretical constructs are incapable of taking responsibility for what they have done, and the misfits who stand at the barricades of the West cosplaying revolutionaries will never understand that it is they/them who destroyed the Palestinian dream.

• Howard Sackstein is the chairperson of the SA Jewish Report but writes in his personal capacity.

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# Looking back over a painful year

DYLAN BERGER

What started as a violent conflict between Israel and Hamas in the south of Israel on 7 October 2023 has now evolved into a war on all fronts, pushing the Middle East to the brink. We take a look at what has taken place over the past year.

**7 October 2023**

Hamas launches "Operation Al-Aqsa Flood" with a surprise and unprovoked attack on southern Israel, killing 1 200 civilians and taking 251 hostages into Gaza. Attacks are carried out by Hamas at the Nova festival, as well as at kibbutzim such as Be'eri, Nir Oz, and Nir Am.

**8 October 2023**

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declares a state of war. The Israel Defense Force (IDF) announces the mobilisation of additional reservists and deploys airstrikes on Gaza.

**13 October 2023**

The IDF tells the residents of Gaza City to evacuate and move south.

**18 October 2023**

United States (US) President Joe Biden makes a solidarity visit to Israel.

**15 November 2023**

The IDF takes control of Al-Shifa Hospital, the biggest hospital in Gaza, which it claims is being used as underground headquarters for Hamas.

**24 November 2023**

A temporary ceasefire is put in place between Israel and Hamas. More than 50 hostages are released including South African-born hostages Aviva Siegel and Channah Peri. Israel in return releases 150 Palestinian women and children who were in Israeli jails. The ceasefire is short-lived, and is broken by Hamas on 1 December.

**26 December 2023**

South African-born parents, Clive and Debbie Chitiz, lose their son, Yaron, in Gaza while serving in the IDF.

**29 December 2023**

The South African government, spearheaded by President Cyril Ramaphosa and then-Minister of International Relations and Cooperation Dr Naledi Pandor, take Israel to the International Court of Justice (ICJ). South Africa accuses Israel of committing a campaign of genocide against the Palestinian population.

**11 January 2024**

The US and United Kingdom launch airstrikes across Yemen against Houthi rebels.

Soon after 7 October, SA Jewish Report photographer **Ilan Ossendryver** spent time in Israel, capturing the pain of the massacre and how Israelis kept going. He has gone back a number of times during this year, and was there too just two weeks before the anniversary of the attack. He shares a selection of his photographs to tell the story.



**14 January 2024**

The war reaches the 100-day mark with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowing that "No-one will stop us. Not [even] The Hague," alluding to South Africa's case at the ICJ.

**22 January 2024**

In a bloody battle in central Gaza, 21 IDF soldiers are killed in a single incident. This is the most soldiers killed in a single day since the war began.

**26 January 2024**

The ICJ issues a ruling that Israel must do all that it can to prevent death, destruction, and acts of genocide, but stops short of calling for a halt to military operations in Gaza.

**17 March 2024**

After more than five months of uncertainty, South African-born soldier Daniel Perez, the son of World Mizrahi head Rabbi Doron Perez, is confirmed dead, with a funeral taking place the following day.

**13 April 2024**

Iran launches a barrage of missiles and drones towards Israel. The Iron Dome intercepts the missiles and drones, saving many Israeli lives.

**7 May 2024**

The IDF launches its ground offensive in the southern Gaza city of Rafah, and takes control of the border crossing with Egypt.

**30 July 2024**

Ismail Haniyeh, the political leader of Hamas, is killed in an Israel airstrike in Iran while attending the inauguration of the country's new president. The previous Iranian president, Ebrahim Raisi, was killed in a helicopter crash on 19 May.

**17 September 2024**

Pagers and walkie-talkies belonging to Hezbollah members explode in Lebanon, killing 39 and wounding almost 3 000.

**27 September 2024**

Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah is killed in Lebanon by an Israeli airstrike.

**7 October 2024**

Commemoration events are hosted across the world to mark one year since the outbreak of the war. Pro-Palestinian marches continue in full swing in condemnation of Israel around the world.

## Bring them home now

OPINION

Every Israeli clearly remembers where they were on 7 October 2023. I was at home in Tel Aviv watching television, and saw a conversation between a journalist and a young woman begging for help to rescue her father, whom she saw on the Telegram app being abducted from his home by Hamas and taken to Gaza. I felt her pain, and that feeling hasn't left me. One year on, I'm convinced that Israel and the international community have to do their utmost to bring them home now.

After the Hamas invasion, it took a long time for Israeli security forces to regain control of the area. Until then, 1 200 Israelis on kibbutzim and in towns in southern Israel were murdered in the most brutal manner. Hundreds of young people who came to the Nova festival were murdered by indiscriminate gunfire. The atrocities included rape, looting, murder, burning houses with their inhabitants, and abducting to Gaza 256 people of 28 nationalities. These included babies aged nine months and the elderly, aged 85. Among the hostages were entire families, siblings, spouses. Most were civilians who were torn from their beds during a religious holiday and kidnapped while still in their pyjamas.

Hamas took living hostages as well as the bodies of those they murdered. The tragedy that day affected the whole of Israeli society. Israel is a small country, everyone knows everyone else, and soon, the names of the kidnapped emerged. Many of the atrocities

were documented by the terrorists themselves and posted on social media, mainly on Telegram. In Gaza, terrorists bringing hostages were welcomed joyfully as heroes.

The Israeli public immediately mobilised to help evacuees from communities in the south who could no longer live in their destroyed and burned communities as well as other victims. One of the initiatives of civil society was The Hostages and Missing Families Forum, which brought together hundreds of volunteers from various sectors of Israeli society. The project has been active for almost a year, and aims to help the families of victims and bring all of the hostages home. I joined a group of former Israeli diplomats who searched for any diplomatic means to bring the hostages home.

All attempts to obtain information about the condition of the hostages or to transfer medication to them through the Red Cross failed. Today, we know that even the transfer of medicines to the residents of Gaza, which was mediated by France and included drugs for the hostages, didn't succeed, and the drugs didn't reach their destination. We also know with certainty the conditions in which hostages are held, especially those in tunnels dozens of meters below ground. They lack minimal sanitary conditions,

have almost no food or water, and are under severe psychological pressure. Many of the hostages are from communities destroyed on 7 October, with family members killed, houses burned, and their communities scattered throughout the country.

Hamas murdered Jews and Arabs. Muslim Bedouins were murdered and kidnapped just like their Jewish neighbours, and Israeli peace activists

hostages and their return to their families in Israel and around the world is essential and urgent.

One hundred and one hostages remain in subhuman conditions in the tunnels of the Gaza Strip. Time works against them even as the suffering of their families grows. We must continue to demand justice, peace, and tranquillity. But more than anything, we must demand the immediate release and return of the hostages.

It's an unprecedented humanitarian crisis that cannot be compared to anything we know, or placed into any political equation. It's not enough to declare this a goal in a United Nations Security Council resolution, it must be done now. The hostages no longer have time, air, or food. They don't see the light of day, perhaps some die every day.

The release of the hostages must be the main objective of Israel and its people. For the international community, there is also a challenge, a moral and ethical obligation, a fundamental duty to do everything, absolutely everything, to demand and ensure their release.

• *Liora Herzl is a senior Israeli diplomat who previously served as Israel's ambassador to Norway. Since 7 October, she has been volunteering in the diplomatic department of The Hostages and Missing Families Forum.*



The world needs to unite to bring home the remaining hostages

Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

who had worked for years towards Israeli-Palestinian coexistence were likewise murdered and kidnapped.

In November, a deal returned some hostages to Israel, and a small number were released by the Israeli army. From their physical and mental state, it's clear that the immediate release of the remaining

LIORA HERZL







# R100 million Wits Bara Burns Unit opens to the public

Thousands of burn survivors will benefit from the R100 million expansion of the Wits Roy McAlpine Burns Unit, which opened at the Chris Hani Baragwanath Academic Hospital. This Centre of Excellence is the only public specialised burns unit located in Gauteng that serves all patients who cannot afford treatment at private facilities.

The Unit sees more than 1 000 admissions of adults and paediatric patients each year, and around 70 patients a week present for burn dressing. Demand for specialist burns treatment by far exceeds supply and there are now 12 advanced ICU beds, dedicated only to patients with burns. The new facility includes an operating theatre, a recovery room, an outpatient facility, and rehabilitation space for physiotherapy, speech therapy, and occupational therapy. This includes an area to be developed for education, research, and a skin substitutes laboratory.

**"Burn care will change in this country. We are going to train more students, interns, registrars, and specialist nurses and doctors at this facility,"** says Prof. Adelin Muganza, who leads the Unit. **"We will develop a skin bank and a tissue engineering laboratory where synthetic and skin tissue for wound cover can be developed. We will no longer have to depend on skin from foreign countries because we have the expertise to do it here. This will greatly enhance our capacity and enable research to enhance the science and treatment of burns."**

# 'Our hearts break as one' – Cape Jewry commemorates

TALI FEINBERG

Cape Town Jewry, supported by allies and dignitaries, came out in numbers to attend a multifaceted memorial commemorating the lives lost and shattered on 7 October 2023. Amidst a strong police presence and roadblocks, participants calmly and safely entered a venue filled with interactive installations, allowing them to grieve, process, and unite a year after "Black Saturday".

With yellow ribbons on their wrists and stickers marking 365 days on their chests, participants ranged from many youth movement members to the elderly. The atmosphere was calm, warm, peaceful, and mournful, gracefully celebrating Jewish and Zionist pride, unity, and strength. In a powerful display of Judaism as *am echad, lev echad* (one nation, one heart) Progressive Rabbi Greg Alexander and Orthodox Rabbi Osher Feldman came together to lead the audience in prayer.

Cape South African Jewish Board of Deputies Chairperson Adrienne Jacobson said, "South Africa has been the intersection of unprecedented challenges in the past year: the breakdown of our relationship with the ANC [African National Congress], which hasn't even expressed a modicum of condolence; South Africa taking Israel to the International Court of Justice; and the rise of antisemitism – of seeing Jews as different to others and the Jewish state as different to other states. We have witnessed society holding Jews responsible for Israel's actions, and we have fought gaslighting, rhetoric, and blame."

Yet, "our Jewish heart beats as one", she said. "Today, it pauses collectively and breaks as one. On 7 October, our world shifted on its axis, and we're still grieving the loss and impact on our own sense of safety." She thanked the "friends who have stood by us", saying, "It means the world to us. You have proven that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, and the meaning of *ubuntu*. You have been a beacon of light in the darkness." She ended by calling for an end to the loss of all life.

Music, integral to healing and community, took centre stage. *Bring Them Home* from *Les Miserables* was a haunting yet urgent call for the hostages to be released, while Eden Golan's *Hurricane/October Rain* was sung with dignity and passion. *Lu Yehi*, to the tune of *Let It Be*, called for peace in the region, a wish that has been drowned by radicalism over the past year. Choni Goldman's voice rang out with belief and hope as he sang *Acheinu* in merit of the return of the captives.

Keynote speaker Liora Ben Tsur told her family's harrowing yet hopeful story of making their way to Israel from South Africa, building a life working the land, and the separate, tragic deaths of both of her parents. Her father was killed in a tractor accident, and her mother murdered by Hamas terrorists on Kibbutz Ein Hashlosa on 7 October, two days after Ben Tsur gave birth to her third child. (See more on page 8.)

South African Zionist Federation Cape Council Chairperson David Cohen said there were two moments in his life that shaped his Jewish identity: the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, and 7 October. Both events warned of



the dangers of *sinat chinam* (baseless hatred) among Jews, he said, and he called on the community to heal divisions and unite in a show of strength. "To honour their memory, we must stand as one people."

In a recorded address, Israeli president Isaac Herzog said that "the passage of time should offer comfort and closure, but the earth still shakes. We're still living in the loss until the captives come home." He criticised the barbarism of Iran and its proxies, and said, "We haven't

abandoned our longing and aspirations for peace. We will overcome and rebuild, inspired by the beauty of everyone we lost."

Jewish Agency Chairperson Doron Almog thanked the South African Jewish community for its generosity, support, and solidarity. "Your support embodies

the spirit of mutual responsibility," he said.

Youth from across different youth movements came together in a display of unity, proudly expressing their Zionist and Jewish identities with stoicism and grace.

Shlichim Maytal and Shlomo Goldberg recalled arriving in South Africa shortly before 7 October, Shlomo being called back to serve his country, and Maytal doing both their jobs. "This community became our family, and welcomed us at the most difficult time," Maytal said.

"Judaism isn't a religion of death,"

Shlomo said. "Not one person who is fighting for Israel values death." He said he had lost many friends on the frontlines, "who died so we can live. At their funerals, I celebrated their lives. Appreciate the people you have – don't wait to tell them how you feel. Judaism is about happiness, friendship, love, and the future. No matter how much it hurts, we will move forward."

Rabbi Greg Alexander and Rabbi Osher Feldman delivering a prayer

## Five exhibits capture the mayhem one year on

LEE TANKLE

One year after the atrocities on 7 October, Grade 10 and 11 students at King David Linksfield and Victory Park joined forces to create an exhibition showcasing their thoughts and feelings on the first anniversary of the massacre.

The exhibition, created by more than 100 pupils as part of the DIJE Plus programme with the help of DIJE volunteers, was divided into five rooms, with individual exhibits created by groups of students. It is running from 7 to 10 October at The Base Shul.

As you enter the museum, you are given a set of headphones playing the song *Ki Mitzion*, traditionally sung to welcome the Torah out of the ark and into the shul. Each group of 15 is put into a small room reminiscent of a bomb shelter that many Israelis fled to that day. As the song plays, one can hear the vibrant sounds one would associate with Simchat Torah – children laughing, a congregation singing, and music playing. Suddenly the sound of joy is broken by a scream and a siren.



As the group moves to the next room, they are plunged into the utter chaos of the media. Multiple projectors display various media clips discussing the events of 7 October and the ongoing war. The clips start playing slowly, but quickly escalate into absolute mayhem, with voices shouting over each other. This room displays the disorientation and turmoil that the Jewish community has felt over the past year. As it becomes time to leave the room, there is the sound of heavy, intense breathing, showing the exhaustion the Jewish community faces after a year of tragedy.

The next room, titled *Ki Ish Echad B'Lev Echad* (Like one man with one heart), created by Grade 11 pupils at King David Linksfield, showcases two beating hearts at the centre of the dark room. As you enter the room, you're enveloped in the sound of a heartbeat, with loud, strong, and fast beats capturing the intense emotions felt in the first months of the war. You also hear a pupil's voice saying, "We are one" on top of the heart beating, demonstrating that the Jewish

community has a single beating heart.

The next exhibit, titled, *It's not 256 461 souls. It's ONE soul 256 461 times*, created by Grade 10 pupils from King David Linksfield, seeks to humanise the statistics of the atrocities of 7 October. There are 256 461 brown paper hearts pinned onto boards in a fragmented pattern. Each heart is placed with a different coloured pin, each symbolising a different way that people have been affected by the atrocities of 7 October. There are 218 yellow pins representing the hostages taken into Gaza that day. There are 1 191 red pins symbolising the people murdered that day. There are 4 834 green pins, each denoting an individual that was injured; and finally, there are 250 000 pins representing the people displaced from their homes. Although the hearts may look like they are placed haphazardly, they are intentionally placed in a random pattern to show that lives were broken by the actions of Hamas on 7 October.

The following exhibit, created by Grade 10 pupils at King David Linksfield is titled, *I do not know if the trees can speak, I do not know if I have the ears to hear them. But what if they can? What if we could?* Five trees are made from wires, each telling a different story of 7 October. The first three tell the story of the Nova festival; the irreversible damage done to kibbutzim in the south of Israel; and the chaos and uncertainty

felt throughout Israel that day. One of the trees showcases the weight of the tunnels in Gaza and the brutality of bodies being paraded through the streets of Gaza on 7 October. Finally, the last tree, evocative of a Jacaranda, tells the story of anguish felt by the Jewish community in South Africa on 7 October.

The next exhibit, titled *Yom Hadin* (Day of Judgement), created by Grade 11 pupils from King David Victory Park, seeks to showcase the betrayal they felt after the South African government accused Israel of genocide at the International Court of Justice at The Hague. On the one side, a figure

stands at a podium embodying Jewish prayer. It wears a *tallis* and clutches a *machzor*. On the other, a figure represents the stance taken by South Africa at The Hague. Adorned with a keffiyeh embellished with a South African flag, the figure stands at a microphone dripping with blood while the words of President Cyril Ramaphosa express solidarity with the Palestinian people.

Next, there is the exhibit *Al Kiddush Hashem* (Hashem's will) created by Grade 11 pupils at King David Linksfield. There's a display of clouds and mirrors with the sounds of a different pupils saying, "I am a Jew."

Finally, there's a silver platter on top of a stack of books in an exhibit titled *The Silver Tray* by Grade 10 pupils from King David Victory Park. This commemorates the soldiers of the Israel Defense Forces who sacrificed their lives in service of Israel, each book representing one soldier as each has their own story. This exhibition is dedicated to a South African lone soldier fighting in the war in Gaza.

Visitors then go through a path of artwork made by Israeli artists showcasing the immense loss and devastation of the atrocities of 7 October, and then go into the reflection room to come to terms with what they have experienced.

They are then guided into the action room, where they are urged to take action to contribute by purchasing items for which the proceeds will go to organisations in Israel.



Photos: Ilan Ossendriewer



# Rescuers recall day of horror, urging, 'Value life!'

STEVEN GRUZD

"No-one could imagine a 7 October. The magnitude of what happened that day was entirely new and unprecedented. We didn't have the resources. We listened to our Israeli colleagues cry on the phone in response to what they saw."

These were the words of Daniel Forman, the regional director of ZAKA Southern Africa at the memorial at the Israeli Embassy in Pretoria on Monday, 7 October 2024.

ZAKA is global Jewish volunteer organisation that operates in disaster areas to save those who can be saved and identify

and honour the mortal remains of those who can't. ZAKA recovers human remains at plane crashes, terrorist attacks, and earthquakes, to ensure that the deceased person can receive a Jewish burial.

On 29 October, the ZAKA head office in Israel called on the South African branch for help, resources, and support. In a few hours, eight ZAKA volunteers were on a plane to Ben Gurion Airport in central Israel.

Their first task was to assist with "cleanup" on kibbutzim – to gather body parts, bloodied clothing, anything that was left of the murdered. Forman describes the scene and the smell on Kibbutz Kissufim as

"unimaginable".

"We had to take cover several times due to barrages of rockets. Safe rooms on the kibbutz were designed to safeguard against rockets, but never against invasions. The terrorists were able to breach these defences and throw grenades into these safe rooms, causing utter devastation. We saw the bloodstained drag marks of the kidnapped people."

They had to sort and clean buildings and personal effects – cell phones, clothing,

shoes, handbags – had to be cleaned and tested for DNA. They also found the DNA of some terrorists.

Forman said, "the greatest challenge was to clean up and gather the blood in the plaster and brickwork".

Over two full days, Forman's team recovered body parts and blood from the 350

cars destroyed on 7 October that had been gathered together. "It was very draining," he said.

"I saw horror, death, the smell, the destruction. It was all premeditated. You can never unsee what has been seen," Forman said "I will truly never forget this. You must all truly value life."

The Israeli embassy marked one year since thousands of Hamas terrorists rampaged across southern Israel. They killed 1 200 people, destroyed bases and kibbutzim, and dragged 251 hostages back into Gaza. Their crimes plunged the region into a ferocious war that has claimed hundreds of soldiers and tens of thousands of civilians in Gaza and Lebanon.

The embassy hosted hundreds of diplomats, communal leaders, and other dignitaries in a short commemorative

ceremony. The lush gardens and bright spring sunshine contrasted with the sadness of this day. Large photographs of the hostages were on display – a handful had a sticker saying "rescued" on them; far more had a sticker saying "murdered".

Israel's deputy ambassador to South Africa, Adi Cohen-Hazanov, spoke emotionally of the chaos and bravery of 7 October. She said there were no words to capture the horrors of that day.

"What adjectives can describe the torture,

day – lives, relatives, friends, faith, and belief. The scars run deep, the weight of loss, the faces of the fallen. Grief never fades, the trauma binds us all. We have risen with a remarkable will to survive, to rebuild, and find a way forward. We honour our heroes, and pray for the hostages. We are united and stronger. We hold hope each day that we will thrive and peace will be a reality," she said.

"Israel is battling on behalf of all civilised nations," said Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein, and the world should be grateful

## 'The scars of that day run deep'

LEE TANKLE

As a people, we're still haunted by the images of what happened on 7 October, "when the gates of hell opened, and Hamas terrorists unleashed a wave of brutality that shook the conscience of humanity".

So said Rowan Polovin, the national chairperson of the South African Zionist Federation, at the organisation's commemoration ceremony at Yeshiva College campus in Johannesburg.

"One morning, in an instant, our lives changed forever. Homes once filled with laughter became battle fields and scenes of horror. Innocent civilians, families, and children became targets of the brutal attack that shocked the very soul of Israel," said deputy Israeli ambassador to South Africa, Adi Cohen-Hazanov.

A common thread throughout the ceremony was that "7 October didn't end on 7 October" and that Israelis and Jewish communities around the world were still reeling from that day.

"The scars of that day run deep, etched into the hearts of every Israeli, etched into the history of our nation," Cohen-Hazanov said. "Each day, we feel the weight of loss, the faces of the fallen in our minds, and the great fear of knowing the next name to be published. The ache of those still missing is always in our thoughts. It's a grief that never fades, a trauma that binds us all. We all lost someone or something."

Said Polovin, "Families were incinerated in their homes. Women were brutally raped. Children are subject to unspeakable cruelty. The air filled with the sickening sounds of terrorists celebrating their barbaric acts. Hundreds of partygoers were massacred at a music festival. One thousand two hundred innocent lives were extinguished. More than 250 people, including women, children, and babies, were taken hostage by cheering savages, with more than 100 still languishing in captivity. It was the darkest day for the Jewish people since the Holocaust."

Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein told the throngs, "October 7 isn't over because our enemies seek to perpetrate it again and again in the south and north. We know this isn't about a Palestinian state. We know this isn't about a political objective. We know this is about their intention to destroy the Jewish state, led by Iran and the forces of violent jihad. They will stop only when they are defeated completely – *ad hanitzchachon* [until victory]."

Polovin went on to say that in the aftermath of what happened that day, Jewish communities around the world weren't met with sympathy but with a wave of antisemitism – on university campuses, the streets of Western cities, even in the halls of the United Nations.

"Here in South Africa, we have

witnessed with dismay the unconscionable actions of the ANC [African National Congress] government," said Polovin.

"The crowning disgrace came when our government brought genocide charges against Israel at the International Court of Justice. This perverse inversion of justice, accusing the victims of the very crime committed against them, represents a betrayal, not just of South Africa's Jewish citizens, but of the democratic values shared by humanity in South African society.

"The South African Jewish community's support for Israel isn't a matter of choice, it's our sacred identity and shared destiny. Yet we take heart in knowing that ordinary South Africans don't share this obsessive hostility," Polovin said.

The chief rabbi called out to President Cyril Ramaphosa and the South African government with these words, "You should be thanking Israel because the brothers in arms of Hamas are murdering African Christians across the border in Mozambique. Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab, and ISIS [Islamic State] are beheading, burning, and kidnapping in Mozambique, in Nigeria, and across this continent from east to west, from north to south.

"The only way we can truly pay tribute to those who died on 7 October, to the hostages, to those who were brutally burnt, raped, and beheaded, to the citizens of Israel who had to endure rockets and displacement," said Goldstein. "The only appropriate response to such evil is to defeat it completely. Not a half measure, not a ceasefire, not a pause for peace, but until the end, because only then will the world be safe."

Due to travel restrictions from Israel, former hostage Margalit Moses, who was scheduled to speak at the event, wasn't able to come, however the audience was able to hear the story of a 22-year-old resident of Kibbutz Nir Oz, Lotus Lahav, and how she managed to survive the attacks on her kibbutz. (See story on page 9.)

Lahav and her mother were able to survive Hamas terrorists entering their home five times on 7 October using a makeshift lock they put on the door to the safe room. They discovered later that they were the lucky ones, as 117 of the 400 residents of Nir Oz were gone and would never return home.

"But out of the ashes of that horrific day, something remarkable happened. In the face of pure evil, the spirit of Israel emerged stronger than ever before," said Cohen-Hazanov, "Communities, once separated by distance, united as one, volunteers poured in from every corner of the country and the world, offering shelter, food, clothing, and comfort."

Said Lahav, "In the worst of times, we discover that the community isn't just where you live, it's who you live for."



Israeli Deputy Ambassador Adi Cohen-Hazanov, United States Ambassador Reuben E. Brigety II, and Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein

and murder, the hunting of young people at a music festival, who were shot, raped, and captured? Does the vocabulary exist to describe the children dragged to terror tunnels? We still don't know the scope and magnitude of the horrors. It's a nightmare that didn't end. One hundred and one men, women, and children are still being held in Gaza in horrendous conditions. Six hostages were recently executed."

Cohen-Hazanov said more than 9 000 rockets had been fired at Israel from Hezbollah and Hamas over the past year, and people couldn't return to their homes in the north and south. She also noted that Israeli intelligence had revealed that Hezbollah had planned a 7 October-style attack in the Galilee.

"We all lost someone or something that

for its efforts. He said Hamas terrorists were brothers-in-arms with terror groups in Africa like ISIS (Islamic State), Boko Haram, and Al-Shabaab, with the same violent fanatic ideology and the same brutal methodology. These groups are massacring Christians across Africa.

"Israel has been dragged [by South Africa] before the corrupt International Criminal Court and International Court of Justice under the veneer of law and civility – it's a political war on another front," Goldstein said.

"Moral clarity and political will are needed in this battle between the forces of good and evil. The best way to honour the hostages, the murdered, and the soldiers would be for Israel's friends to say, 'We stand with you, and will be grateful for you to defeat the darkness.'"

## Silent protest speaks loudly against sexual violence

STAFF REPORTER

A silent protest by women outside Parliament on 7 October conveyed a tangible sense of feminine strength. The women represented the Women's Action Campaign South Africa (WACSA), which handed over a petition to the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee for Women, Youth, and Persons with Disabilities, calling on the government to take stronger action against conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV).

The event marks one year since the 7 October 2023 attacks in Israel, which sparked WACSA's initial campaign. Since then, the organisation has broadened its focus to address CRSV globally, particularly in African conflict zones.

"Our message is clear: rape and sexual violence are never justified, under any circumstances," said WACSA spokesperson Angie Richardson.

The petition, signed by more than 5 000 South Africans, urges the government to strengthen its voice in condemning CRSV; to support prosecuting these acts as war crimes; provide consistent support for all CRSV survivors; and address attitudes about sexual violence in conflict.

"We're calling on government to apply consistent pressure through international courts, the United



Women from the Women's Action Campaign South Africa staging a silent protest outside Parliament

Nations, and its diplomatic channels to ensure accountability and justice for all victims," Richardson said.

# Just keep swimming: Chitiz parents honour their son

NICOLA MILTZ

Every day is tough for the ex-South African parents of slain Israel Defense Forces (IDF) soldier Yaron Chitiz, 23, who was murdered by Hamas terrorists in Gaza nearly 10 months ago.

This week, as the world marked the one-year commemoration of 7 October, the day that changed everything, the pain of losing him hit harder than ever, deeper, and rawer, if that's even possible.

"When you lose a child who is prepared to die for our survival, it's something no-one understands unless they have been through it," said Debbie Chitiz.

This week, Debbie made sure to keep herself extra busy on 7 October. She did what has become her umpteenth public engagement in honour of the soldiers since her son's passing, this time at the Meir Medical Center in Kfar Sava.

In honour of the day, Channel 12 aired a poignant documentary featuring Debbie alongside two mothers of fallen soldiers. Remarkably, each of their sons had held the same position as deputy commander of the Shaked Battalion in the Givati Brigade, stepping in for one another and taking over when they were killed. They are united in grief, sharing the same profound emotions and heartbreak.

"The video brings it all back to the surface. Everyone is watching the news today, and will

have seen the documentary. Suddenly, you see yourself on screen with photographs of your son, and the memories and pain flood in," she said.

"Each day isn't great, but today more so," said Clive Chitiz, the father of Yaron, who was shot on 26 December, one week before his 24th birthday.

"It has been a trying, testing time, an overwhelming rollercoaster of emotions for the whole family," he told the *SA Jewish Report*.

"The kindness of the community has kept us afloat, but it also keeps the wound of Yaron's passing open. Wonderful, kind people approach me, whether on the street or even at the supermarket, when all I want is to buy a loaf of bread quietly," he said.

Yaron, the son of Clive and Debbie, both graduates of King David Linksfield, had been away from home for 80 days following the outbreak of war. In a video filmed by his brother, Yaron is seen walking into

the family's home in Ra'anana, catching his mother by surprise. Debbie's pure, unrestrained joy at

seeing her youngest child after weeks apart was a poignant

reflection of the emotional

weight carried by parents of IDF soldiers.

The video struck a chord with many and

quickly went viral, touching families far and

wide. The Chitiz family

is a well-known, popular, and much-loved family in the central

Israeli city of Ra'anana.

The family is deeply embedded and actively involved in the fabric of the



Yaron Chitiz

community.

Honouring his memory is what gives them the strength to endure and the hope they cling to.

There are multiple initiatives created in his name that the family hope will perpetuate the memory of this "happy, smiling, *simcha* child", said Debbie, an avid swimmer.

"I get my strength from the water, my family, and my faith, and the order changes depending on the day," she told the *SA Jewish Report*.

She's busy organising a 24km Mediterranean swim in Yaron's name to take place on Friday, 18 October, from Tel Aviv to Netanya.

"I came up with the idea for a swim during Yaron's *shiva* week," said Debbie.

"We have called it 'Yaron's Swim' and the response has been amazing. Everyone is training hard and posting their progress. It has gone viral. Some swimmers will do 12km," she said.

The swim is weather permitting but so far, things are on track. It's a highly organised event, with food stops and support boats accompanying the swimmers throughout the approximately se10-hour swim.

Yaron's death has triggered dozens of initiatives of *chesed* and charity. A children's Bible book which is read on Yom Kippur has been published in his name.

As a die-hard Liverpool supporter, hundreds of car stickers have been printed with the words, "You will never walk alone," demonstrating his love for the game and the team he supported.

One of his passions was hosting braais for family friends. They are now hosting braais for soldiers at IDF bases throughout the country and on the frontlines in his name, called "Yaron's Barbecue".

The family has set up a nonprofit company, which has raised thousands of shekels to help pay for the braais. They have transformed into significant, festive gatherings for soldiers, featuring music, speeches, and appearances from members of the family.

"This past week, we managed to get 12 volunteers to put together an amazing braai for 250 soldiers in the blink of an eye at a moment's notice," said Clive.

"We're just trying to keep his memory alive, this is our main focus," said Debbie reflecting on how difficult first experiences can be, like this year's Rosh Hashanah, when she baked challah for the first time since his passing.

She chooses not to dwell on the sadness, but focuses on how to keep moving forward, knowing that if she doesn't do something on a good day, she certainly won't choose to do it on a bad day.

She recently learned that her son had made sure to give each soldier a chance to call their parents to say hello before an operation. Because of this, one mother received a call from her son, which turned out to be their last conversation before he died.

"That was the kind of man he was. He cared about everyone," said Debbie.

## Communities come together One Day for peace

LEE TANKLE

"From across South Africa, they arrived with a message. Some chose to raise their voices, others to move their feet, there were those who sang in prayer and a few who stood in silent solidarity. All showed up, praying for no more war, and for our children to play. One day."

These are the words displayed at the beginning of a new viral video in commemoration of 7 October, in which school children and choirs came together to cover the song, *One Day*, by Matisyahu.

The idea for the video came from South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) Deputy Chairperson Craig Pantanowitz in September.

"We wanted to do something to show Israel and the Israeli people that during their darkest hour, during the time that they are going through the hell of war, the community – not necessarily just the South African Jewish community, but South Africa as a whole – isn't

represented by the African National Congress government. And that its stance isn't what the people on the ground feel."

Pantanowitz assembled a team made up of Jewish National Fund South Africa executive committee member Saul Jassinowsky; his wife, Batsheva; author and radio host Howard Feldman; and the marketing director of King David Linksfield, Jodi Starkowitz to bring this vision to life.

The project wasn't conducted under the auspices of any organisation as all involved wanted it to go as far as it possibly could, and to be a community effort.

Starkowitz recruited the video's musical director, Debra Mizrachi, and they decided on the song *One Day* by Matisyahu.

"We chose to do this song because it's instantly recognisable," Starkowitz said, "and just to hear a multitude of voices singing these words asking for peace isn't something that can be easily ignored."

"The song is a call for peace and that was clear to everyone, wherever that may be," said Pantanowitz.

Mizrachi and Starkowitz took the original lyrics of the song and arranged them in a way that allowed for them to be sung in English, Hebrew, and Zulu.

For Pantanowitz, the video demonstrates that "we, as South Africans, want peace, and will stand by Israel through all of its trials and tribulations".

The video was released on 6 October, and since then, has gone viral, amassing 40 000 views in 48 hours. Comments under the video also showcase the wider South African community's support for Israel, with words of support and Israeli flags proudly on display.

"To see it go viral is a testament to why we did it in the first place," said Pantanowitz. "We want peace with our neighbours in Israel, and

we want peace across the world. Hopefully, we will one day find peace."

The video also premiered at the SAZF's 7 October commemoration ceremony to raucous applause.

"I told anybody interested to just join the WhatsApp group. We had about a few hundred people

who were interested in learning the song and singing the song already," Starkowitz said.

To get more diverse voices, Pantanowitz got two choirs with the South African Friends of Israel (SAFI) to be part of the video.

On Sunday, 29 September, the song was recorded, and the video was recorded with more than 100 people of all ages, from the Jewish community and the two choirs from SAFI from Soweto and Alexandra singing with all their might, wearing shirts bearing yellow ribbons and the South African and Israeli flags.

"At first, it was awkward, as everyone didn't know each other, but as soon as everyone started singing, they just started to come together," said Starkowitz. "There's nothing in the world like music to be able to bring people together."

She said that in the process of recording the song, one of the choirs sang, "Pray for Israel", and it was added to the end product despite the phrase not being a part of the original lyrics.

"Their passion for Israel and peace was palpable," she said. "Jewish children responded to that because they were able to see other people who care about Israel, and that they aren't so alone."

"The song and message behind it is something we all needed to hear," said Pantanowitz.



# New heroes fly Israel's flag in info war

NICOLA MILTZ

Well-known Johannesburg rebbeztin confided that she harboured a “sort of crush” on British political commentator Douglas Murray, and secretly wished she had invited him for Shabbat dinner when he visited South Africa.

The reason for her admiration? His unwavering moral clarity and the fearless way he spoke out for Israel in the aftermath of the 7 October Hamas massacre. Murray's powerful stance stood out as a beacon of truth and conviction. Most of all, it offered comfort, she said.

Since the outbreak of war many people, some more likeable than others, have gained global recognition for standing up for Israel even as global sentiment turned against it.

Murray has unflinchingly cut through the moral ambiguity often used in public discourse surrounding the war, saying, “Hamas isn't just some plucky underdog; it's a genocidal terrorist organisation.”

Before the war, no-one had heard of Eylon Levy, the former spokesperson for the Israeli government. He has since emerged as one of Israel's most steadfast defenders. “Israel didn't want this war,” Levy has said repeatedly, showing an ability to dissect complex geopolitical issues while remaining emotionally connected to the plight of Israeli citizens.

New York comedian Michael Rapaport has been a forceful advocate for Israel. Known for his outspokenness, Rapaport has used his brash, unfiltered persona to bring attention to the atrocities on social media, angrily questioning the world's reaction, saying, “Where's your outrage? Where's your disgust for what happened to those people?”

Likewise, British comedian Lee Kern's words often deliver a sharp, emotional punch. “We're not asking for sympathy. We're asking for decency. What happened on 7 October is beyond politics, this is about human lives being torn apart. And yet, the world can't even muster a word of condemnation,” he said.

He posted on X, “If this were happening anywhere else, the world would be outraged. But since it's Israel, it's apparently ‘complicated’. Well, it's not complicated. It's evil.”

Arab-Israeli Joseph Haddad and former Miss Iraq Sarah Idan were public figures before 7 October, but their influence has grown further since then.

“Israel is on our side. They are on the side of the oppressed, they are on the side of the minority because they know what it is like to be a minority,” said Idan in reference to the recent saving of a 21-year-old Yazidi woman rescued by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) from Gaza, where she had been held captive by Hamas for years after being trafficked by ISIS (Islamic State).

Israeli actress and activist Noa Tishby has taken to social media

to share graphic details about the abduction and killing of innocent civilians and regularly criticising media outlets for their biased portrayal of Israel. “It's time to call Hamas for what it is – a brutal terrorist organisation with no regard for human life,” she said.



Douglas Murray

Bari Weiss, a journalist and the founder of The Free Press, is another unapologetic voice. Weiss has taken aim at progressive intellectuals and media outlets that try to paint Hamas as “freedom fighters”.

“The world saw, in horrific detail, what Hamas did. To then twist that into some anti-colonial narrative isn't just dishonest, it's dangerous,” she said.

Sheryl Sandberg, the former chief operating officer of Facebook, has pivoted toward public advocacy for Israel, particularly through producing and directing the film *Screams Before Silence*, which exposed the horrific experiences of female Israeli victims of terrorism.

Former IDF intelligence officer and Knesset member Einat Wilf has gone head-to-head with some of Israel's harshest critics from the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions coalition, consistently defending Israel's right to self-defence while highlighting the dangers of Hamas's genocidal charter. Since 7 October, she has redoubled her efforts, pointing out that “the international media's attempt to whitewash terrorism isn't just morally wrong, it's lethal”.

Hillel Neuer, the executive director of UN Watch, has been one of the most vocal critics of the United Nations and its agencies, particularly UNRWA (the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East).

Professor Shai Davidai has become a vocal advocate for combating antisemitism on college campuses. “We cannot allow a situation where Jewish students feel unsafe on their campuses simply because they identify with Israel,” he famously repeated.

Mosab Hassan Yousef, also known as the son of a founding member of Hamas, and well-known before 7 October, has continued to be one of the most powerful defenders of Israel. “I know Hamas from the inside,” he said. “They are a death cult. Their goal is the complete destruction of Israel, and the annihilation of every Jew.”

Lieutenant-Colonel Jonathan Conricus, the spokesperson for the IDF, has become a well-known face worldwide, delivering clear, consistent messaging about the



Eylon Levy

moral imperative of Israel's fight against its enemies. “This isn't a war we asked for, but it's a war we must win. The people of Israel

deserve to live without the constant threat of annihilation,” he said.

Rachel Goldberg-Polin, the mother of Hersh, 23, who was abducted and recently murdered by Hamas, has channelled her pain into activism, calling for international pressure on Hamas to return the hostages. She has become the human face of the trauma experienced by countless families.

There are many others including South Africa's Gareth Cliff; Patriotic Alliance leader Gayton McKenzie; South African Friends of Israel Spokesperson Bafana Modise; podcasters such as Dan Senior and Sam Harris; broadcasters such as Chris Cuomo, who said this week,

“There's only one enemy in this situation, and it ain't Israel, it's Iran”; and human rights attorney, author, and the founder of the Lawfare Project, Brooke Goldstein. The list goes on.

President Isaac Herzog is a figure of immense humility and leadership. Since the attacks, Herzog hasn't just been a moral compass for Israelis, but a voice of compassion and unity. “This isn't just a war for Israel's survival; this is a war for the very soul of humanity,” he said.

In a world where the loudest voices often drown out the truth, these individuals are a beacon of hope for those who feel isolated in the struggle to defend the Jewish state.

## City Parks strangles family's 'hostage tree' project

NICOLA MILTZ

City of Johannesburg officials have ordered a Jewish family to remove the yellow ribbons tied around a tree outside their home, a symbol of solidarity with the Israeli hostages held by Hamas.

The family displayed the ribbons as a way of reminding passers-by of the hostages' plight, but the officials told them the ribbons were damaging the tree.

Kari Berkowitz, a florist and tree lover, expressed her shock when municipal workers from Johannesburg City Parks & Zoo arrived at her Rouxville home on 25 September.

“They claimed that the ribbons were harming the tree,” she said. “But the tree is flourishing.”

“My husband, Joffie, and I started printing the number of days the hostages had been in captivity and placing the updated number on the tree each day together with pictures of the hostages. It was our way of standing in solidarity,” said Berkowitz.

Their initiative, which began on day 100 of captivity, became a focal point for many in the community, particularly schoolchildren who passed by the tree daily. “Children from various schools would stop, look at the tree, and often ask questions. My husband and I would sometimes chat to them and explain the significance. The children seemed genuinely interested in learning,” she said.

This small but meaningful act came to an abrupt halt when city officials arrived and ordered the removal of all paraphernalia from the tree. They said they had received anonymous complaints from members of the public.

The officials claimed the ribbons were “stressing” the tree, and causing long-term damage.

“I'm in the flower and tree business. I would never do anything to have a negative impact on the health of a tree. This was obviously a political move,” said Berkowitz.

Despite their anger, the family complied. “They said that if we didn't, they would do so on our behalf, and we certainly didn't want them to remove photographs of the hostages and chuck them away, so we did it ourselves,” said Berkowitz.

“I said to the one official that both she and I know this has nothing to do with the health of this beautiful tree, and that we both know this is political. She kept quiet,” said Berkowitz.

Upset, Berkowitz took to social media that day, and posted pictures of her tree, saying, “This is our hostage tree. Today is the last day that we can record the number of days since the hostages were stolen from their homes. We have been ordered by the city horticulturist and park rangers from the zoo to remove everything from the tree. Apparently, complaints were made anonymously. The complaints stated that our tree has been like this since October last year, even though we wrapped our tree and started the count only on day 100.

“This is clearly antisemitic, and has nothing to do with the health of the tree. Apparently, they have received complaints about other areas too. Lawfare on another level. Cowards!”

The move also angered the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, which posted on Facebook: “Johannesburg's infrastructure crumbles but @CityofJoburgZA officials waste their time harassing Jewish residents. Several city employees arrived at this home, demanding the removal of yellow ribbons that were supposedly ‘harming a healthy tree’. This was an attempt to silence a community member who was showing solidarity with hostages.

City of Johannesburg, we urge you to prioritise critical services like fixing roads, maintaining public spaces, and ensuring water access instead of censoring peaceful expression and trying to silence our community members. The Jewish community of Johannesburg won't be silenced.”

Instead, the Berkowitzs' “hostage tree” was featured this week at the Board's October 7 Square memorial at Great Park Synagogue to commemorate one year since the 7 October Hamas massacre.

For the memorial, the family created a notice in the form of a City of Joburg letter placed next to the tree, highlighting what happened. The sign was made to look like an official City of Johannesburg letter, bearing the tagline, “Joburg, a world-class Hamas puppet city.”



City officials demand the Berkowitz family strip the tree of yellow ribbons

The letter told of their plight, saying, “Ironically, though so many trees in Johannesburg remain covered in political party signs long after elections and others are neglected for years with other appendages, the area horticulturist found the time and necessity to act as a proxy to demand the dismantling of the tree, instigated by a complaint from a deceitful member of the public who claimed it had been up since October 2023.”

Community members believe the removal order wasn't just overreach but lacked sensitivity to the situation in Israel. “It's incredibly disheartening,” said one member of the community who wished to remain anonymous. “This is a humanitarian issue, not just a symbolic gesture. We should urge the city to show compassion and reconsider.”

Berkowitz, unwilling to have her solidarity spirit quelled, said, “We'll find another way. We won't let this diminish the message we're trying to send.”

Johannesburg City Parks and Zoo spokesperson, Jenny Moodley, said she was unaware of this request by park rangers. “We have had a similar experience with the Cancer Association who wrap trees in pink ribbons. Trees are an asset of the city, and one requires permission prior to branding a tree. There is due process, and an application would have needed to be made. City Parks were most likely contacted, and it was probably an issue of noncompliance more than anything else.”

# Jewish community awed by messages of support

HEATHER DJUNGA

Mysterious cards left on gates, in post boxes, and taped to the intercoms of homes of local Jews around 7 October warmed the hearts of recipients, but left them curious as to who had sent them.

The cards came in envelopes marked with the words, "Let my people go", with a yellow ribbon, which is a call to bring home the remaining hostages from Gaza. Inside the cards, there were caring, handwritten messages showing encouragement and support. Each card was signed, "Your Christian friend." The cards were accompanied by beaded bracelets showing the colours of Israel and the Magen David.

Those who received these cards went to social media to try and figure out who these Good Samaritans were so that they could thank them for bringing hope over the 7 October period.

"In the cynical and antisemitic world that we find ourselves in, reading the simple and supportive message in the card brought me feelings of gratitude and delight. It was a real gift of support," said Zahava Lipschitz, one of the recipients. "I was overwhelmed that someone out there had taken the time and made the effort to reach

out in such a touching way."

Lipschitz wrote to the *SA Jewish Report* about the card she had received, expressing awe at the kind gesture. She wrote, "Heartfelt letters were delivered to houses on Study Road and Corbel Crescent yesterday in a statement of unity and support with the Jewish community and Israel."

She said she wasn't sure whether other streets had received the bracelets and cards, but said the gesture

daughter walking down Study Road just after 14:00 putting envelopes in people's post boxes or sticking them on their intercoms."

Lindi Katzoff, the office manager for Bikkur Cholim, a Jewish society which visits the sick, received one of the cards. As with Penn, she said this "phenomenal gesture" was initially met with suspicion as she wasn't sure who the cards were from. However, on reading her card, which was from "Howard and Bron, your Christian friends" she was deeply grateful and moved.

"October 7 was a deeply sad time for us as a community," said Katzoff, who said that despite this, she had witnessed the Jewish community stand alongside one another, for example at the October 7 Square at Great Park Synagogue in Houghton. "Not only did Jewish residents stand together on the day, but Christian residents and other non-Jewish community members stood alongside us, and this was a beautiful thing

to experience, even during the immense pain and heartache." Members of the Facebook group Joburg Jewish Mommies shared that they had received the supportive cards. Each message in the cards received was different.

All the cards, it seemed, were signed with a name, without a surname, and as in the case of Katzoff's message, the words, "Your Christian friend."

Simone Penn was first made aware of the kind-hearted gesture towards her family when her daughter came running to her with the card and bracelet and said, "Mommy, your friend dropped off a gift!" She told the *SA Jewish Report* that on receiving the card and beaded bangle, she was initially concerned. "I was

worried that this was a plot to see whose homes are owned by Jews, and an element of fear and suspicion crept in, which I have felt since 7 October," she said.

On reading the card, her heart was touched by the personalised message, which she emphasised was handwritten. She said she recently sent cards to her friends for Rosh Hashanah, and those were not as beautifully written and with such care as the card she had received from an anonymous stranger.

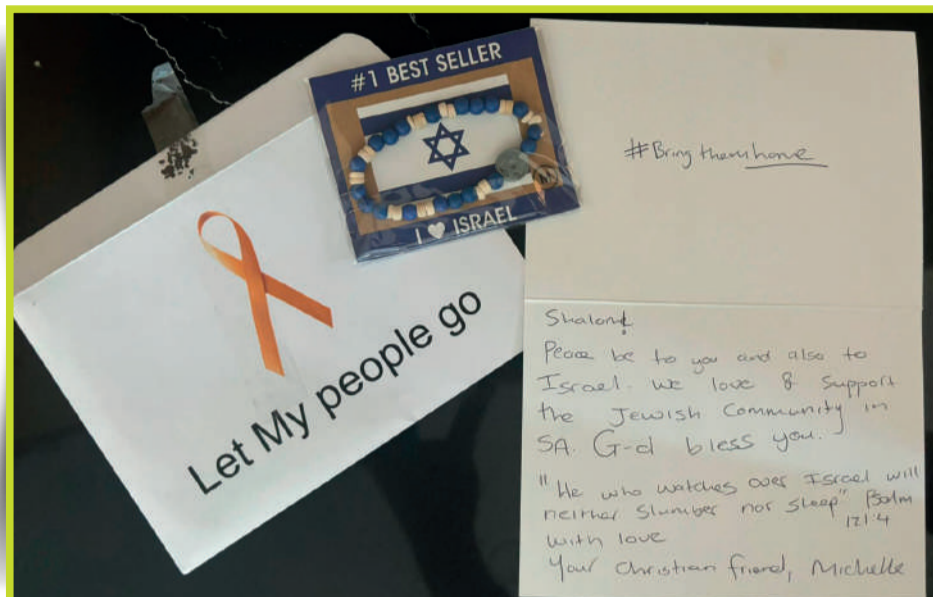
"October 7 rattled me completely," she said. "I saw a photo on social media about a child taken hostage, and I felt like this was my loss, which is how it is with the Jewish community."

She said the love shown through the card was healing and restorative as it was affirmation that the Jewish community wasn't alone in its grief. "My nine-year-old son is convinced a non-Jewish woman in the printing department of his school sent it. Still, whoever it's from, the whole concept is stellar, and unquantifiable in words."

It was Penn who eventually discovered the identity of the card givers, when seeing a group of Jehovah's Witnesses walking down her road. She asked them whether they had given the cards and bangles, and was told they had done so as a gesture to encourage hope and faith.

"The messages should give the Jewish community hope, as they are a reminder we have Christian friends and there are many Christian groups from different denominations throughout the country who would have willingly posted the cards, who support Israel."

At a time when many Jewish residents feel alone in their heartache about what happened on 7 October and since then, the cards are a reminder that many stand alongside the Jewish community.



had touched the hearts of her entire street group who wanted to express their gratitude. "Unfortunately, we don't know who was responsible for this kind gesture to thank them."

She said following the arrival and receipt of the cards, messages were exchanged on street WhatsApp groups. "A number of people responded with photos of their individualised letters." Though they still had to find out who had posted the cards, one of the people on the WhatsApp group wrote, "I saw a Christian gentleman with his son and

## KDVP celebrates 60 years of excellence

King David Victory Park (KDVP)'s 60th anniversary on Sunday, 22 September, began with a brunch for alumni, where the school's longest-standing head, Jeffrey Wolf, and his wife, Barbara, were honoured as guest speakers. Rabbi Ricky Seeff, the general director of the South African Board of Jewish Education, warmly welcomed everyone in attendance.

Following the brunch, an assembly was held in the school hall, bringing together alumni, current students, staff, and parents. The atmosphere was excited and nostalgic as attendees reminisced about their time at KDVP.

After the assembly, the festivities moved outdoors, where a lively carnival and *shuk* were set up on the field. The highlight of the carnival was undoubtedly the "dunk tank", where key staff members, including heads took the plunge for a good cause. The colour run that followed was a burst of fun, with participants of all ages covered in vibrant hues.

The celebration was a testament to KDVP's enduring legacy and commitment to providing quality education and support to its students.



Raquel Meyerowitz, Dani Beira, and Emma Dakes

## King David wipes the board at Israel Quiz

The South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) and Israel Centre, in collaboration with The Academy of Jewish Thought and Learning, proudly hosted the annual Israel Quiz on Sunday, 29 September. The event showcased the remarkable talent of young students, who competed in a challenging and engaging competition, highlighting their knowledge of Israel's history, culture, and contemporary issues. Daniel Segal and Aimee Shull from King David Victory Park came first and third respectively, with Noah Greenblatt from King David Linksfield coming second.

The 2024 quiz was the beginning of a new era for the quiz, in which the audience also had a chance to compete and share its knowledge about our homeland. The event was a testament to the bright future of Zionist education in South Africa.

Special thanks to Ethiopian Airlines for generously sponsoring the winner's prize of a ticket to Israel and to iStore and iStore Education for its contributions to quiz prizes and for generously loaning iPads for the event.



Daniel Segal

## Christian Zionists pray for security of Israel

About 80 Christians Zionists, members of Israel Matters for Africa, and the South African Friends of Israel gathered for a prayer breakfast on 7 October, where they prayed for safety, the security of Israelis, and the speedy and safe return of the 101 hostages still in Hamas

captivity in Gaza. They affirmed their unwavering support for Israel and its people, and what Israel



Participants at the Israel prayer breakfast

could contribute to South Africa. They prayed for South Africa's leadership to be on the right side of history in terms of good and evil, and celebrated the unbreakable bond between Christians and Jews.

## Yeshiva college girls show Emunah

Yeshiva Girls' High School wowed audiences with its production, *Emunah*, on Monday, 23 September, which was professional in every respect from sound and lighting, to costumes and choreography. Based on Disney's *Encanto*, the script was adjusted to have a Jewish flavour and positive message, especially in the month of Elul, about faith in Hashem and in ourselves.



The cast of the Emunah production

## Commemorative garden says "siyabonga" to anti-apartheid activists

The South African "Gan Siyabonga" honour garden, dedicated to honouring activists against apartheid and who have made a contribution to Israeli society, was inaugurated in Park Hayearot Tel Mond in central Israel.

"Siyabonga" means "thank you" in Zulu, and in the memorial area, about 36 trees have been planted, each accompanied by a plaque bearing the name of an activist. Visitors will also be able to scan a QR code leading to brief biographies of activists. Additionally, the site features a statue sculpted by a South African artist and benches for visitors to rest and reflect.

The ceremony took place with the participation of Lynn Kaplan, the head of the Tel Mond Council; the management of Keren Kayemeth LelIsrael (KKL)-South

Africa, whose contribution made this project possible; Orna Tuag, the head of the South Africa, Scotland, and Ireland desk at KKL-JNF (Jewish National Fund);



The Gan Siyabonga honour garden inaugurated by delegates in Park Hayearot Tel Mond

Shay Bar Ratson, the chief engineer central area at KKL-JNF; and the South African Zionist Federation.

The activists honoured were Jews who supported Israel and held various roles such as doctors, musicians, judges, and politicians. The apartheid regime in South Africa enforced a policy of racial segregation between whites and blacks, granting privileges to the white population from 1948 until 1994.

The initiative commemorates those who fought for justice and equality while maintaining a bond with Israel and making a contribution to the betterment of the lives of its citizens.

## Mensch survey maps Jewish changemakers

Mensch, in partnership with the Li Boiskin Social Justice Fellowship, the Mauerberger Foundation Fund, and the Kaplan Centre has launched a survey to find out more about Jewish changemakers. Mensch's mission, inspired by the Jewish commitment to justice, is to support individuals, organisations, and communities who are working for the betterment of the wider South African society.

The aim of the survey is to develop a needs analysis for Jewish social changemakers in South Africa. The survey will also assess the impact that they are having in positively transforming South African society, and aims to gain clarity on the extent to which the changemakers' Jewish identity influences the work they do.

Help Mensch to assist Jewish social changemakers, and connect them with one another by filling out the survey <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/MenschSurveyJR>

# Growing up is hard, but no regrets

One of the most annoying statements is, "Well, that's 30 minutes we'll never get back", often said when reflecting on an experience that was a waste of time. Strictly speaking, whether we gained from the half hour or not, we'll still never get it back.

Much like, "We aren't getting any younger," or "We aren't as young as we used to be." Both are true, irrespective of the situational reference.

And yet, I know that I'm a lot older than I was on 7 October 2023. I have aged significantly more in the past 12 months than I did in any other period of the same duration.

I'm also not the same person. And I've had so many people say the same thing. About themselves.

The first anniversary of the day was excruciating. It didn't surprise me that it was a day of immense feeling. What did catch me unawares was the number of discussions I had with people about how much they have changed over the year. How shocked they were by the largely awful response and increased antisemitism; at the lack of empathy and ruthless celebration of the murder of Jews; how the women's movements have turned their backs on Jewish women subject to the most horrific sexual abuse; and how much effort was put into denial, justification, and then silencing of Jewish or Israel supporting voices.

This resonated for me.

Prior to 7 October 2023, I wasn't the "Israel guy". I have always been a proud Zionist, but hadn't incorporated this into my public persona. I did that deliberately, as I knew inherently that if I voiced a view on Israel, I would be disregarded in other areas. And so, I chose to limit how much I wrote on the subject and did so only when I felt it was really necessary.

After the Hamas invasion, it was necessary. And so, I did. And what I had predicted became reality. Any time I didn't cover Israel as a topic, I would be assured of several "why would I listen to a Zionist?"

## INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



comments. And then, as is well known, I was removed from News24 ostensibly for having an uncomfortably pro-Israel view. And then the *chutzpah* to express it. Because a "Jew with a view" is all well and good if the view is acceptable to the bastions and protectors of the group-think narrative.

Former supporters and "friends" in the media have been horrified. How far I have fallen from my days of fighting against the apartheid regime, of being elected to the first non-racial Law Student Council, and holding the position of editor of the *Wits Law Journal*. At a time when it was risky to do so.

They genuinely believe that I've lost my mind. In some sense, they no doubt think that I've been radicalised. Like the Jewish Taliban. As a result, I'm no longer considered an insider and no longer regarded as a "moderate" or "liberal" voice. Because in their world of identity politics, you're in or out. You're with us, or against us. You're one of them. Or you're a racist and a bigot, and you support the killing of babies. Obviously.

As for the whole freedom-of-expression thing, well that's all well and good so long as the group agrees with what's being expressed.

The truth is that they are right. I have changed. Not in my belief about equality or in my values. But in the way I see the world. How I see some I respected. Who I consider friends, and how I view myself. I'm now not just happy to accept being the "Israel guy", but I wear it as a badge of honour. I'm proud to be called a "belligerent and unrepentant Zionist" in an Africa4Palestine press release, and labelled "Mampara of the week" by the *Sunday Times* because of it.

I have changed in that I'm no longer as young as I used to be. And because with age, comes wisdom, I couldn't be happier.

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

# The square that made us stronger

This week marks the first anniversary of the 7 October attacks. To honour this moment, the South African Jewish Board of Deputies organised a commemorative event titled "October 7 Square" in the forest at the Great Park Synagogue. The original purpose for this gathering was to offer a counter-narrative to the prevailing pro-Hamas rhetoric championed by the African National Congress and much of the national media. While we cannot take the South African media to Hostage Square in Israel and to experience the pain and loss firsthand, our hope was to create a space here where the deep emotional wounds and profound sense of loss shared by Israelis and Jews globally could be felt.

On Monday, 7 October, we hosted an exceptionally well attended press conference in the square, with representatives from most major national outlets in attendance. The response was overwhelming, with significant coverage across television, radio, and print, sharing deeply moving stories that resonated with both the Jewish community and the broader public.

This was a true success for the event, but in reality, the October 7 Square became so much more than merely a media moment. Nearly 40 community organisations, representing a wide breadth of our youth movements, social spaces, schools, shuls, and women's groups, came together to create meaningful installations, each contributing a unique voice to the commemoration. The square became a source of so much mourning, reflection, and ultimately healing for so many in our community. It became apparent that as a community and as Jewry at large, we experienced a deep trauma and needed the space and time to express our grief.

Many people attended the square on multiple occasions, returning with friends, family, colleagues, and neighbours. In fact, the event was original slated only for 6 and 7 October, but due to its popularity

## ABOVE BOARD

Karen Milner



and impact, we extended it into a third day. The installations themselves invited participation, with attendees leaving thousands of heartfelt notes, messages of support to families, reflections on personal feelings, and calls for peace. It was particularly poignant that at one installation which simply stated, "After October 7 I am Feeling", so many participants chose to write "proud", "Jewish", "stronger", and "more Jewish". This is a theme we didn't anticipate, but is a clear indication of how the events of that horrible day awakened a feeling of belonging for so many.

This feeling of belonging, strength, and unity was further highlighted on Sunday afternoon, 6 October, when a pro-Palestine convoy and protest came to intimidate visitors. Rather than cowering in fear, our community stood tall, singing songs and dancing in an outpouring of strength and resilience. This inspirational and invigorating moment was then followed by a moving vigil, which had been planned as a private event for one of the youth movements, but was attended by all at the square, a testament to the unity and spirit that has come to define this commemoration.

We're a small community, but our unity and spirit have shown us to be determined, united, and strong well beyond our numbers. As we look toward Yom Kippur this Shabbat, I hope that we can take this unity forward, and that likewise, we'll be reunited with our hostages very soon. I wish everyone a safe, peaceful, and meaningful fast and a *gmar chatima tova*.

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

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

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A Curriculum Vitae and contact information of two referees should be e-mailed to: [hazyn@sabje.co.za](mailto:hazyn@sabje.co.za).

The school reserves the right not to make an appointment. Only short-listed candidates will be interviewed.

CLOSING DATE FOR APPLICATIONS: 14 OCTOBER 2024

King David Schools are a network of Jewish day schools offering pre-primary through to high school education across five campuses in Johannesburg. Our purpose is to instil Jewish values, deliver exceptional education and inspire a life of purpose

In line with POPIA (Protection of Personal Information Act), King David will attempt to ensure the confidentiality of all applicants for this role. All reasonable measures will be in place to protect personal information but will be used in the recruitment, selection, and reporting process. By submitting your application for this position, you are recognising and accepting this disclaimer.

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