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# South African Jewish Report

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## ANC endorses terror with 'martyrs' rally

TALI FEINBERG

An African National Congress (ANC) branch has imported Hamas and Hezbollah's jihadist "martyrdom" culture to South African shores by inviting the public to honour "their martyrs", Hamas leaders Ismail Haniyeh and Yahya Sinwar, and Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah.

The ANC Cape Town branch was scheduled to hold an event titled, "Honouring our martyrs: a tribute to courage and sacrifice" on Wednesday, 30 October, to honour these terrorist leaders who were assassinated in recent months.

The event poster, with photos of the three men, called for people to "join us in honouring the lives of the martyrs who sacrificed their lives for the freedom of the people of Palestine."

"The ruling ANC persists in viewing Hamas and Hezbollah as legitimate liberation movements," said Ray Hartley, research director of the Brenthurst Foundation. "This is plainly not the case, as these organisations actively use terror tactics and are anti-democratic. South Africa would be better served by living up to its claim to be a 'peace-seeking' country that abhors violence and wants to achieve negotiated solutions. Referring to these leaders as 'our martyrs' represents an endorsement of their methods, which are antithetical to South Africa's identity as a peaceful democracy."

Hussein Solomon, senior professor in the department of political science at the University of the Free State, said using the term "our martyrs" "possibly points to the fact that the ANC has essentially adopted the ideology and the discourse of groups like Hamas and Hezbollah".

The gathering was to be hosted by the ANC

Robert Waterwitch-Thornhill branch at the Ghousia Manzil event venue in Cape Town. This branch was founded by current ANC Western Cape provincial spokesperson and leader of the opposition in the Western Cape legislature, Muhammad Khalid Sayed, and remains closely associated with him.

Sayed was one of the people who came out in support for Muslim Judicial Council President Sheikh Riad Fataar's "We are Hamas" statement in early September 2024. When Nasrallah was assassinated, Sayed reinforced the martyrdom culture, saying "a revolutionary pillar and man of faith has fallen. He now joins the garden of selfless servants whom he so dearly loved."

Speakers at the 30 October event included Ronnie Kasrils, who has proudly stated how "pleased" he is that Hamas butchered innocent civilians on 7 October, and Arab Barghouti, the son of prominent Palestinian terrorist Marwan Barghouti. The latter was convicted of five counts of murder in 2004. In February 2024, the younger Barghouti told South Africa's *Eyewitness News*, "Netanyahu has been very clear, he doesn't want to end the genocide of Gaza."

South Africa doesn't categorise Hamas and Hezbollah as terrorist groups, which is in direct opposition to its legislation combatting terrorism. The South African Protection of Constitutional Democracy Against Terrorist and Related Activities Act criminalises acts of terrorism and terrorist financing, and specifies international co-operation obligations. It's important to note that South Africa is still on the Financial Action Task Force's grey list because of its failure to combat terrorist financing.

Hartley wrote at the time that the ANC expressed support for Fataar: "Doubling down on Hamas is a curious direction for

the ANC at a time when South Africa is endeavouring to patch up its relationship with the United States [US], and when the departure of Dr Naledi Pandor as minister offers a break with Tehran's foreign policy scriptures."

Analyst Dr Frans Cronje said, "Regarding the US, there's concern at the actions and influence of some actors in South Africa. You've seen that in the review Congress has sought of the relationship with South Africa. But I also think there's a balance of official opinion on South Africa, that seeks to play down the influence of malign actors. A lot will hinge on future control of the White House and Congress. If that control is blue, then

malign South African actors will be granted a significant degree of space to operate. If it's red, that space will become constrained."

Solomon said he believed that "there's a deeper intellectual malaise in the ANC in that it cannot come up with an alternative discourse which reflects South Africa's national interests. If it was pro-peace, it would use a more neutral discourse. But the ANC is fundamentally stuck in this ideological 1960s prism, from which it can't move. I'm not sure how South Africa could possibly be seen as an honest broker in this conflict, without any perception of what's in our national interests as a country."

South African Zionist Federation (SAZF)

spokesperson Rolene Marks said, "The SAZF vehemently condemns the ANC's decision to honour Haniyeh, Sinwar, and Nasrallah, whose legacies are steeped in terrorism and unspeakable atrocities."

"Haniyeh was a pivotal figure in orchestrating attacks that resulted in the deaths of innocent civilians. Under his leadership, Hamas committed egregious acts such as using Palestinian civilians as human shields and executing alleged collaborators in brutal public displays. His regime's systematic abuses, including torture and extrajudicial killings, exemplify a governance steeped in fear and oppression."

Continued on page 3>>

## Drive to stop Leila Khaled

See page 5



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# Cape Town teen saves life while surfing

LEE TANKLE

Jonah Lustig, 18, went for a quick surf in Camps Bay in Cape Town in an attempt to reduce his stress levels over his upcoming matric exams, and landed up saving the life of a man caught in a rip tide.

His "destressing" surf turned into such a life-saving, high-pressure moment, he didn't even get the name of the man whose life he saved.

Lustig, who is writing matric at Herzlia High School, planned to go for a mere 45-minute surfing session on 9 October. As he returned to shore after surfing, two men pleaded with him to help save their friend, in his 20s, whom they said was drowning.

Lustig, a trained lifesaver, raced back into the water with his surfboard and GoPro to rescue the man. "I quickly realised that he was caught in a rip tide and was being taken out by the current on the right side of Camps Bay," said Lustig.

"I rushed out to him, paddling on my surfboard. Just before I arrived, another lifesaver had also been trying to reach him, but wasn't quite getting there," he said. "Luckily, I was able to get to him with my board, and quickly put him on the board with me and brought him back to shore."

While Lustig was in the water, the lifeguards on the beach had come in to help with their T-buoys as well, and another surfer had also come to the man's aid.

"We were able to get

him out of the situation and put him in the recovery position, and an ambulance was called to make sure that he was okay," Lustig said.

He and his friends have been City of Cape Town lifesavers for the past five years, ever since they did an online lifesaving training course. He decided to do the initial course because, he said, "I thought being a lifeguard would be a radical experience. I wasn't ever the greatest swimmer or runner, but I just wanted to do something new."

Since completing the course online because of the COVID-19 pandemic, Lustig and his friends are regularly on duty at various beaches in Cape Town.

"In the summer season, there's a roster for all the duties, so you would usually do, at minimum, one duty a month, but you can also substitute for people, and then you can do as many as you like."

Lustig said that had he not got to the man in time, the man would probably have drowned because of the nature of the rip tide combined with the fact that he couldn't swim.

"A rip takes you out to sea. It takes you further from land, and it's hard to get back if you don't know how to get out," said Lustig. "You're in a tricky situation."

"Even if I didn't have my board or a T-buoy, I would have run in and tried to grab him, even though it's kind



Jonah Lustig

of risky. Since he didn't know how to swim, he could have tried to use me as a lifebuoy and maybe tried to drown me. So, it was just fortunate that I had my board with me.

"These things happen when you least expect them," said Lustig, "Camps Bay has especially unpredictable conditions because it looks like it's flat, but at any moment, the rip can take you out."

"I'll always be humbled by the ocean. It's the greatest power of all," he said. "But I'm confident in my abilities. I just try to remain calm, like everything's going to be okay, and try to be as much in the present as possible. I wasn't focused on myself, I was just focusing on the task at hand."

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## Noah's flood of reckoning



Rabbi Levi Lipskar  
The Shul @ Hyde Park Chabad

Parshat Noach narrates the story of Noah, the great flood, and the subsequent covenant between G-d and humanity.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe teaches that this parsha offers profound insights into human responsibility, the power of faith, and the path toward redemption.

The story of Noah begins with a description of his righteousness in a world filled with corruption. The Rebbe emphasised that Noah's actions serve as a model for individual responsibility. At a time when the majority of society was steeped in immorality, Noah stood out as a beacon of virtue. Each person has the capacity to effect change, regardless of their surroundings. This idea reinforces the concept that every individual possesses the ability to make ethical choices that can positively influence the world around them.

Noah's building of the ark isn't merely preparation for the impending flood, but symbolises proactive engagement in one's faith. Noah worked on the ark for 120 years, during which he warned others of impending doom. This demonstrates the importance of perseverance, and the hope that even the most stubborn hearts can change – a reminder that we mustn't become despondent in the face of challenges, but should continue to strive to inspire others.

A central theme in Parshat Noach is faith. Noah's faith wasn't blind; it was rooted in a deep understanding of G-d's justice and mercy. When G-d commanded him to build the ark, Noah didn't question the divine directive, but took immediate action, demonstrating unwavering trust in G-d's plan.

This faith is exemplified in the covenant established after the flood. G-d promises never to destroy the world again with water, signified by the rainbow – a

symbol of hope and reassurance. The rainbow signifies a balance between divine justice and mercy, reminding us that despite challenges and adversity, God's mercy ultimately prevails. This serves as a life lesson, encouraging us to maintain faith even when faced with difficulties.

While the rainbow is a sign of G-d's promise, it also serves as a reminder of the importance of unity and peace among humanity. The rainbow consists of many colours, symbolising the diverse facets of creation and the need for harmony among different communities. The Rebbe often advocated for a world where differences were celebrated, fostering a spirit of collaboration and understanding.

## Torah Thought

Finally, the narrative of Noah transitions from destruction to renewal, embodying the potential for redemption. The Rebbe taught that while the flood was a means of purification, it also signified a new beginning for humanity. The mitzvot given to Noah and his descendants – the Seven Noahide Laws – establish a framework for ethical behaviour that upholds the dignity of all human beings.

Through this lens, we're inspired to recognise individual responsibility, to cultivate unwavering faith, embrace diversity, and strive for a world of peace and justice. As we reflect on this parsha, may we find strength in Noah's example and work toward creating a better future for all.

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# DIRCO spokesperson open about anti-Israel bias

TALI FEINBERG

Jewish communal leaders have called on the government to replace its new spokesperson for the department of international relations and cooperation (DIRCO), Chrispin Phiri, after he tweeted "Free Palestine" at around 10:00 on 7 October 2023, making it clear that he supported one of the most gruesome massacres in history.

On 8 October 2023, he reinforced this with the tweet, "Palestine shall be free." Now, community organisations and an antisemitism watchdog are questioning whether he should continue to hold his position.

When the SA Jewish Report asked Phiri why he stated "Free Palestine" on 7 October 2023, he responded, "I have always believed and continue to believe that at the heart of the conflict, even before 7 October, is the denial of the Palestinian people's right to self-determination, sovereignty, and independence. That Israeli forces have brutally suppressed the Palestinian people is a matter which predates 7 October."

Asked if he or DIRCO would ever condemn terrorism directed at Israelis, he said, "The South African government has condemned the cowardly attack by Hamas that killed and injured innocent people. Similarly, the South African government condemned the heinous opportunism of the Israeli government to use Hamas's cowardice to continue its genocide against the people of Palestine. We continue to call for the release of Palestinian detainees and Israeli hostages. I align myself with those condemnations."

GnasherJew, a group of experienced digital online investigators who expose antisemites around the globe, noted Phiri's tweets in a post on 23 September 2024. Speaking to the SA Jewish Report, the organisation said, "We initially focused on Phiri due to his involvement with the South African delegation to the International Court of Justice [ICJ]. During our investigation, we uncovered additional concerning information and ahistorical posts. It's deeply troubling that a senior member of the South African civil service would endorse rhetoric advocating for the destruction of the Jewish state, especially given his role in the South African ICJ case. Phiri's statements and actions are incompatible with the responsibilities of his position. We believe immediate steps should be taken to remove him from this role."

A review of Phiri's activity on X reveals that he promotes the slogan, "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free," which is widely understood as a call to eradicate Israel and all those who live in it.

Asked what he envisions as a solution to the conflict, Phiri said, "A two-state solution based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine." However, on 15 May 2015, Phiri tweeted, "So on this day, land was brutally expropriated in Palestine and hasn't stopped since. Then the West says we respect Israel's right to protect its borders. What borders, exactly, [as] this nation didn't exist before 14 May 1948?"

In 2019, Phiri referred to "The Zionist [sic] delusional mentality", linked to a blog post that denies a Jewish connection to the land of Israel, calls Jews "European invaders" and "colonisers", and dismisses the Torah as "Talmudic fairytales". He also



Chrispin Phiri, Department of international relations and cooperation spokesperson

published a post saying that Hitler hated Jews because "Hitler's first love was a Jewish woman."

Regarding Israel's existence as a Jewish state, Phiri said, "A two-state solution envisions the existence of Israel, and that has not been problematised. The question is, does Israel envision the existence of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital?"

Yet in June 2024, Phiri called on people to purchase the colouring book, *From the River to the Sea*, which erases Israel from the map. In February 2024, he asked, "Who and where are these faceless Hamas combatants that Israel is 'winning' against?" along with a cartoon of an Israeli soldier killing a baby and a journalist.

To the Jewish community, Phiri said, "Criticising the actions of this Israeli government isn't criticism of Jewish people. Innocent women and children are being killed and maimed in the name of Judaism. We engage with many Jewish organisations. Most recently, this included our director general's participation on a *Jewish Currents* [an extreme left magazine] panel with Daniel Levy, who was a negotiator for Israel in the Oslo process. *Jewish Currents* indicated that what drives high levels of real antisemitism is the approach that portrays Israel as a 'Jewish state', thereby linking the actions of the state to all people of the Jewish faith."

Phiri's written statements for DIRCO condemned the assassinations of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh and Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, called Israel's war against Hamas a "genocide", condemned Israel's self-defence in the face of daily Hezbollah rockets, and blamed Israel for the continued attacks against it.

"Israel's bombing of Lebanon is a serious violation of the territory of a sovereign state, and a grave violation of international law. The international community cannot afford to remain indifferent," stated Phiri on 14 October, ignoring the reality that the daily unprovoked Hezbollah attacks on Israel are a serious violation of the territory of a sovereign state and a grave violation of international law, and that he and the South African government have remained indifferent to them. When, on 25 October 2024, Israel responded to Iran's missile attack of 1 October, Phiri wrote a DIRCO statement that said it "strongly condemns Israel's attack on Iran, which seeks to foment war in the Middle East. This attack is an unacceptable violation of Iran's sovereignty."

South African Zionist Federation spokesperson Rolene Marks said, "Phiri's statements and social media are deeply concerning given his role as DIRCO spokesperson. His endorsement of slogans and ideas calling for the eradication of Israel alongside posts denying the Jewish connection to the land are not

only inappropriate but signal a dangerous level of bias.

"South Africa's foreign policy should promote diplomacy and balance, especially when engaging with complex international conflicts," said Marks. "Phiri's stance is out of step with South Africa's key trading partners, who expect a more neutral and informed approach. It also disregards Israel's right to self-defence, especially as Israel continues to face unrelenting attacks from Hezbollah and Hamas."

"In light of the government of national unity, South Africa should adopt a more nuanced foreign policy approach that clearly delineates between supporting legitimate humanitarian efforts and endorsing extremism," she said. "By failing to do so, DIRCO risks alienating South Africa from the global community and key trading partners."

South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) national director, Wendy Kahn, said, "The SAJBD is greatly concerned by revelations that Chrispin Phiri has a lengthy history of propagating explicit antisemitism on his social media. Going back to at least 2012, Phiri has been falsifying the historical record so as to deny Jewish people their heritage and identity, and mocking Jewish religious beliefs."

"The propagation of such overt bigotry is indefensible, regardless of who is responsible, but it's especially unconscionable when coming from the designated spokesperson for the South African government," said Kahn. "By using social media to peddle unbridled prejudice, Phiri is guilty of flouting the humanitarian values that South Africans are committed to upholding. A person who is capable of such hate shouldn't hold such a position."

## ANC endorses terror with 'martyrs' rally

>>>Continued from page 1

"Sinwar's role in orchestrating the largest massacre of Jews since the Holocaust cannot be overstated. The suffering endured by innocent families stands as a testament to his barbarity.

"Nasrallah engineered a campaign of terror that included the dismemberment and starvation of civilians in Syria and the execution of political opponents in Lebanon. His forces have engaged in heinous sectarian killings, and have been responsible for bombing civilians. His direct involvement in the assassination of prominent Lebanese figures highlights his ruthless quest for power.

"It's inconceivable," Marks said, "that an ANC branch is honouring three men who are recognised internationally as terrorists and who not only terrorised Israelis but also Syrians, Lebanese, and others across the region. For Ronnie Kasrils, who celebrated 7 October, to honour these people is an absolute disgrace, and should be roundly condemned."

Dr Glen Segell, professor at the University of Cambridge, said, "It's disconcerting that the ANC continues to glorify violence and honour murderers, clearly motivated by anti-Zionism and antisemitism. Steps towards Palestinian statehood have been set

back by these so-called martyrs. It's despicable that Ronnie Kasrils is speaking at this event, given that the victims of their violence over the past 40 years have been mainly Jewish. Does he and the ANC see them as 'our' martyrs because of the Jews killed? This is one more nail in the coffin for the ANC's foreign policy, that others in the government of national unity should distance themselves from."

South African Jewish Board of Deputies National Chairperson Professor Karen Milner said, "This grotesque glorification of characters who epitomise violence reflects on the organisers of this event. To hold these men in esteem reflects the warped beliefs of those who would participate in it. It's no surprise that Ronnie Kasrils, who described the 7 October pogrom as 'a brilliant, spectacular guerilla warfare attack', would be part of this hideous tribute."

"Celebrating such individuals sends an outrageous message that the ANC endorses violence and terror as acceptable tools for political expression," Marks said. "The SAZF calls on the ANC to reject this ANC branch's glorification of inhumanity, and instead promote peace, justice, and respect for all lives. We stand with those who seek a future free from the shackles of terror and oppression."

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# UCT decisions raise alarm bells for free speech

TALI FEINBERG

The University of Cape Town's (UCT's) highest decision-making body, its council, is taking on its own head of its historical studies department and director of the Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies at UCT, Professor Adam Mendelsohn, over his legal application to stop its anti-Israel motions.

The council made the unprecedented decision to oppose Mendelsohn's legal application that calls for two motions it adopted in June to be reviewed or set aside. Mendelsohn took the matter up because he said the resolutions curtailed his research and would have profoundly negative implications for academic freedom and the university.

The council's latest decision was made just three days after the university's new vice-chancellor (VC), Professor Mosa Moshabela, put on hold a lecture scheduled for 17 October, because of what was believed to be pressure from the anti-Israel lobby.

The anti-Israel extremists demanded that the university cancel Claudius Senst, the chief executive of the newspaper *Bild* and chief operating officer of its parent company, Axel Springer SE, who was to give a VC's open lecture, part of a series of lectures. Senst was to speak on the interplay between media, artificial intelligence, democracy, and governance.



**This is a chilling threat to freedom of speech because of the perceived pro-Israel stance of the speaker. This is the return of cancel culture, appeasement, and the end of academic freedom at UCT.**

UCT4Palestine claimed that Senst was unwelcome because Axel Springer SE "endorses and actively participates in the illegal occupation of Palestine and takes an unwavering pro-Israel stance". The group launched a petition calling for Senst to be "de-platformed", signed by more than 900 people.

The VC's decision to put "on hold" the

lecture set off alarm bells for academics and free-speech activists. One academic, speaking anonymously for safety reasons, said, "This is a chilling threat to freedom of speech because of the perceived pro-Israel stance of the speaker. This is the return of cancel culture, appeasement, and the end of academic freedom at UCT."

The council's decision to oppose Mendelsohn's application added fuel to the fire. On 19 October, the chairperson of the UCT council, Norman Arendse SC, addressed the UCT community, saying, "Following full, frank, and robust discussion on all the relevant and material facts including financial consequences, the council resolved by substantial majority to uphold its commitment to its values and oppose the court application. Pending the outcome, we appeal to the university community, donors, and stakeholders not to pre-empt the outcome and take any action that might be premature."

The director of the Campaign for Free Expression, Professor Anton Harber, said, "We are concerned that the cancellation of the VC's lecture and the banishment of Ivor Chipkin's conference from Constitution Hill represents a shutting down of space for those who aren't towing the dominant line in relation to Gaza. Even those whose criticism of Israel is seen as not going far enough seem to be targeted."

"This is a time when we need open dialogue more than ever as we cannot leave the space to be dominated by extremists from either side. Public institutions have an obligation to make space for tough discussions. Instead, they are avoiding this and bowing to pressure."

"The lesson of our own South African history is that you have to keep the doors of

dialogue open for that day when both sides realise there's no military solution to such a conflict, and we have to find a political one," Harber said. "We need more voices, more dialogue, more exchange. We need less name-calling and labelling – and that's true for both sides of the conflict."

Free Speech Union South Africa (FSU SA) Director Sara Gon said the

FSU was perturbed by the "putting on hold" of the lecture. "The VC clearly thought Senst was a suitable invitee, given his high profile



Photo: Axel Springer

Claudius Senst



Professor Adam Mendelsohn

as chief executive of *Bild*, the largest circulation newspaper in Germany.

Added to that, Senst is an alumnus of UCT.

"Academic freedom and free speech demand that the other side be allowed to be heard," Gon said. "The opponents have a right to challenge Senst's views, protest against him, and question him, but they shouldn't have the right to have the lecture banned. The fact that some of the signatories are well-known for their antisemitic views suggests that there is more debate needed on campus, not less."

Regarding the Mendelsohn application, she said, "Arendse appealed, *inter alia*, to donors not to pre-empt the outcome of the court action. The problem for UCT is that its

antipathy to Israel has already been a source of dissatisfaction from significant donors. The absence of full debate on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will continue to affect its standing."

David Benatar, emeritus professor of philosophy at UCT, said, "Both these decisions provide further evidence of UCT's disregard for academic freedom and freedom of expression, especially of those who don't toe the institutional line that demonises Israel. The principle of freedom of expression extends not only to those with whom one agrees, but also – and especially – to those with whom one disagrees. The disinclination of Mr Senst is part of a distinct pattern in which those hostile to Israel are routinely given a platform while those not bowing to that narrative are repeatedly silenced or constrained. In taking these decisions, UCT continues its ignominious fall."

Milton Shain, emeritus professor of history at UCT, said, "I'm shocked that the VC's open lecture has been put 'on hold' due to certain stakeholders having reservations about the lecturer and whom he represents and the potential for the lecture to 'polarise' the university community. This means any group can de-platform a speaker whose views, or employer, they find obnoxious. This goes against every tenet of free speech, which is

the life blood of a university. Hopefully this isn't indicative of a return to the suppression of speech under the National Party."

Regarding the Mendelsohn case, "It seems that council didn't apply its mind when accepting these resolutions. What's in the public domain suggests a problem with the deliberations," Shain said. "A court will have to look at the procedures and what was presented to councillors. Arendse may well have a lot to answer for."

South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) spokesperson Rolene Marks said, "The SAZF condemns UCT's decision to oppose the court application by Professor Mendelsohn and other concerned academics. UCT's decision to defend these resolutions is particularly disheartening as they are vague, legally unsound, and dangerously political."

"They restrict UCT academics' ability to collaborate in networks with their international counterparts if research groupings contain an academic from Israel, thus limiting UCT's ability to take place in global research," she said. "The boycotts contravene the very essence of academic freedom and debate, a core value that any university should uphold. We believe UCT should reconsider its decision to defend the resolutions in court, which prioritises political expediency over the integrity of its academic and ethical commitments."

South African Jewish Board of Deputies National Chairperson Professor Karen Milner said putting on hold the Senst lecture was "a fundamental breach of academic freedom and freedom of expression. UCT will be the poorer if it continues to concede to bullying tactics as it isolates itself increasingly from anyone with a worldview that differs even slightly from its own."

Because of his involvement in the case, Mendelsohn said he was unable to comment at this point. UCT spokesperson Elijah Moholola told the *SA Jewish Report* that there were no further updates on the status of the Senst lecture.

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# DA accuses Sandton Drive renaming lobby of fraud

NICOLA MILTZ

The hotly contested proposed renaming of Sandton Drive to "Leila Khaled Drive" has become a national flashpoint, with the Democratic Alliance (DA) taking the matter to Parliament this week.

DA Member of Parliament and Sandton constituency head, Leah Potgieter, decried the public participation process, calling for an independent audit after thousands of allegedly unverifiable petitions were submitted in support of the renaming.

"The DA believes fraud has been committed, and will submit this issue to the relevant government bodies for investigation," said Potgieter.

Ward councillors directly impacted by the proposal to rename the popular Sandton road have requested an independent audit of all submissions made to the community development department which deals with the matter.

Sandton Drive is home to the United States consulate, and is within walking distance of several synagogues and Jewish schools. Khaled, 80, is a member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, a designated terrorist organisation. The renaming is viewed by many as a violation of the city's own renaming policies, which state that naming after a living person should be avoided and a name should promote goodwill and reconciliation, among other things. It's also seen as a waste of money in the face of crumbling city infrastructure. Many say the renaming serves no purpose other than to antagonise significant sections of the community.

The African National Congress (ANC) has thrown its weight behind the name change. The ANC's first deputy secretary general, Nomvula Mokonyane, told colleagues recently that the campaign to change the name must "happen in our lifetime".

"We want the United States of America embassy to change their letterhead to Number 1 Leila Khaled Drive. We are sending a message that they cannot dominate us and tell us what to do. It must be in their face, it must be in their computers, in their letterheads," she said.

In a letter to Johannesburg's Executive Mayor Dada Morero and City Manager Floyd Brink, Sandton ward councillors Martin Williams and Lynda Shackelford said, "It has come to our attention that many thousands of submissions were made on mass-

produced statements bearing name and signature without accompanying critical information as physical address, email address, phone number, identity number, or even date of birth".



Photo: Facebook

Kabelo Gwamanda, former Johannesburg mayor and MMC for community development

They said that the submissions should be considered invalid due to the "lack of traceable details" for signatories.

The DA facilitated more than 5 500 formal objections from residents and local businesses, who oppose renaming Sandton Drive after Khaled, a controversial figure linked to airline hijackings in the 1970s. Pro-Palestinian lobbyists submitted more than 70 000 petitions in favour of the name change, however the DA claims these are invalid.

The surge of petitions from both sides reached the City of Johannesburg following the deadline for public participation on 15 October. However, the DA's opposition and insistence on accountability have injected a powerful voice into the fray, raising questions about transparency and democratic principles in the handling of South Africa's public spaces.

Potgieter voiced her concerns in a session on Tuesday, 29 October, saying that the public participation process, a critical aspect of assessing community impact, had been compromised. She attributed this to the involvement of disgraced former Johannesburg mayor and current member of the mayoral committee (MMC) for community development, Kabelo Gwamanda, who, despite his recent arrest for fraud, played a key role in advancing

the contentious renaming proposal.

Gwamanda, a member of the Al Jama-ah party which holds three out of 270 seats in the council, was placed on special leave with immediate effect following his arrest in connection with a fraudulent funeral insurance scheme. He was arrested on Friday, 18 October, for allegedly swindling Soweto residents in a funeral insurance scam that he ran in 2011 and 2012. He was arrested after a victim of his alleged Ponzi scheme opened a case at the Protea Glen police station in Soweto. He appeared in the Protea Magistrates Court on charges of fraud in connection with the case, and was ordered to pay R2 000 bail. According to reports, an investigation by the Financial Sector Conduct Authority in 2023 found that Gwamanda disappeared in 2012 when his clients came looking for their money. He has previously defended himself against allegations of dubious dealings in connection with his company, the iThemba Lama Afrika funeral scheme.

The protracted road renaming saga dates back to 2018, when now failed mayor Thapelo Amad, then councillor of Al Jama-ah, brought the motion before the council. Amad stepped down as mayor last year on the eve of a motion of no confidence in him. His original motion was seconded by ANC Councillor Eunice Mgcina, who has since become an MMC. In Gwamanda's absence, she has been appointed acting MMC for community development, responsible for overseeing street naming.

According to Potgieter, Gwamanda announced a city-funded event to discuss the renaming just hours before the process deadline, choosing to meet only one interested party. He claimed to have gathered 100 000 submissions supporting the name change, but DA councillors allege that these submissions lack essential details for verification.

Potgieter said an independent audit was essential to maintain the credibility of the process, which was "clearly compromised by an individual already accused of defrauding the people of Johannesburg".

Critics argue that renaming Sandton Drive in honour of Khaled is needlessly provocative. To Israel haters, she represents a freedom fighter, but to others, particularly in the Jewish community, she is seen as a terrorist. Business leaders in Sandton have expressed concern over how the decision will affect the district's reputation. "Our public spaces should unify us, not divide us," stated one Sandton businessman. "The way this process has been handled undermines trust in our local government."

The DA's demand for an independent review has intensified the national spotlight on Johannesburg's approach to politically charged naming issues.

Williams said that the people of Johannesburg deserve a process that respects their voices, not one manipulated by politicians with compromised records.

# Poland's Jewish museum marks first tumultuous decade

SHIRA LI BARTOV – JTA

In the heart of the former Warsaw Ghetto, where Jews were killed and their neighbourhood razed during World War II, a Jewish community has never recovered, but a museum has for a decade drawn visitors to learn about their history.

The Polin Museum is marking 10 years since opening its exhibition about the 1 000-year history of Polish Jews. In that lifespan, it rose to fame as one of the world's leading Jewish museums and a symbol of Poland's long-deferred recognition of its extinguished Jewish past.

But it also faced down challenges from a government ruled by Poland's right-wing nationalist Law and Justice Party, which sought to remove museum leaders seen as too critical of government policies or unwilling to conform with nationalist versions of history. Law and Justice was overturned by a centrist coalition last year.

During a weekend of anniversary programming in late September, nearly 10 000 people passed through the museum.

The hoopla surrounding Polin's 10-year anniversary reflects its impact on Poland, a society that only in recent decades has confronted the history of its Jewish community and the three million Polish Jews killed there under the Nazis.

Before Germany invaded Poland in 1939, Jews made up 10% of the total population, and a majority in many towns. Warsaw was home to more than 350 000 Jews – about 30% of the city.

After the Nazis killed most of Poland's Jews, the country came under decades of communist rule. Soviet authorities suppressed Jewish religious and cultural life and folded the Holocaust into an ideological narrative about the Soviets' total victory over the Nazis. Only in the early 1990s, after the fall of communism, did the idea of the Polin Museum first come into being.

Over 20 years and more than \$100 million later, with the help of wealthy American donors and the Polish government, the Polin Museum opened its core exhibit in October 2014.

The ambition of Polin was distinct from the memorials at Poland's slew of concentration camps and Nazi killing centres: this place called itself a "museum of life".

But the past 10 years have also brought challenges. Between 2015 and 2023, a nationalist-conservative government made controlling history a central part of its platform, promising to revive Poland's pride in its past and eradicate a so-called "pedagogy of shame".

In 2018, the country passed a law that outlawed accusing Poland or the Polish people of complicity

in the Holocaust. Although its penalty has changed – legislators downgraded it from a crime punishable with three years in prison to a civil offense – the law remains in effect.



Photo: STR-NurPhoto via Getty Images

The Polin Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw, Poland

Dariusz Stola, a historian at the Polish Academy of Sciences and the museum's first director, was among the casualties of the government, which accused him of "politicising" the Polin Museum after an exhibition that documented Poland's antisemitic campaign of 1968. Stola was pushed out as the director in 2019.

Still, Stola believes Polin has triumphed in educating the Polish public about the Jewish history in its midst. He pointed out that even those who oppose the museum's contents have been forced to contend with them.



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## South African Jewish Report

The source of quality content, news and insights

### Unbroken global bond

After two weeks of *chaggim* and no newspaper, the SA Jewish Report is filled with depressing news on the home front. Reading this week's newspaper certainly isn't going to inspire celebration, particularly in light of our country's leadership.

Despite this, I find it important to dispel the idea that South African Jewry is in terrible trouble. It isn't. The reality is that antisemitism and hatred for Israel and all who support it is on the rise everywhere. Though there are those who might want us to believe that Jews are in deep trouble here on the southern tip of Africa, that would be a lie.

Being a Jew in London, New York, or Paris isn't better or easier than being one here. In fact, while we have haters and they are ugly – particularly on social media – we live a wonderful life here on the southern tip of Africa. And we have a Jewish community that surpasses any other in the world.

I've just returned from a trip to Europe, which was beautiful. Walking around on foreign turf, wearing a Magen David and chai around my neck, I had several people looking askance, even glaring at me, but nobody addressed me about it. In South Africa, I wear way more Jewish and Israel-supporting paraphernalia without so much as a negative glance.

Over Simchat Torah, I was in Portugal, which has a history of Jews being chased out during the Inquisition or forced to become Christian. Many changed their religion on the surface, but continued to practice Judaism behind closed doors. There are myths that people still light candles on Friday nights and bake plaited breads, thinking it's a national tradition as opposed to Jewish heritage.

On Simchat Torah, we went to shul in Lisbon. It was a wonderful but enlightening experience. First, we had to get advanced clearance to go, which meant filling out forms and sending copies of our passports. This isn't unusual anymore anywhere in the world. Jews must be cautious.

I arrived where I believed the shul to be to find three policemen standing around. Asking if they knew where the shul was, they asked why I wanted to know. I had clearly found the right spot. I turned around to see a huge metal gate that was as high as my eyes could see, with barbed wire on top of it. I could see no shul, that's for sure. But the police alerted someone inside, and out of the gate emerged a large man who proceeded to question us extensively. It felt much like what you would get when someone is suspicious of you before getting onto an El Al flight.

We passed the test, and the gate opened onto a small road with what clearly led to a magnificent old shul standing on the side. The Shaare Tikvah Synagogue was built in 1904, and held all the stateliness of a shul of its stature and age.

As it happens, the rabbi, Ruben Suiza, had been a rabbi in Cape Town before taking on this position. Walking in and telling him we were from South Africa was heartwarming, especially being called "landsmen" (a Yiddish term for a person from the same land/town) so far from home.

Portugal has a Jewish community of about 5 000 to 6 000 people, predominantly living in Lisbon and Porto. Interestingly, there are only a few hundred formal community members in each of those cities.

Being there on the *yahrzeit* of the Simchat Torah massacre felt important, and drew me closer to the women standing nearby upstairs in the shul as the men danced with the *Torot* below us. Despite the inevitable sadness, there was joy in being able to be with other Jewish people and actually dancing after the devastation of the year we have lived through.

I recognised the songs they sang, and sang along. The people even looked familiar, although they weren't people I knew. The environment felt like home, although it wasn't.

My point is that in South Africa, we aren't alone and we certainly aren't isolated in facing antisemitism. We aren't alone in our traditions, and we aren't alone in our religion. We also aren't alone with our *meshugas* (absurdities) or our love of family.

So, as you read the newspaper this week and perhaps feel a bit overwhelmed by the news we write about, know that this isn't just South Africa's problems. We share our problems with the Jewish world. They aren't good problems, but they are ours. And we must never hide under a bushel because we are Jews. Because we are Jews, we can be proud.

We give you the stories and information so that you know about it. We don't hide the truth from you. But instead of feeling depressed and downhearted, don't forget how over the *chaggim*, especially Simchat Torah, our community pulled together.

Unlike me, sitting in Lisbon, each South African shul community did something special to commemorate what happened on Simchat Torah last year. More often than not, it was uplifting. People told stories of survival. People shared information that would help others manage their lives better.

So, Simchat Torah this year in South Africa was a bonding and uplifting experience, albeit a sad one. And every time, I feel the sadness of what has transpired in Israel, to Israel, in the Jewish world, and to Jews, I'm reminded of how resilient and strong we are as a community and as the Jewish world.

So, when people threaten us, they threaten a strong, bonded, powerful, super-smart community of people. It's very difficult to break such bonds. It's when we are at each other's throats and don't stick together that people can break us and get between us. But never if we hold onto each other.

Have you ever tried to break down a wall of bricks bonded with cement, tightly interwoven to be strong and everlasting? It's not easy! We won't be broken.

*Am Yisrael Chai!*

**Shabbat Shalom!**

**Peta Krost**  
Editor



## Jewish voters may help swing US election

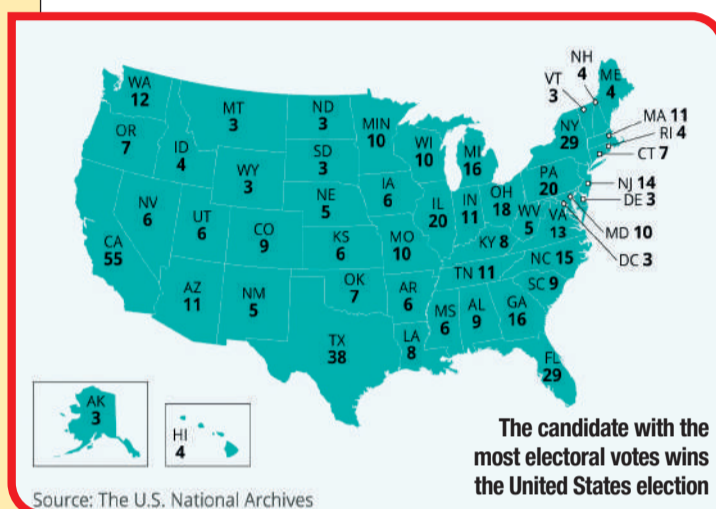
OPINION

J. BROOKS SPECTOR



If the United States elected its president via a national popular vote, discussions of the impact and influence of racial, ethnic, and religious minority groups might not be particularly consequential. However, the nation doesn't elect its national leadership that way. Instead, the presidential election is essentially 50 individual elections – plus the District of Columbia – brought together.

It's important to understand the system. When a candidate wins the popular vote in a state, that candidate gains the state's full electoral vote apportioned on the basis of population, equal to the number of members of Congress of each state. Winning a state by a million votes or just 10 000 means a candidate gets all the electoral votes, except in two small population states. There are a total of 538 electoral votes, and so the candidate who gains at least 270 electoral votes wins the presidency.



Because of this system, minority groups can have real consequences in determining whether a state's electoral votes are gained by a candidate in America's basically two-party system. Religious and ethnic minorities thus may have real weight in hotly contested battleground or swing states.

In this election, these are Pennsylvania, Michigan, Wisconsin, Georgia, North Carolina, Arizona, and Nevada. According to polling in those states, overall, there is close to a 50-50 split among registered voters between Donald Trump and Kamala Harris.

Thus, even small shifts in support among some ethnic groups could have a real impact on the results in those states. Most of the states with significant numbers of Jewish voters – New York; New Jersey; California; Maryland; Illinois; Massachusetts; and Connecticut – are solidly Democratic Party-supporting states. Thus small shifts of support among Jewish voters would have marginal impacts. However, in Pennsylvania, Arizona, and Michigan, with their nearly 50-50 splits and significant Jewish populations, shifts of just a few percentage points among Jewish voters could have a real impact.

Similar circumstances also help explain the potential impact of about 300 000 Muslim- and Arab-Americans in Michigan. Harris's loss there would make her victory that much more difficult, and it might be a bellwether for other swing states. Muslim- and Arab-Americans have, historically, most often voted for the Democratic Party's candidates, and their numbers have grown substantially via immigration in recent years. Crucially, in the past year, the fighting in Gaza and now Lebanon and the ferocity of the Israeli military campaigns, has made the conflict a fiercely contested issue for those voters.

Over the years, Trump has often demonstrated a distain for Arab- and Muslim-American voters and the Muslim world more generally. Further, he continues to offer strong support for Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's policies, tactics, and strategies. Additionally, he has been vocal – particularly to Jewish voters – about his actions to support Israel as the pre-eminent force in the Middle East; his success with the "Abraham Accords"; the relocation of the United States Embassy to Jerusalem; and America's withdrawal from a nuclear accord with Iran.

Meanwhile, however, many Arab- and Muslim-American voters say they feel deeply let down by incumbent President Joe Biden's – and by extension Harris's – support for Israel, along with a seemingly limited ability to change the course of that conflict, to successfully exert pressure on Netanyahu, or to demonstrate substantial support for the increasingly beleaguered residents of Gaza, and now those in southern Lebanon as well.

For nearly a century, Jews have been more loyal to the Democrats than almost any other ethnic minority, save perhaps among African Americans in the south, once they had

secured the right to vote as a result of the Voting Rights Act and the civil rights movement. Jewish voting patterns paralleled other ethnic minority voters in northern cities, especially where machine politics administrations stayed strong.

Among many, perhaps most, American Jews, fighting in the Middle East over the past year has also generated significant consternation, confusion, and fear. For some, the long-held consensus support for Israel has become subject to dispute and despair. Some American Jews have rallied against the Israeli military responses to the events of 7 October, even though support of Israel as a nation with the right to defend itself largely remains.

Among a much smaller group post-7 October, some have rejected supporting Israel, given the policies of the Netanyahu government. And some have joined university and other protests against Israeli military actions. Historically,

there has always been vigorous dialogue among American Jews over whether their allegiance to America is unconditional, or if some degree of support must adhere to Israel as well. Some ultra-conservative religious communities embrace the view that Israel is a secular entity and not the promised messianic state of prayer and tradition.

Nevertheless, the allegiance of a majority of American Jews to the Democrats remains, despite some reservations that there may be a shift by Harris away from unwavering support for Israel.

New survey data from the Pew Research Center – the respected attitude survey organisation – from August 2024 says,

"Harris currently has the backing of roughly two-thirds or more registered voters in various other religious groups: 86% of black Protestants; 85% of atheists; 78% of agnostics; 65% of Hispanic Catholics; [and] 65% of Jewish voters."

That latter figure is apparently somewhat below the top levels for Jewish voters in some past elections, but not dramatically so, and remains close to support levels from Jewish voters when Biden was still the candidate.

On the core electoral issues, Pew says, "Certain issues are highly important to voters regardless of religious group. For instance, at least six-in-10 registered voters in every religious group say the economy will be very important in their voting decision. And half or more in almost every religious group say the same about health care, Supreme Court appointments, and foreign policy. About six-in-10 agnostics (62%); Jewish voters (59%); and black Protestants (57%) also say abortion will be very important in deciding how to vote this fall."

A report issued by the Jewish Electorate Institute (JEI) two months before the 7 October attack found that "Jewish voters remain focused on the cultural issues that divide the country: democracy, abortion, and guns, in addition to inflation and climate change. Abortion continues to be a defining issue among Jewish voters, with 88% believing it should be legal, and 80% concerned that women no longer have the constitutional right to abortion. Jewish voters also prioritise inflation and climate change."

Said the JEI, "In a polarised political environment that divides the country, Jewish voters continue to be firmly entrenched in the Democratic camp. Biden has high job approval [67%], Trump is reviled [19% favourable/80% unfavourable], other Republican leaders are also viewed very negatively, Democrats are far more trusted on all major issues, and Biden leads Trump 72-22 in a presidential match-up."

Even before the 7 October attack and Israel's response, the survey noted though most Jewish voters "still feel emotionally attached to Israel [72%] they also hold seriously negative views about Netanyahu [28% favourable/62% unfavourable]". That support may well have fallen further by now.

If one were to make any prediction, the most important votes by Jewish Americans will be those cast in the suburbs near the big cities of swing states like Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Arizona. We'll know soon enough what they choose.

• J. Brooks Spector settled in Johannesburg after a career as an American diplomat in Africa and East Asia. He has taught at the University of the Witwatersrand, been a consultant for an international nongovernmental organisation, run a Johannesburg theatre, and been a commentator for South African and international print/broadcast/online media. Spector has also been a Bradlow Fellow of the South African Institute of International Affairs and a writing fellow of the University of Johannesburg's Institute for Advanced Studies.

# Sukkot, Sinwar, and Simchat Torah

OPINION

ROLENE MARKS



Sukkot took on a new meaning and significance this year in Israel and around the world



Photo: Chabad.org

In Kfar Aza, there are still sukkot that stand. A silent, mournful testimony to the families that will no longer occupy them or are alive to take them down. They also stand as a defiant reminder to the latest generation of Amalek who wish to destroy us: you may murder, burn, rape, kidnap, and mutilate, but we will still stand, proud of who we are, rooted in our beliefs and our traditions. They are a symbol of our survival and resilience in the darkest times. Sukkot still stand in the other towns and communities whose once vibrant life was brought to a standstill that Black Saturday.

This year, Israelis approached Sukkot, a time of joy, with great trepidation. How could we celebrate when we still live under the constant clouds of war and when 101 remain captive in the terror tunnels of Gaza? We also knew that we had to celebrate because not to do so would mean that Hamas had dominion over our joy in our ancient customs. The sukkot went up, this time decorated with the names and faces of the hostages and yellow ribbons in solidarity.

On the first day of Sukkot, the rumours started. A terrorist bearing a striking resemblance to Yahya Sinwar had been eliminated. Israelis held their collective breath. Was it him? Dental records that matched his distinctive teeth and his DNA, which was on record in Israel from his prior incarceration, confirmed it a little later. The "Butcher of Khan Younis" and mastermind of the 7 October atrocity was dead. The now iconic photograph of his body lying in the rubble, bullet wound to the head, surrounded by soldiers of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), was beamed around the world.

Footage of him sitting in an armchair, significantly wounded, throwing a plank at an IDF drone showed a man alone, his bodyguards either eliminated or fled. Sinwar was eliminated in Rafah, a part of the Gaza Strip where Israel was cautioned by its allied partners not to enter. Once again, the Jewish state has proven that we understand our enemy and how to fight it better than our Western allies.

Israelis greeted the news with cautious celebration, thinking first of the 101 hostages and what the death of Sinwar would mean for them. It's no secret that Sinwar was the major obstacle to any deal that would result in the release of hostages. Hostage families welcomed news of Sinwar's death and expressed their belief that with him removed, the time was ripe for a deal. It's believed that Sinwar left explicit instructions for Hamas not to negotiate, but as negotiations resumed this week, it's hoped that there may be some positive movement despite the terror organisation saying that its terms are clear. It wants a full withdrawal of IDF troops from the Gaza Strip.

The circumstances surrounding his death were poetic justice. The monster who prepared to murder and kidnap Israelis on the last day of Sukkot last year, was himself eliminated on the first day of Sukkot. The IDF soldiers who rid the world of this arch terrorist weren't from an elite unit on a special mission, they were soldiers from the Bismach Unit, responsible for the training of all Infantry Corps squad commanders and platoon sergeants. They were on a routine patrol in the Tel Sultan area of Rafah. Justice had been served on behalf of the thousands of Israelis who were victims of Sinwar's murderous activities and thousands of Palestinians tortured and killed by the "butcher" and his henchmen.

What does Sinwar's demise mean for Hamas? Hamas is now without a central commander and co-ordinator, but is still operational across the Gaza Strip. Sinwar's death has also created a vacuum for a new leader. Will it be his brother, Mohammed Sinwar, or Khaled Mashal, living a billionaire's life in Doha? Whoever it's likely to be, they are a target for Israel. IDF troops are still engaged in intense combat with Hamas, albeit in counterinsurgency operations. In past days, hundreds of Hamas fighters have been captured or surrendered.

It's written that to everything there is a season. A time to mourn, and a time for joy, a time for war, and a time to make peace. Approaching the first Simchat Torah in the shadow of 7 October was profoundly difficult. We went back to that sunny Saturday morning when our lives were forever changed. Not to celebrate Simchat Torah would give Hamas final dominion over us and so, with broken hearts, Israelis held aloft Torahs across the country and danced. We danced for them. We danced for us. This was followed by another day of mourning to coincide with the Hebrew date, but not to rob us of our joy. The Torah has sustained us through centuries, and it did so again on

Simchat Torah.

A few months ago, I wrote about the *dvash v' ha oketz* (the honey and the sting). As we continue to navigate the difficulties and the pain that comes with being a country enduring a war, we take the wins. In those times when we feel that the pain is overwhelming, we take strength from what has sustained the Jewish people throughout our history.

• 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.



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# Why UNRWA's words will harm peace prospects



FLEUR HASSAN-NAHOUM

OPINION

The Israeli government's decision to ban UNRWA (the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) from operating in Israel is not an act of petty revenge for its involvement in the massacres of 7 October. It's a considered response to decades of toxic indoctrination in its schools and institutions, in East Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria, and in Gaza, that keeps the Palestinian people in a perpetual state of victimhood and takes us further away from any potential peaceful resolution.

For years, I have sought to amplify the work of experts on the topic of UNRWA's curriculum of incitement that attempts to turn hatred for Jews and the Jewish state into an education



UNRWA has now been banned from operating in Israel

Photo: UNRWA Facebook page

of whom participated in the rampage of rape, torture, murder, and kidnapping that ignited the current war in Gaza.

Besides instigating the terror that we are living through right now, light is being shed on UNRWA's role in perpetuating the conflict since the organisation's inception in 1949, by keeping the Palestinians permanent refugees and instilling destructive philosophies in an entire population. Finally, countries who fund UNRWA are beginning to wake up to the reality of where their money has been going, and are one by one saying, "Enough!"

I spend the majority of my time these days thinking about words: how to phrase mine properly in defence and promotion of Israel in international media; the hateful words spewed by antisemites across the globe; and the great subversion of words that once had meaning, such as "genocide" and "apartheid". I'm alert, especially now, to the power of words: the impact they can have on others, and the damage they can cause.

Brazil's President Lula da Silva was recently in the news for hateful words comparing Israelis to Nazis and our war of defence in Gaza to the Holocaust. He was right to identify in this conflict some of the same elements of hate that enabled the systematic annihilation of Europe's Jews, but he was mistaken in identifying who really has taken up Hitler's ideas and lust for genocide – Hamas and its proxies – and where it originates.

Hitler's ideas grew from words on paper to a full-fledged Holocaust in which six million Jews were methodically killed. Similarly, we must acknowledge that the UNRWA curriculum's indoctrination of children to hate Jews, which begins with simple words on the page of a textbook, has led to violence against Jews that should make anyone with common decency nauseous.

It's not only in Gaza that words are being used as weapons of incitement against Jews via UNRWA's curriculum of hate, but here in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria (the West Bank). The Palestinian Authority and UNRWA provide education for children in East Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and Gaza.

Unfortunately, rather than providing an education that focuses on the core subjects needed to succeed in life, the education system is used to indoctrinate its young people at the most impressionable ages. It teaches them that their neighbours stole their land, inciting hatred against the state of Israel, the Israeli people, and the Jewish people. The Palestinian Authority's mosques, media, and education system poison the impressionable minds of Palestinian children. UNRWA's mission has evolved into the demand for the right of return of the descendants of Palestinian refugees in perpetuity, a guarantee that the conflict will never be solved.

Last year, even UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini acknowledged the antisemitism in Palestinian Authority textbooks. "We largely agree with

the conclusion – antisemitism, intolerance. Absolutely, these are the issues identified by UNRWA."

Before the recent pledges to defund or pause funding for UNRWA from several factions, the European Parliament passed a resolution targeting UNRWA for teaching "hate speech and violence" in its schools, harshly criticising the education material that incites and teaches antisemitism. The body has threatened that unless changes are made to the "hate speech, antisemitism, and incitement to violence in Palestinian Authority and UNRWA textbooks", it will end its funding. Though at the time, the European Union, the body that actually provides the funding, refused to condemn or reduce funding to the agency, it announced in January 2024 through the European Commission that it would be investigating claims against UNRWA before contributing further.

In textbooks published by the UNRWA and the Palestinian Authority, students are indoctrinated to "defend the motherland with blood"; taught that Israelis are "Satan's aides"; and to solve maths problems using martyrs (i.e. terrorists) who killed innocent Israelis.

The biased education system, coupled with the disinformation and antisemitism shared on social media, creates an atmosphere in which Palestinian children are taught to hate rather than work toward peace and acceptance. Social media is the lifeblood of "Generation Z".

Social media is a dangerous place where falsehoods spread like wildfire. Between social media and the current Palestinian Authority curriculum, there's very little chance of convincing Palestinian children why peace and coexistence are the best possible outcomes for our communities.

Words are more powerful than we often think, and when hateful words are used to teach such young people, it leads to violence that has taken so many lives. The books used to teach young Palestinian children are calls to action, destabilising the region and providing a roadblock to peace.

Every child deserves the right to an unbiased education, as education should be used to develop a person's intellectual capacity rather than as a way to push a violent political agenda and teach that the best they can do with their potential is to martyr themselves for the cause. Many psychologists would call this child abuse.

If we are to usher in a new reality for the region after this war, ending indoctrination of hatred against Israel and Jewish people should be top priority for those countries who want to see a better future for Israelis and Palestinians.

• *Fleur Hassan-Nahoum, the deputy mayor of Jerusalem and a prominent figure of Palestinian descent, advocates for unity and cooperation among the city's diverse communities. Since the onset of the Gaza war, she has condemned Hamas and called for peace, highlighting the importance of maintaining diplomatic relationships in the Middle East.*

## Holocaust distortion in sights of renowned Nazi hunter

ELKA COHEN

Dr Ephraim Zuroff, chief Nazi hunter for the past 38 years, announced recently that he was stepping down from his position as director of the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Jerusalem, but told the *SA Jewish Report* he would continue to tackle Holocaust distortion and fight antisemitism.

This renowned American-born Israeli Holocaust historian's career in Nazi-hunting began when he joined the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles in 1978. "Shortly after joining, I convinced them that they needed a researcher in Israel because Israel was the biggest repository of World War II documents and information with the largest number of Holocaust survivors. So, I got the job," he says.

His tall, imposing frame is mitigated by a warm, impassioned energy as he details timelines, recalls records, names, dates, statistics, and facts like a human time machine.

Because Nazi war criminal legislation didn't exist in many countries, Zuroff played a pivotal role in locating and helping bring to justice the worst suspected Nazi criminals around the world, convincing foreign governments to pass laws enabling their prosecution. His efforts influenced the passing of special laws in Canada (1987), Australia (1989), and Great Britain (1991). His research uncovered the postwar escape of several thousand suspected Nazi war criminals to Australia, Canada, Great Britain, New Zealand, and other countries.

"Governments around the world have taken legal steps against at least 50 war criminals," says Zuroff. Perpetrators who fled must be held accountable before ill-health or death can save them from facing rightful punishment, he says.

Operation Last Chance, spearheaded by Zuroff, is a vast public project active in more than a dozen countries that focuses on tracking down ex-Nazis still in hiding. So far, it has helped to locate and investigate more than 520 names of previously unknown suspects in 24 different countries, leading to numerous convictions and prosecutions, including that of Sobibor death

camp guard John Demjanjuk in Germany, as well as 101-year-old Josef Schütze, who helped murder thousands of Sachsenhausen concentration camp inmates. Although most Nazi war criminals and collaborators are nearing the end of their lifetimes "late justice is still justice", says Zuroff. Hence the operation's name.

"The one I'm most proud of is the prosecution of Dinko Šakić, who was the commandant of Jasenovac, one of the most horrific camps in World War II," he says.

Zuroff was internationally recognised for his role in the arrest, extradition, and prosecution of Šakić, who was extradited from Argentina, prosecuted in Croatia, and sentenced to 20 years in prison. The particulars of his crimes against civilians included

in maths and history.

Since 7 October, it has become clear that past calls to defund UNRWA weren't alarmist. Indeed, the terror curriculum in the classroom translates

directly into terror in the street, with roughly 1 200 UNRWA social workers, teachers, and other employees having already been proven to be Hamas-affiliated terrorists, a portion

ordering executions, torturing and inhumanely treating civilians, intimidation, collective punishment, forced labour, and starvation of detainees at the Jasenovac concentration camp.

Another smaller yet notable research project directed by Zuroff involved identifying Nazi war criminals who were still receiving special disability pensions from the German government, which resulted in the cancellation of pensions of about 100 individuals who "violated the norms of humanity".

Zuroff has kept an account of his life's work in four published books, which have been translated into 15 languages. The most recent of which is *Our People: Discovering Lithuania's Hidden Holocaust*, co-authored by Lithuanian journalist Rūta Vanagaitė. The book offers a powerful examination of the genocidal murder of Lithuanian Jews by their own countrymen during World War II.

"I've been tackling Holocaust distortion primarily among countries in Eastern Europe who made the transition from communism to democracy. They created a false narrative as to what happened in their countries during the *Shoah* by trying to hide the significant role of their nationals in the mass murder of Jews. Particularly horrifying statistics come straight out of Lithuania," says Zuroff.

"Of the 220 000 Jews living in Lithuania under Nazi occupation, 96.4% of them were murdered – shot near their homes – by their neighbours. These war criminals remain heroes in their home countries to this day, perceived as having fought communism rather than having been vicious Nazis."

Zuroff's personal ties to South Africa come through his father's family roots in Lithuania, who escaped during this time. While his father sought refuge in the United States, two uncles came to South Africa. He often visits the country as his wife, too, is an ex-South African Israeli.

"People are wasting their time looking to say that what happened on 7 October is precedence for the *Shoah*," Zuroff says about Israel today. "This isn't the *Shoah*, it will never be. Not every war crime is a case of genocide. It's a terrible pogrom, and it is horrendous in terms of the people who were murdered, the people who fought and fell, and those who are still on the frontlines. But we must remember two cases in history in which criminals pulled off a huge attack not realising that the tragedy they engineered was the beginning of the end for them: Pearl Harbor and the Twin Towers – both ultimately ended with the death and persecution of the perpetrators."

There's no way to compromise with Hamas, he says. "It's a fundamentalist organisation seeking our destruction and we have to keep fighting and doing whatever we can to obliterate fundamentalist Islam. We need hope and perseverance because there are no easy victories, especially in the Middle East."

In recognition of his life-long commitment as a Holocaust scholar and Nazi hunter, Zuroff has been awarded many times by both the Serbian and Russian governments, including a nomination by the Serbian president for the Nobel Peace Prize.

However, life hasn't necessarily played out as he planned as a youngster. "My fantasy growing up was to be the first Orthodox Jew to play in the NBA [National Basketball Association]" he says. "I knew I wanted to make history rather than just learn about it, but the truth is I wasn't a good enough basketball player."



Dr Ephraim Zuroff



# Social media platforms failing to moderate online hate

STEVEN GRUZD

As the world enters its second year since the murderous Hamas attack on Israel on 7 October 2023, the oldest hatred is alive and well in cyberspace. A new scorecard by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) shows that social media platforms consistently fail to moderate and remove antisemitic conspiracy theories and posts using "Zionist" as a slur.

The ADL's Center for Technology and Society evaluated both policy and enforcement around antisemitism from five online providers. The worst culprit is X (formerly Twitter), which scored an "F" and didn't remove hateful content; Facebook and TikTok were each awarded a "C"; YouTube and Instagram received a "C-minus". The SA Jewish Report spoke to South African antisemitism experts about these findings.

Jonathan Greenblatt, ADL chief executive and national director, said, "In the aftermath of the unprecedented Hamas attack on Israel on 7 October, Jewish users are encountering more antisemitic slurs and harassment on social media than ever before. It's not hard to detect this hate, but it takes leadership to enforce the rules consistently."

The United States-based ADL found that while all the platforms, bar X, had anti-hate policies, they were poorly enforced when it came to antisemitism. The study revealed that most platforms took some action only when the ADL escalated the reports through direct channels as "trusted flaggers", a recourse unavailable to ordinary users. Even then, actions by the social media firms were uneven and disappointing.

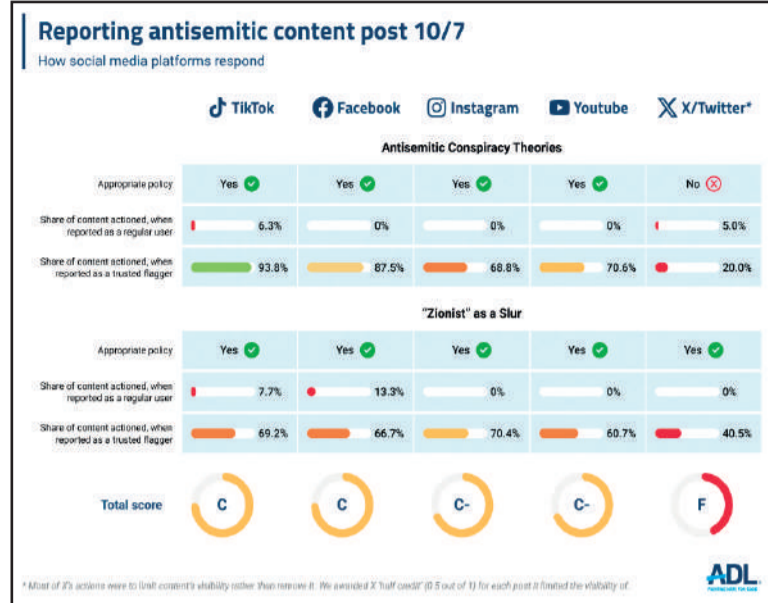
Milton Shain, emeritus professor of historical studies at the University of Cape Town (UCT), said, "It doesn't come as a surprise to read a study that confirms the dramatic explosion of Jew hatred on social platforms. Sometimes this hatred lives below the radar; at other times it

emerges. Ideal breathing space was given on 7 October. Zionism as an ideology has been mangled over decades, and Israel's delegitimisation orchestrated with great effect. Needless to say, its oxygen is Jew hatred. Anti-Zionism is now a hygienic form of antisemitism. More disturbing, however, is the poor management of hate on social platforms. These have become a boon for haters of all stripes. Something needs to be done. The ADL is suggesting the way forward. It's to be commended." Shain's latest book, *Fascists, Fabricators and Fantasists: Antisemitism in South Africa from 1948 to the Present*, was published by Jacana Media in 2023.

"The ADL's findings accord with our own experience," said Adam Mendelsohn, a professor at UCT and the director of the Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies. "The approach that different platforms take to content moderation is opaque, and the quality of moderation is patchy at best. Even when reported, platforms are often slow or reluctant to respond, and then show poor judgement in determining what's unacceptable. Unfortunately, social media platforms profit from heated discussion and controversy among their users – this drives traffic – and are reluctant to invest adequately in tackling hate speech."

Professor Karen Milner, the chairperson of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD), concurs. "Antisemitic tropes, misinformation, and outright lies are nothing new when it comes to Jew hatred," she said. "Going back to blood libels and the bogus *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, such lies have been manufactured and used against Jews for hundreds of years. We would expect better of technology companies in the 21st century, however. Social media companies have an obligation to ensure that they aren't a platform for blatant lies and hate speech. I commend the ADL for doing this work."

"The communications revolution resulting from the social media phenomenon has also provided



unprecedented opportunities for bigots to disseminate hateful content with minimal effort and at no cost to a global audience," Milner said. "Antisemitism of every stripe are thriving in this environment, using the wide variety of platforms available to revile, defame, and often incite actual harm against Jews without hindrance and with complete impunity. Although the various social media platforms at least theoretically have in place codes of conduct to prevent this kind of abuse, in the experience of the SAJBD, these rules are in practice infrequently and inconsistently enforced, allowing much or even most of the offending content to appear uncensored. Moreover, even when formal complaints are submitted, in practice either nothing is done or when action is taken, it's only after lengthy delays.

"What's further making it all but impossible to effectively address online antisemitism is the fact that the abusers of these platforms are able to operate with complete anonymity, which the companies concerned steadfastly refuse to betray even in cases involving incitement to antisemitic violence. Added to that is the

ease with which users can simply create new profiles in those rare cases where their original accounts have been closed. Ultimately, if the social media platforms concerned are truly serious about curbing online hatred, their modus operandi needs a serious overhaul."

Tali Nates, the director of the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre (JHGC) said, "After a few years of research, at the end of 2022, the JHGC together with

KAS [Konrad Adenauer Stiftung] Media Africa and the Kaplan Centre at UCT, published important research on the 'Dynamics of Racism, Antisemitism and Xenophobia on Social Media in South Africa', available on the JHGC website. Continued research is being conducted on antisemitism post-7 October. As an education institute, it's of great importance to translate the data into actual educational programmes for learners and educators. Together with other partners, we're developing a toolkit for teachers to be able to sensitise the youth to heighten their awareness to hate speech and disinformation. Such education is even more essential now than before."

Recommendations for the platforms by the ADL included improving user reporting, fixing the gap between policy and enforcement, reviewing reported content in context, and following emerging trends and adversarial shifts over time.

Users of any social media that find content to be objectionable must use the online reporting channels at their disposal. Sunlight is the best disinfectant. Expose the lies, and pressure the platforms to remove them.

## No way to run from Nova

OPINION

SASHA STAROGRAD



Once the first few waves of shock and nausea had passed, I began receiving messages that read, "Thank G-d you weren't there!"

Though I'm far from the only one to receive a message like that, I guess the chance that I might have been at the Nova festival was higher than others.

seen as barriers, and you are encouraged to be exactly who you are.

Thus, the chance that I would have been in the wrong place at the wrong time that fateful October morning was higher than others.

And yet, even now, I question what I would have done if I had been there.

I wouldn't have managed to run into an underground shelter. I wouldn't have been able to make myself as small as possible to hide behind some structure. I wouldn't have even been able to play dead on the ground in the hope that I might be overlooked by the cold-blooded murders with darkness in their veins.

Those far smarter and more capable than me did all those things, and weren't spared.

They happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time – at a music festival where diversity is embraced, where music is a common language, and where someone in a wheelchair doesn't feel like an outsider.

While every one of us has probably thought about what they would have done had it been them, I know it could well have been me. I know I wouldn't have been able to hide, and I know that I would have been seen by those callous monsters as a liability.

It serves as a brutal reminder that those filled with such cruelty couldn't care less about nationality; religion; race; age; parental status; or physical ability.

People still tell me that the possibility of me being at Nova was one of their initial thoughts, despite the fact that I was 7 000km away at the time. It's a place where I would have felt embraced, where I would have danced enthusiastically because I was just like everybody else who was at the wrong place at the wrong time.

• *Sasha Starograd is a radio, television, and print journalist. Her "driven" personality and consistent curiosity means that despite being in a wheelchair, she's often too busy to sit down.*



Photo: Ilan Ossendyver

### The site of the Nova festival

I had only recently returned from a three-month trip to Israel, where my heart had most certainly remained behind. Having grown up in a country where accessibility is an afterthought to the afterthought, Israel's purposely-built plethora of ramps, wheelchair-friendly transport, and consistent curb-cuts served as a balm to those like myself who have felt forgotten about in an "ableist" world. I've often said that being in Israel was the first time in my life that I had felt like a completely regular, accepted member of society, as opposed to the typical frustration of being "othered".

And I love music festivals. Yes, I, in my battery-powered wheelchair, love festivals.

I love the experience of freedom that festivals so often possess – dancing because the music vibrates within you, and singing with strangers who you may never see again but who in that moment are both the recipient and source of your energy. It's about connecting with others who share a passion, where differences aren't

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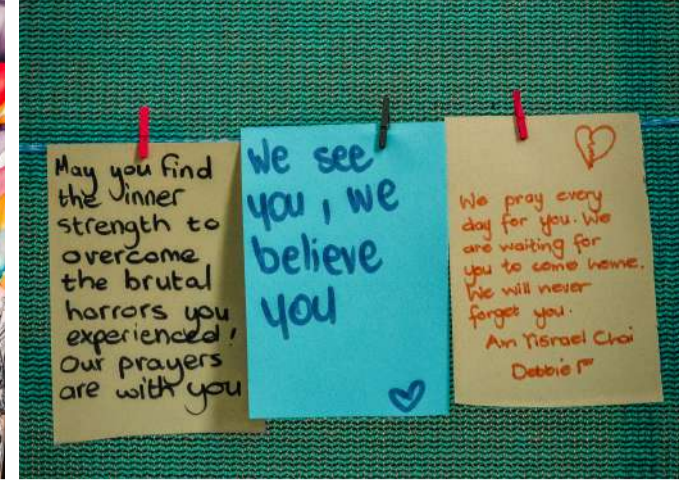
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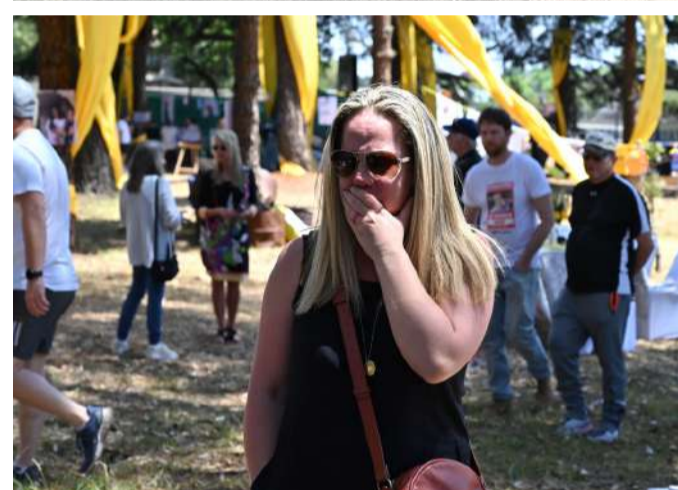
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### October 7 Square Brings Unity to South African Jewry

To mark the one-year anniversary of the darkest day for Jews since the Shoah, the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) created October 7 Square. Held over three days in Johannesburg's Great Park Forest and attracting thousands of visitors, the Square was a place for the community to reflect, grieve, and find hope and healing in unity.



**The Power of Remembrance**  
October 7 Square, modelled on Hostage Square in Tel Aviv, included re-creations of Kfar Aza, the Nova car graveyard, 37 teddy bears representing child hostages, as well as places visitors were able to listen to recordings of sexual violence survivor testimonies. At the memory tree, children painted pebbles to remember the loss. Community members expressed the overwhelming significance of the Square.



**"We finally had a place to mourn... It was so healing and important,"**

**A Platform for Truth and Hope**  
The SAJBD also used this platform to counter false narratives that have ignored the brutal reality of Hamas's attacks on October 7. A well-attended press conference for leading media outlets was hosted to share untold stories and offer a clear picture of the events of October 7.

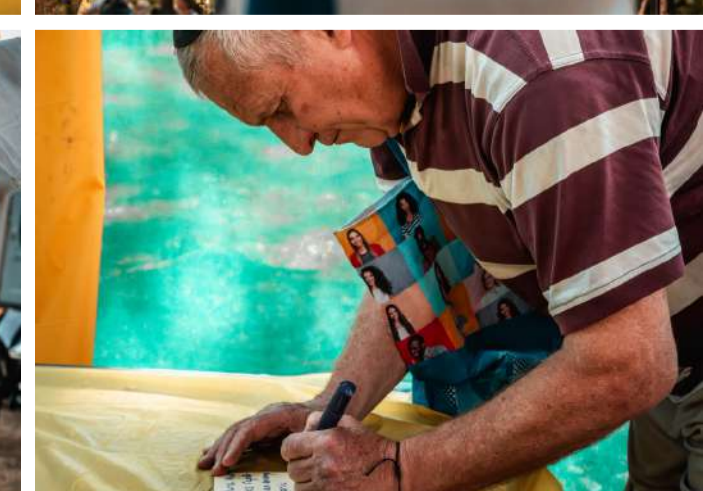


### Beyond remembrance, the Square fostered unity, with attendees standing in solidarity, singing Acheinu following a protest outside

The event brought together people of all ages and backgrounds, offering a space for healing and strength during a difficult time. As one visitor expressed, "The memorial was really beautiful. It broke my heart, but something else that I noticed was the strong and powerful optimism of the messaging. Hope, love and peace - despite all the pain."



Select exhibits from October 7 Square will be on display at Beychad during November and December 2024. To arrange a viewing, please contact Roseanne at [sajbd@sajbd.org](mailto:sajbd@sajbd.org)



October 7 unleashed a wave of Jew hate internationally, including a 600% rise in recorded incidents in South Africa.

# The tricky art of co-parenting after divorce

GILLIAN KLAWSKY

Communication, problem-solving, flexibility, decision-making, trust. Ironically, when it comes to divorce or separation, the elements that most likely tore your relationship apart are the ones that underpin effective co-parenting.

Yet there are ways to establish these pillars even in the most acrimonious of splits, said counselling psychologist Dr Ronel Duchon. Duchon discussed positive co-parenting at a talk hosted by Chevrah Kadisha Community Social Services at the David Lopatie Conference Centre on 25 September.

However, Duchon, a mediation and forensics specialist renowned for her work in the field of divorce and children, acknowledged the difficulties that come with co-parenting after a divorce or break-up.

"Usually, the reason why a relationship or marriage doesn't continue is because there's a problem with communication," she said. "There isn't the capacity to make a plan, to get that communication going, and to sort things out one way or another."

Yet, she said, the Children's Act compels co-parents to make decisions together. It says that with all major decisions in a child's life, be it around education, medical care, and so on, parents must give due consideration to each other's views and wishes and to those of the child.

"Many relationships break down because of a violation of trust in one way or another, and it's so easy then to think, 'I can't trust this person,'" Duchon said. "Yet, if we can't trust them as a partner, it doesn't necessarily mean that we can't trust them as a co-parent."

Prioritising the child's needs is vital. "Shift your focus off the two of you, and onto the

best interests of the children, which is what really matters in these situations," Duchon said.

Divorce or separation is never clear cut, especially because in many cases, there are still feelings involved, positive and negative, Duchon said. "It's not that you just flick the switch and you go from all to nothing. There's a level of discomfort that comes with the mixed feelings parents have for one another."

relationship cannot continue, and there must be clarity about that.

Even with clarity, feelings can become overwhelming in the process of a split, especially when new partners enter the equation, so aiming for consistency is key, she said. "Find a way to create a space that you can put in between you, realise how far you want your relationship to go with one another, and keep that fairly consistent. The goal is to be able to be neutral when you

Even within the happiest of relationships, differences in parenting style can cause discord, and this is naturally amplified should the couple separate. "The parenting relationship, which must continue even when you split up, is now difficult because there isn't agreement about how to deal with the children," said Duchon. The consequence is that you create two different worlds for the child, which can be damaging.

child, co-parents also need to accept that they cannot control everything that goes on in the other home, Duchon said. There can be numerous reasons why children act out when they're transferred to the other parent's home, so keep in touch with what may be causing concerning behaviour.

"It's so much easier to see somebody else's mistakes than to see your own," said Duchon. "You need to focus on creating the best possible home environment and being the best possible parent when your child is with you."

"Families work as a system, and when children act out of sorts, each person in the system plays a role in creating that anxiety," Duchon said. "This means that everybody must work together in getting the child settled. It's not necessarily a problem that lies on the other side of the fence."

Though flexibility is important, there has to be a clear plan in place in terms of the co-parenting arrangement, she said. "The removal of uncertainty out of interactions and plans is valuable. If everybody knows what's happening, everybody will be calmer and deal with things better."

Understanding your child is also key, Duchon said. "It's not just about looking for the problem between the two of you as parents and blaming one another, sometimes it's understanding that a problem may lie with the child." Children today experience high levels of anxiety. Parents must be cognisant of that and of deeper childhood issues that may arise.

"You have to find a strategy to make joint decisions," Duchon said. "If your communication is just slightly off balance, you need to tweak it and establish clear ground rules, which can fix many issues. Remember, each child deserves to have a sense of family."



**Divorced parents need to work hard to establish a strong co-parenting relationship**

The most volatility between couples in her practice emanates because of residual feelings and a lack of clarity around the relationship. "It creates a level of inconsistency that's incompatible with trying to create a co-parenting relationship," she said. "That's because the premise of a co-parenting relationship is that you drop the personal relationship and sustain a co-parenting and a financial relationship." If you're lucky, you can sustain some form of friendship, yet the intimate-partner

engage with one another, but one has to find that level of resolution within yourself and between one another in order to get that done." Consistency builds trust.

You need to be willing to work on yourself in line with this goal. "One person can, to a certain extent, take the lead and define the distance between themselves and their ex. If one person stays steady, the other can try and move up and down, but the manoeuvring space is quite limited," she said.

children. It's about saying, 'Let's just find a way that's effective, and let's both try and buy into that and move it forward.'

You need to realise how the other parent operates. If they're impulsive and change their mind later, factor that into the co-parenting relationship to limit disagreements. Knowing what to expect from your ex-partner in terms of behaviour and being sensitive to that can help to promote understanding and limit conflict.

Unless there's a real threat of harm to the

## Game on at school as eSports go mainstream

OPINION

KEVIN LEES



When you think of gaming, the first image that might come to mind is a greasy-haired adolescent, slumped over in his oversized wingback chair, surrounded by chocolate wrappers, crisps packets, and Red Bull cans, all in a darkened bedroom. If so, think again. While you were sleeping, the video game industry has exploded, and is now bigger than the movie industry and North American sports combined! Gaming, now called eSports, has gone mainstream, and our schools need to get with the program(mers).

Gone are the days when parents rolled their eyes at sullen teenagers asking, "Do you think you can play video games for the rest of your life?" The burgeoning industry has opened up careers in coaching; coding; marketing; and journalism. There's a need for casters; stream producers; video game commentators; eSports managers; cybersecurity experts; programmers; developers; and much more. Team Liquid, one of the most successful professional eSports teams, has won more than \$48 million (R849 million) in prize money, proving that eSports can offer lucrative salaries for top players. But beyond the players themselves, the industry surrounding eSports is booming, creating jobs for a variety of roles that support the games, teams, and events.

Beyond a focus on future employment opportunities, eSports offers a dynamic educational

tool that opens pathways to develop critical skills. The fact is that a broad range of skills are developed through eSports. It develops critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, and communication. It's not just about playing video games in isolation or endlessly honing reflexes. eSports requires teamwork, communication, and strategic co-ordination, skills that are just as vital in the workplace as they are on the digital battlefield. Competitive games like those used in eSports demand that players work together,

solve problems, and make split-second decisions, much like traditional sports. In fact, many professional eSports teams live and practise together, emphasising collaboration, communication, and trust. These are precisely the skills schools aim to cultivate in students, so why not do it through a medium that students are already passionate about? The idea that gaming is a solitary activity is also outdated. A *Washington Post* and University

of Massachusetts Lowell poll from 2018 found that more than half of teens and young adults play or watch games with friends they know from other activities. eSports programmes in schools can bring students together side by side during practice and competitions, just like any other sports team.

One of the most powerful aspects of eSports is its inclusivity. In eSports, no-one is defined by their gender, race, or physical size; everyone competes on an equal footing. This allows students who might

not fit into traditional sports or social groups to find a place where they belong. For students who struggle to make face-to-face connections, eSports can provide an opportunity to be part of a team, fostering a sense of belonging and community within their school. It's also a diverse and vibrant space that encourages students to celebrate each other's achievements in something they're all passionate about.

eSports has been part of youth culture for decades, and schools in Europe have already embraced eSports programmes, leveraging them as a tool for learning and skill development. It's time for our schools to recognise its potential as a tool for engagement. For students who are less interested in traditional sport or classroom activities, eSports can be a way to stimulate massive student interest and engagement and interest in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) fields.

A frequent criticism of eSports is that it's not a "real" sport. Though it's true that eSports don't involve physical endurance in the same way as traditional sports, they still demand intense training, discipline, and mental acuity. Professional eSports players often train for hours a day, honing their hand-eye co-ordination, quick decision-making, and strategic thinking. They face high-stress situations and must perform under pressure, skills that translate directly into real-world challenges. Additionally, many professional players integrate physical exercise into their routines to maintain stamina and prevent the physical strain that can come with long hours of gaming. Just like traditional athletes, eSports players must balance their mental and physical health to perform at their best. And just like traditional sports, eSports teach students the value of discipline, perseverance, and teamwork, essential life skills that will serve them well beyond their gaming careers.

Another criticism is that video games and excessive screen time lead to increased aggression

while the games themselves are often violent and may promote and lead to violence. The latter claim has, in fact, been refuted in a massive study by Oxford University. Nevertheless, schools should be careful not to offer games meant for older users – M (mature)-rated – and should exercise discretion based on their particular values. On the subject of safety, students should be taught guidelines and protocols to follow when interacting with people they don't know personally, and supervision should be a given.

When it comes to regulating screen time, this is the challenge of the age. Screens are an inevitable part of our lives, and we all need to be role models for effective time management, teaching children how to juggle school, homework, physical training, nutrition, and gaming. Ultimately, a player's effectiveness comes down to how well he or she can focus during a game, so shorter bursts of play are actually in the players' best interests. It's also only at professional level that players spend all day on the screen.

As schools seek new ways to engage students and prepare them for the future, eSports offers a compelling solution. Offering students the opportunity to be part of something bigger than themselves, whether through gaming, competition, or community building, is an investment in their personal, academic, and professional growth. In today's digital world, that's an investment worth making.

King David Primary School Victory Park is excited to be the first Jewish school in Johannesburg to open a state-of-the-art eSports lab. The school offers a tour to find out more. Contact 011 446 7870 or vanstadena@sabje.co.za

• Kevin Lees is head of school at King David Primary School Victory Park.



**The eSports lab at King David Victory Park**

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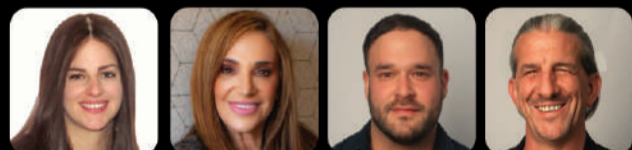
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TO GIVE. TO LOVE. TO LIVE.

# Pro-Hamas editors insert anti-Israel bias into Wikipedia

LEE TANKLE

A large, powerful group of pro-Hamas editors is using Wikipedia as a tool to delegitimise and demonise Israel and the Jewish people by systematically changing and omitting things in its articles.

This was exposed by Ashley Rindsberg on Pirate Wires, an online media company reporting on the intersection of technology, politics, and culture, on 24 October. He explained that these editors were “hijacking Wikipedia, pushing pro-Palestinian propaganda by erasing key facts about Hamas, and reshaping the narrative around Israel with alarming influence”.

Rindsberg said that the co-ordinated campaign was led by about 40 veteran Wikipedia editors and a Discord channel of 8 000 editors called Tech For Palestine.

He said that it had been happening for years, as Wikipedia is a platform that prides itself on the fact that it's free for anyone to use. However, since 7 October 2023, there had been more of a concerted effort to distort the narrative through the website.

In the welcoming message to the 8 000-strong Discord channel, Tech For Palestine, Wikipedia Collaboration, poses, “Why Wikipedia? It is a widely accessed resource and its content influences public perception.”

One member of this channel questioned the veracity of reports on sexual violence by Hamas on 7 October, and added to Wikipedia articles about the rape committed by Hamas on 7 October false claims that Israeli soldiers raped Palestinians.

Rolene Marks, a Middle East commentator and the spokesperson for the South African Zionist Federation, said, “It's no secret that well-coordinated groups have infiltrated everywhere, school systems, university campuses, and Wikipedia is no exception. And we know that there are at least 40 different groups that have managed to hijack the narrative on Israel by editing Wikipedia articles.”

Marks said it worried her that “the editors have revised Jewish history, are changing the definitions of Jewish events, changing definitions of things like Zionism, and engaging in Holocaust revisionism. They are also erasing Hamas's history, Hamas's charter, and definitions. They have erased the fact that Hamas has called for the extermination of the Jewish people.”

Rindsberg said one member of these groups, with the username Iskandar323, removed mention of Hamas's 1988 charter which calls for the killing of Jews and the destruction of Israel from the Wikipedia article on Hamas. That same user also removed 22 000 characters from the article on Amnesty International that was critical of the organisation, ultimately deleting a 1 000-word passage related to criticism of its stance on Israel.

This user also deleted a paragraph critical of the Iranian government, and removed an account of 16th-century Jewish immigration to Israel from an article about the history of Israel.

These editors are getting away with it because they use their know-how about Wikipedia to co-ordinate efforts without raising any red flags. They work in small clusters, and on their own, the edits can seem minimal.

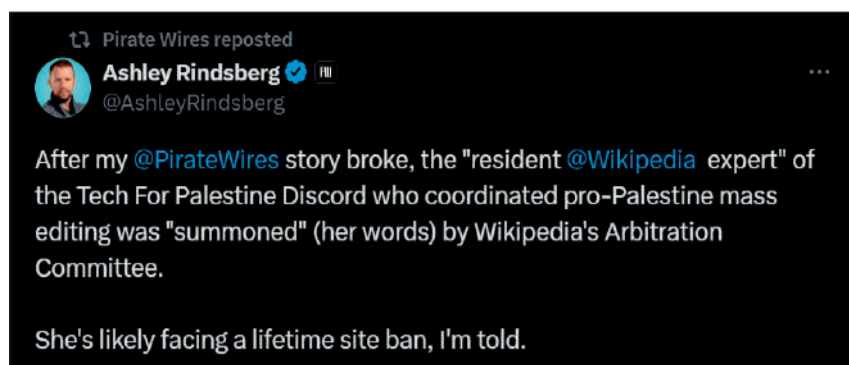
Said Gus Silber, a journalist and the author of books covering South African socio-political satire, innovation in business, entrepreneurship, and technology, “Wikipedia is a hugely active community of people which instantly notices changes and bias in articles, and then will correct them because Wikipedia is, by its nature and its mission, a crowdsourced encyclopaedia which technically means that anybody can edit and therefore anybody can impose a specific view on articles. But the way Wikipedia works is that viewpoints are quickly noticed and subject to being changed and revised by people with opposing ideological viewpoints.”

Said Marks, “We live in a time when people don't read books, they don't do proper research, they don't go to proper resources, they use platforms like Wikipedia, like TikTok to learn, and we certainly see the ramifications on our streets. They don't take information from credible sources, rather from the easiest they find available. And it's causing real problems. We see it with the proliferation of antisemitism, which very often ends in violence. And we're seeing it with massive misinformation and disinformation campaigns. We're fighting a war not just on the kinetic battlefield, but in the information battlefield, and Wikipedia has been weaponised by Israel's enemies and the enemies of the West as an information weapon against us.”

For example, if one were to type “Zionism” into the search bar on Wikipedia, aside from the main article on Zionism, the auto-fill returns as “Zionism as Settler Colonialism”; “Zionism in the Age of Dictators”, a book written by a pro-Palestinian Lenni Brenner; “Zionism from the standpoints of its victims”; and “Racism in Israel”.

The edits made to these articles have enabled many of Wikipedia's most fundamental policies to be violated. “Wikipedia has what's meant to be a very strict policy called neutral point of view [NPOV], that particularly applies to any kind of information that may be subject to ideological bias in one direction or another,” said Silber. “But NPOV, of course, is subject to a lot of disclaimers because the reality is that people will impose their points of view on articles. So, in effect, what's happening and what very often happens in conflict scenarios or politically contentious scenarios is that Wikipedia becomes a battleground of ideas, and a neutral point of view very much becomes a biased point of view.”

There have been various attempts



by users to submit cases of false information to Wikipedia's arbitration committee, made up of 12 volunteers.

“Wikipedia is quite an idealistic venture,” Silber said. “It's meant to be a democratic way for people to access unbiased information, but the reality is that this doesn't happen. It's important not to take Wikipedia articles at face value,

to be savvy enough to be able to recognise instantly when they're being misinformed and when Wikipedia's policy of neutrality is in effect being violated,” Silber said.

However, for journalist and adjunct professor of journalism at the University of the Witwatersrand, Anton Harber, “the narrative around Israel-

but to delve into them as fields of active and contested information.

“People who use Wikipedia need to educate themselves

Palestine has changed, so you would expect this to be played out in contestation over how it is represented on Wikipedia. Wikipedia is crowdsourced, so it's going to be a site of narrative struggle at a time like this. Those who don't like the changes can engage and make their changes, or hold the editors to account for their accuracy. But it's important to realise that it will inevitably reflect changes in the way the world sees Israel. Even Israel's closest allies are questioning its conduct, so it will inevitably be reflected in media such as Wikipedia.”

For Silber, “The only way to counter misinformation on Wikipedia is to use the power of Wikipedia, which is the crowdsourced power, to correct and to edit.”

## Honouring ‘ordinary’ Czechs who saved Jews

LEE TANKLE

“In today's world, shining a light on those who risked their lives to save others is important,” said Tali Nates, the director of the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre at the opening of the temporary The Righteous Among the Nations exhibition.

Many of those honoured in this exhibition at the centre, which opened on 29 September and is running until January 2025, were ordinary people who risked their lives to save other ordinary people and haven't received acknowledgement or recognition before. The exhibition, in collaboration with the embassy of the Czech Republic in South Africa and Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, focuses on 17 of the 30 000 righteous among the nations.

It homes in on ordinary people doing extraordinary things, no matter how many they were able to save from certain death at the hands of the Nazis, according to Nates. It also walks us through the history of the *Shoah*, tells the stories of those who risked their lives, and provides local responses to the persecution of Jews in Europe.

Dr Zuzana Pavlovská, Prague's Jewish Museum's head of education and culture department, said that in her years of researching the role of rescuers in World War II, many of those who today are revered as righteous among the nations “were just ordinary people who never spoke of what they did”.

“That's why it's not easy to trace these people,” Pavlovská said. “I believe many are still not known. This exhibition represents a selection of those who have never before been honoured. They just helped when help was needed.”

Pavlovská told the story of Přemysl Pitter, a Protestant preacher, writer, social worker, and pacifist who founded Milíč House, which secretly became a centre of support for persecuted Jewish families in Prague during World War II. Pitter provided families with food and other necessary items. After the war ended, he organised Operation Castles, in which he and his colleagues provided health and social care for surviving children from German concentration camps as well as those from Czech internment camps. He saved 810 children, and was recognised by Yad Vashem in 1964.

She also spoke of Milena Jesenská, a Czech journalist and writer, who was also one of novelist Franz Kafka's girlfriends. When a flood of Jews fled to Prague in 1938, she and her friend, Count Joachim von Zedtwitz, convinced their Jewish friends to escape to Poland and head west. She and Zedtwitz devised an escape route in order to smuggle out their Jewish compatriots. She housed Jewish refugees in her apartment in Prague, and helped many escape to England. Jesenská was arrested on 11 November 1939 and was sent to Ravensbrück concentration camp. She died there on 17 May 1944, three days before D-Day. She was recognised as a righteous among the nations in 1944.

Then there was Vladimír Vochoč, who served as Czechoslovakia's consular official in Marseilles between 1938 and 1941. Pavlovská said Vochoč helped hundreds of French Jews escape from France

by providing them with Czech passports. Vochoč later ignored the request from the German consul general in Marseille for the consulate to be handed over to the Germans, and instead joined the Czechoslovak resistance.

Between 1938 and 1941, he enabled hundreds of Jews to escape from France by providing them with Czechoslovak passports. His actions were linked to a rescue operation organised by United States journalist Varian Fry. While Vochoč issued a passport to anyone proposed by Fry, Fry financed the printing of the false documents. They are believed to have saved about 2 500 people. By issuing passports, Vochoč enabled several thousand refugees to escape via Spain and Portugal.



Prague's Jewish Museum's head of education and culture Dr Zuzana Pavlovská, Czech Ambassador Tomáš Uličný, and director of the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre Tali Nates

In December 1949, he was dismissed from the service of the foreign affairs minister in Prague but continued issuing documents to provide practical support for refugees with all kinds of daily needs. He was recognised as a righteous among the nations in 2016.

Pavlovská went on to say that people who became righteous among the nations were from so many backgrounds, ranging from

psychiatrists to farmers to circus performers to lawyers and diplomats, reformed thieves, teachers, foresters, postal workers, and so much more. They lived all over Europe, not just in Germany, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Hungary, but also Denmark and Greece. Many of them were imprisoned for their selfless acts, and often died in concentration camps.

One such person was Antonín Kalina, a pre-war member of the Communist Party. Kalina was arrested by the Nazis in September 1939, and was incarcerated for six years in Dachau and Buchenwald. He found all sorts of ways to make life easier for prisoners and save them from certain death. He oversaw a special barricade for Jewish children and youth in Buchenwald in 1944, where he became the block 66 elder. He did all he could to have children between the ages of four and 18 placed there.

Kalina went to extraordinary lengths to ensure the children's survival. With the help of another prisoner, Jindřich Flusser, he changed the boys' Jewish names to Christian ones and told them never to say they were Jewish. He provided them with beds, blankets, clothes, and above all, better food. With the help of many other prisoners, he managed to save the lives of more than 900 children. He was recognised as a righteous among the nations in 2012.

Czech Ambassador Tomáš Uličný said at the event, “We sometimes overlook those who risked their lives to protect others from arrest, deportation, and death in concentration camps. This exhibition honours the brave Czech men and women who stood on the right side of history during a time of terror and injustice. Their courage has been remembered through the right wisdom of the nations.”

Uličný said their legacy continued in the Czech Republic, and mentioned a personal connection to them. He lives near a small village in the South Moravian region where Oskar Schindler had his factory, through which he was able to save 1 000 Jewish men, women, and children.

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# The kindest eyes – a tribute to Lionel Slier

TRIBUTE

PAULA SLIER



This is the most difficult thing I've ever had to write. There's so much to say, and then there's nothing really, except, "I love you."

My sister, Hayley, and I were holding our dear father's hands as he took his last breath.

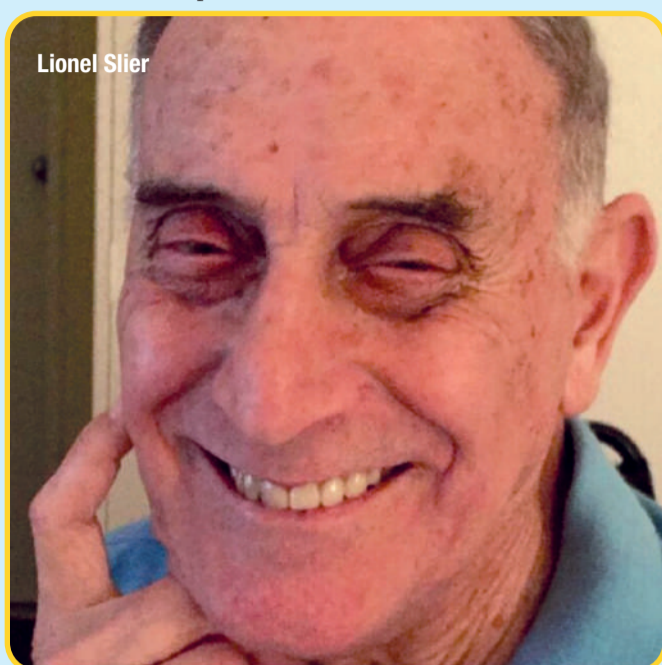
My brother, Jack, was pacing the room, and we were softly singing *Adon Olam*, which ends with the words, "With my soul, my body too, the Lord is with me, I shall not fear."

Our dad, whose full name was Leo Lionel Slier, had held on for days, waiting for Hayley to arrive from London. His eyes were closed, his breathing was laboured, and he was on oxygen, but he heard our anxious pleas and was able to squeeze my sister's hand one last time when she told him how much she loved him. And no sooner did we tell him he could go, than he left us.

Our precious, darling father, about whom no-one ever said a bad word, died on the first day of Sukkot. There's a Jewish belief that those who die during the holy days are "tzaddiks", people of true righteousness. He was one of them!

My father was born and lived most of his life in Johannesburg. I asked him years ago where he'd prefer to be buried – Israel or Johannesburg. In his usual wit, he replied, "Johannesburg", as his friends, family, and community were buried there, and "I know

more people in Westpark cemetery, than out," he chuckled. He would've been genuinely surprised, and touched, at how many people came to his funeral, bearing in mind that at 93 years old, most of his contemporaries had passed on.



Lionel Slier

My father drew up a resume for people to introduce him whenever he gave one of his delightful speeches, often about the "Ochberg orphans", of which his mother was one, or about his popular column in the *SA Jewish Report*, *Community Buzz*. He listed among his achievements getting chosen for the Balfour Park Under-10 soccer team, and wearing a jersey when it was cold "just like my mother told me to".

He was a diamond polisher by trade, taking after his father, Itzhak, who had come to South

Africa from Holland with his brother, Andries, in 1925. They had been waiting for visas for America when they were recruited by South Africans who convinced them they "spoke the same language". My grandfather opened one of the first diamond cutting factories in South Africa, Amsterdam Diamond Cutting Works, around 1926.

Later, my grandfather's brother, Andries, returned to Amsterdam and was one of 119 Sliers – direct family – murdered by the Nazis. This affected my father deeply, and he instilled in us a deep respect and appreciation for personal and Jewish history.

He often spoke, and wrote, about the Jews of Holland, the Holocaust, and his mother's story, which was also remarkable. Born Sara Altuska, she and her siblings were among 177 Jewish orphans rescued in 1921 by a Ukrainian Jewish philanthropist, Isaac Ochberg, and brought to South Africa. We travelled twice to her home town of Brest in Belarus and when I asked my father what she'd think of us being there, he'd say, "*Meshuga*, for sure!"

Dad was a historian and a writer, and in later years, he turned his attention to these two pursuits and became actively involved in the South African Jewish community. He wrote regularly for the *SA Jewish Report*, the South African Jewish Board of Deputies' *Jewish Affairs* journal, the *Jerusalem Post*, and the *Sunday Times*. He loved answering the question about whether I, as his daughter, had inherited my journalism from him. He'd always chuckle and insist that no, he got it from me!

For many years, he served as the chairperson of the Zionist Luncheon Club at Our Parents' Home, a position he insisted he was elected to only because he'd missed the

meeting to vote against his appointment. He loved Israel and his favourite place, from where there is a beautiful panoramic view of Jerusalem, was the Montefiore Windmill in the Mishkenot Sha'ananim neighbourhood. What I would give to have just one more moment there with him, to look into the kindest eyes I've ever known and tell him I love him!

I finally understand why we sit *shiva*. It has been comforting to hear stories and receive emails and WhatsApps about the memories people have of our father. He was one of the good guys. He had an amazing ability to connect with people from all walks of life, from the car guards at Pick n Pay in Norwood who would rush to help him with his groceries, to the security guards outside our favourite restaurant, who would fist-punch him as he'd arrive, sitting in a wheelchair with a cap pulled low, declaring that "backup" was here!

My sister writes, "The loss of my daddy is so earth shattering and monumental, that I look at the trees and wonder how they are still standing. The thought of never being able to hold his beautiful hand or look into his kind eyes or share a joke with him is so gut wrenching and just so unbelievably sad. My dad and I shared so many private jokes between us, so many little private sayings and actions that only we understood, and now I have no-one to share those with, who will understand the way my daddy and I did."

Our father always thanked us for choosing him as our father. It's us who must thank him for the privilege of being his children. Rest in peace, darling dad, until we meet again. • Paula Slier is a former columnist for the SA Jewish Report.

## Innocence lost: Bak's art depicts childhood in Holocaust

LEE TANKLE

"Our world is composed of broken things, with bruises, cracks, and missing parts, but we must learn to live with it." These are the words of Lithuanian Jewish artist Samuel Bak, whose work depicts the horrors of the Holocaust he witnessed in his childhood in Lithuania and at a displaced persons camp.

"His work must also be remembered in the context of the hatred that we can see in the world today, particularly after the attacks Hamas carried out against the people of Israel on 7 October 2023," said Lithuanian ambassador to South Africa, Rasa Janaukaitė, at the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre at an event showcasing the artist's life on 14 October.

"His thought-provoking pages reflect the deep form of his experience during the Holocaust. He challenges us to remember the past while urging us to keep hope," Janaukaitė said.

Author of *Art and Life: The Story of Samuel Bak*, Dr Ute Ben Yosef

Bak, who has family living in Cape Town and visited the country a few years ago, was born in Vilna in 1933, just as Adolf Hitler came to power. In Lithuania in 1941, there were 41 000 Jews. By the end of the war in 1945, only 2 000 remained in four small labour camps.

A book detailing his life in the context of his

art, *Art and Life: The Story of Samuel Bak*, was launched at the event. The author, South African art historian Dr Ute Ben Yosef, described Bak as "the greatest contemporary artist of our time".

Said Ben Yosef, "The Bak family were secular Jews, intellectuals, inventors, artists, realists, and dreamers. Each of them worshipped little Samech, their child prodigy, who twisted them all around his little finger. They sheltered him from the storm clouds that began engulfing the Jewish wilderness, and they all helped nurture his artistic gift."

Bak was eight years old when his childhood ended. His family was forcibly removed from their home, and sent to the Vilna Ghetto. It was then that his artistic talent was first recognised. A painting of his was displayed in an exhibition in the ghetto when he was nine.

In a painting titled *Interruptions*, Bak depicts the loss of innocence and childhood with a teddy bear, a soccer ball, and a little hoop.

All of his grandparents were murdered in Ponary Forest outside Vilna. Bak's father was taken to a labour camp, where Bak and his mother joined him after being kicked out of a Benedictine convent where they had stayed for eight months.

Said Ben Yosef, "The living conditions in the camp were terrible. Sam witnessed terrible things like the gruesome hanging of a family of three – mother, father, and son – who tried to run away. They were hanged in a sadistic way.

"But life in this camp went on. Children played. They started playing Nazis and Jews, perpetrators and victims. Then, on 27 March 1944, trucks entered the camp. Whistles blew. The inmates were ordered to bring their children to an assembly for vaccination. His mother was

about to join the crowd when a friend pulled them into a corridor and they hid him in a storeroom filled with burlap sacks. And then the sound of machine guns exploded. It dispersed with pistol shots. It was a *Kinderaktion*."

Ben Yosef said Bak depicts this time in his life through images of teddy bears, showing the loss of innocence and childhood that many like him experienced.

"The trauma of these days, filled with the naked fear of death, never left him," Ben Yosef said.

In many paintings, he depicts bandaged teddy bears representing the murdered children, chess pieces representing the tenuous insecurity of the Jewish pawns whose lives depended on chance, flightless birds and angels, and broken china representing destroyed lives. Bak's trees are cut away from the ground, unwilling to be rooted in the blood-soaked Ponary Forest. There are crematoria chimneys, broken tablets of the law, with bullet holes through the sixth commandment – "Thou shalt not kill." There are representations of the yellow star Bak was forced to wear, crumbling shtetl ruins, distorted Magen Davids, Shabbat candles, and shtetl houses on boats of stone unable to sail in the sea of indifference.

Similarly, in many of his paintings, Bak depicts the famous image of a young boy with his hands held up in surrender taken out of the Warsaw Ghetto. "This became Bak's prototype for all children that lived through the Holocaust," Ben Yosef said.



Procession by Samuel Bak

Bak and his mother escaped the camp by being smuggled out in potato sacks on his father's back. They were able to find refuge in the same Benedictine convent.

Three days before Vilna was liberated in 1944, Bak's father was shot dead.

After liberation, Bak and his mother stayed in a displaced persons camp in Munich. It was in this camp that for the first time, Bak was able to get an art education and further his artistic skills.

Said Ben Yosef, "He received a scholarship to study at the Bezalel School of Arts and Crafts under professors who had been famous artists. In 1956, he went to Paris to study art at the École des Mosaics. He needed to acquire the visual language of modern art.

"In Paris, he absorbed the *zeitgeist* of first-world Europe," Ben Yosef said. "In his art, he was able to release a hidden power, combining the style of old-world Europe and the modern day. In the years since, he has continued to draw inspiration from his childhood and Jewish upbringing."

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# Levitan chess prodigy seals SA's World Cup spot

SAUL KAMIONSKY

Fourteen-year-old chess star Caleb Levitan kept his cool with all eyes on him for more than five hours in a high-pressured Olympiad match in Budapest in September to seal South Africa's spot at next year's Chess World Cup.

This Grade 8 King David Linksfield (KDL) student is now playing in Serbia before heading off to Singapore in November. A KDL Facebook post about his Olympiad triumph went viral and caught the eye of the International Chess Federation (FIDE), in particular the chief executive of FIDE, Emil Sutovsky. Caleb was subsequently invited to go to Singapore to watch the World Championship match, receive grandmaster training, and play in a grandmaster event.

Caleb found himself the focus of the action at the Olympiad as he played in South Africa's crucial final match. South Africa was 2-1 up, and needed Caleb to at least draw the match to secure the country a ticket to next year's World Cup.

Caleb had huge pressure on him. "Everyone was waiting outside with bated breath to see what was going to happen," said his dad, Shaun. "He fought hard." His opposing country, Nicaragua, was in a similar position, needing to at least get a draw out of the match. "The game went on for more than five hours. Caleb's opponent was much more senior, more experienced, and he had all eyes on him. In the end, I think time pressure and stress made the opponent make a mistake, and Caleb capitalised on it, winning the game, which meant that South Africa won the match 3-1. There was great euphoria and relief from his teammates."

Caleb's performance at the Olympiad helped South Africa finish as one of the top 80 teams and earn the team the right to send someone to the Chess World Cup next year. "Caleb was the youngest South African to ever participate in the Olympiad, and he did really well for his first time and for his age," Shaun said.

Caleb and his twin brother, Judah, are now playing in the Serbian League, in which chess clubs play against each other. "He is part of one of the teams, and so is Judah," Shaun said. "They just completed an event where Caleb achieved his second international master norm. You need three norms to become an international master, and you need to get your FIDE rating to 2 400.

"Caleb has a live rating of 2 278. Judah has a live rating of 2 100. Judah is also strong. He has the candidate master title."

In November, Caleb's attention will turn to Singapore, where he will receive special grandmaster training conducted by some of the world's top grandmasters such as Belarusian-Israeli Boris Gelfand.

Caleb will also play in the Singapore International Open, "an incredibly strong grandmaster

event", said Shaun. "It's by far the strongest event that Caleb would have played outside of the Olympiad, but the Olympiad is a team event, this is an individual event. It's another opportunity for Caleb to show where he stands and gain experience. A lot of what South Africa misses isn't necessarily talent but exposure to these very strong events.

"He can be seen by countries outside of Africa. These opportunities don't normally go the way of Africa, let alone South Africa. It's just amazing for Caleb to have caught the eye of FIDE. Hopefully, he can take the opportunity that has been given to him and build on it."



Caleb Levitan

While in Singapore, Caleb will watch the World Championship match between Ding Liren of China and Gukesh Dommaraju of India. "The winner of those series of games will be the next world chess champion. Liren is the current champion, so he might retain the title of champion or hand it over," Shaun said.

What propels the Levitan twins along their chess journey is the fact they have each other along for the ride, Shaun said. "They both still love chess, and they have each other for companionship. If only one of them loved chess, it could be to the detriment of the other.

"They're both missing a lot of school. They're missing family, but

they have their brother, one of their closest friends, with them. Whether it's jokes or experiencing life or new things, you've kind of got a ready friend next to you. Imagine being able to have a close friend who you get to go and see parts of the world with that you've never seen before," Shaun said. "For example, they are currently by Lake Palić, a beautiful lake in the middle of Serbia. It's an amazing journey that these boys are having, which is unique for any South African and probably unique for any South African chess player.

"They will miss a couple of exams while in Singapore. They will write those exams online, jet-lagged, in a different time zone after a full day of grandmaster training. They might be exhausted, but that's just the balance that they are trying to seek, having this experience but still having some responsibility for their academics. The school has been incredibly supportive in allowing that."

## Jewish table tennis stars shine at SA championship

SAUL KAMIONSKY

Two brothers and an old table tennis hack were among several Jewish table tennis stars who won medals at the South African Table Tennis Championships at Brixton Sports Hall in Johannesburg from 21 to 29 September.

All the medallists play at the JusTT table tennis club in Sandringham, Johannesburg, and got the better of players from across the country in various categories.

Veteran player Rainer Sztab, self-described as "an old hack at this game", won gold in the over 60s team event, and got a bronze as losing semi-finalist in the over 50s individual category.

"The veterans are a tough crowd, very competitive," says the 64-year-old Sztab, who has a Maccabi Games silver medal, and ran Maccabi table tennis for many years.

Naftali Kavonic, playing in the Under-15 age group, won gold in the team event; silver in the Under-15 doubles event with his brother, Levi; and bronze in the Under-15 singles event. "I also played in the Under-19 age group, and made it to the quarter finals," Naftali says. "It felt like I achieved something great." The tournament was "really fun" for him, he says. "I made lots of new friends. It's nice to see how people play from other cities."

Levi, playing in the Under-13 age group, won bronze in the team event in addition to his doubles silver. "It felt amazing! They were the first medals I had ever won," he says, describing the tournament as "really exciting".

"It got really intense as well," Levi says. "I enjoyed getting to know the other players."

Amichai Asulin, who won a gold medal, says, "Winning was an incredible feeling, knowing that all my hard work and dedication has paid off."

Tevia Sapire, who won a gold medal in the

team category, played in the men's team, men's doubles, men's mixed doubles, and men's singles. "I'm proud of the team for its strong performance," he says. "I didn't play in the final team match, but the atmosphere was great, and it was a well fought match."

To qualify for the championships, Sapire's team played at provincial team trials, which were highly contested with many players in the top 10 in the country. "I came fourth at the trials, which I was happy with, considering the competition," he says.

Judit Sassu, who played in the over 40 and over 50 women's categories, crowned a remarkable return to the sport by winning a silver and two bronze medals at the championships, at which she also coached the Under-11 boys.



Levi and Naftali Kavonic with their medals at the South African Table Tennis Championships last month

Sassu won the SA Championships Under-17 women's singles and doubles events in 1986 before giving up table tennis that year and returning to the sport only a year ago. "I was finally ready to come back to the sport," she says. "For 24 years, I was a junior league coach at Highlands Park Football Club. That took a lot of my time, especially coaching two teams."

Leading up to the championships, Sassu

played up to three or four times a week. "I've never been to such a big tournament as these championships. It was awesome to win two bronzes and a silver. The tournament was well attended. It was quite an interesting tournament because there were bad storms in Durban, so a lot of the games were delayed."

At the championships, "There was no-one I played against who I used to play against when I was in my juniors," Sassu says. "None of those players are around anymore. But there were are many women youngsters."

Sassu, however, plans to play for as long as she can.

Sztab, who has about seven veteran national titles to his name, says, "Table tennis is a sport you can compete in regardless of how old you are. If you go to the world events, they have an over 90s category."

During his table tennis journey, Sapire has been a part of the gold medal team at the national championships team event a few times. "I've also been in the South African junior and senior national team for two African championships, and have won the university games singles title."

He got into table tennis while playing on holiday in the games room with his family. "I fell in love with the sport and became addicted to improving," he says.

Sapire hopes one day to win the SA Championships singles title.

Levi says it's nice to have a brother who also plays table tennis because they get to practice together and help each other improve. "It's helpful," Naftali says, "because I don't always have to go and train at our club because we have a table at home and Levi and I can just practice with each other and train before tournaments."

The Kavonic brothers got into table tennis when they were stuck at home during the COVID-19 pandemic. "We've always had a table at home, and our dad bought us really nice bats, so we started playing a lot. We found out about JusTT, which was near our house, so we started going for lessons."

While Naftali aspires to make the South African team and play in the Maccabi Games, Levi's ambition is closer to home. "My goal is to beat my brother," he says.

# Nothing to be gained from silence about antisemitism

We had big dreams back then. We were filled with hope, glitter, love, and rainbows. It was the 1990s. The transition from the apartheid regime to a Mandela's African National Congress (ANC) proved that we were more similar than we were different, and that despite our painful past, the Freedom Charter, the sparkling Constitution, and more than a few good men (and women) would lead us to prosperity.

We saw the good in each other back then. And when we didn't, we chose to remain silent, because there developed an unwritten social contract that offered a quid pro quo: much of the ugliness of years prior would be ignored in exchange for some latitude in terms of the behaviour of our newly elected politicians.

The deal worked well for a time. Until it didn't.

Today, the rainbow is all but gone. The skies have turned grey, the wind of mistrust is blowing, and similarities are harder to find. The level of trust for the ANC from the perspective of the South African Jewish community is arguably at its lowest point.

It didn't start in October 2023, but that's when it became clear just how much the community was despised. Not only has the ANC remained unmoved by the murder, rape, and kidnapping of Jews, it has actively tried to curtail Israel from acting against the perpetrators. Not only did the ANC ignore the plight of a nation attacked for being Jewish, but without shame, it mourned the deaths of the "martyrs" Ismail Haniyeh, Yahya Sinwar, and Hassan Nasrallah, the architects and leaders of the collective death cult. Together with Jew hater Ronnie Kasrils, who celebrated 7 October, and Arab Barghouti, they gathered to "honour" them for giving their lives for the "people of Palestine".

The social contract between the ANC and the Jewish community, for whatever it was worth, burned in the flames of 7 October. And yet, for some reason, the community continues to honour the terms.

In a conversation with a friend about the appalling tweets of Professor Shabir Madhi at the University of the Witwatersrand, he asked me if I thought it was wise to call them out publicly and "give them oxygen".

The question was a valid one.

There's a well-known principle in marketing that negative press should be removed off the front page as quickly as possible, and that there's little value in promoting someone else's cause. That said, when a man of his stature and power is allowed, unhindered, to repeat the vile messaging of the professor's feed, that

## INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



gives him all the oxygen he needs. When News24 leads with an article that names a Jewish family and links its son to a unit in the Israel Defense Forces that it alleges is problematic, then not challenging the platform teaches it that there are no consequences for its "doxing".

The ANC didn't start courting Hamas in 2023. Its relationship was well established when Dr Naledi Pandor called Hamas immediately following its attack – and before Israel responded – to offer support. We clearly erred in our treatment of the ANC by not calling out its anti-Jewish behaviour until then. Because left unimpeded, it allowed themselves to be wooed and loved by the worst that the world has to offer.

And yet we seem to be applying the same approach to media, public figures, companies, and organisations. There's no social contract that demands that we accept antisemitism in any form. And nothing to be gained by remaining silent in the face of it.

This is war of small steps. Anti-Israel comments on an industry or professional WhatsApp group that aren't challenged will result in this becoming the norm. A biased statement by an organisation will lead to open antisemitism, and not challenging our press, government, or professors will create an environment that's not sustainable.

There are many in the South African community who are standing up and calling out antisemitism. But there are also many who could but aren't doing so. Many who have the strength, the respect, and power, but who choose, for various reasons, "not to give them oxygen". Many who mistakenly believe that this is a Jewish thing, and that being Jewish themselves, they need to consider if it's appropriate.

The answer is that it's not "appropriate". It's essential. A society that allows antisemitism bodes poorly for the future. And an environment that scapegoats Jews never succeeds.

Antisemitism needs to be called out and addressed as soon as it appears. Those who are silent need to find their voices. And those who have been seated need to stand up. It can be ugly and unpleasant. But we have been doing this for thousands of years. It will come back quicker than you think.

It's time for us to adopt zero tolerance for Jew hatred. We didn't ask for this. But it's time for us to answer.

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

# The mask has slipped

The first *yahrzeit* for more than 1 200 victims of the attacks on 7 October has just passed. It's a moment that stands stark in our consciousness as we try once again to contemplate the enormity of pain that so many families in Israel suffered this Simchat Torah. I pray for our hostages to be returned and for the creation of peace across the land, so that both sides can begin the difficult and painful healing process.

Unfortunately, in South Africa, there's no compassion for Jewish loss of life among the African National Congress (ANC) elite as well as a number of public figures whose roles as healers and helpers of those in need should have taught them better. Indeed, Professor Shabir Madhi, from the medical school at the University of the Witwatersrand, and Imtiaz Sooliman, Gift of the Givers, have made deeply problematic statements and social media posts that go way beyond support for Palestinians and empathy for the plight of Gazans, and instead have descended to hate-filled rhetoric that does nothing to promote a path to peace.

We're concerned about the way in which the mask has slipped for many in South Africa away from a pro-Palestinian stance towards full throated support for Hamas. An ANC branch event commemorating the deaths of Yahya Sinwar, Hassan Nasrallah, and Ismail Haniyeh being a case in point.

Bizarrely, comparisons between Sinwar and Nelson Mandela have been made, comparing a man who dedicated his life to freedom and reconciliation to a man who dedicated his life to rape, the murder of Palestinians who opposed him, and the wholesale slaughter of innocents. The moniker "Butcher of Khan Younis" was coined to reflect Sinwar's brutality against Gazans. Such a man, who brought death and destruction to so

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

## ABOVE BOARD

Karen Milner



many and still failed to achieve a single positive outcome for the people he was ostensibly leading, is no liberation hero.

In the same vein, the South African Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO's) statements never fail to disappoint. Continuing its programme of utter hypocrisy, DIRCO released a statement admonishing Israel for its attack on Iranian military infrastructures last Friday night (25 October). DIRCO has shown itself to be deaf and blind to ongoing missile fire, rockets, terror attacks, and aggression levelled against Israel, and has chosen to support its dubious friends regardless of their human rights record or values.

This unwavering support of Iran, which is known for its oppressive regime, gender apartheid, and sponsorship of terror groups like Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Houthis, reveals an inconsistency in South Africa's approach to human rights, raising serious questions about its selective advocacy for global justice.

Adding to these contradictions, DIRCO Minister Ronald Lamola has stated his intention to downgrade diplomatic relations with Israel further, and remains absolutely unable to see any Russian belligerence in Ukraine, human rights violations in Sudan, or Iranian aggression against Israel.

In the face of such challenges, we stand firm in our commitment to counter misinformation and antisemitism, protect our community, and uphold the principles of truth and justice that define our values.

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

## Crawford Sandton celebrates blessings of Sukkot

Students at Crawford International Sandton visited a sukkah on Sukkot recently, learning about the significance of the

structure itself, a symbol of shelter and hospitality that recalls the fragile dwellings used by the Jewish people in their journey through the desert.



Crawford International Sandton students celebrating Sukkot

The students participated in the ritual of shaking the lulav and etrog. The lulav, consisting of branches from a palm tree, myrtle, and willow, along with the etrog, a fragrant citrus fruit, represent different aspects of nature and are seen as an expression of gratitude for the harvest. As the children shook the lulav and etrog together, they embraced the deeper meaning of connecting with the world around them and acknowledging the blessings in their lives.

## Austrian ambassador calls for ceasefire

Austrian Ambassador Romana Königsbrun told diplomats and dignitaries, including Jewish leaders, gathered for the Austrian National Day celebration in Pretoria recently that the world was "witnessing new devastation in the Middle East".

"The Hamas group of terrorists' attack on Israel just over a year ago unleashed a new dimension of horror in the region," Königsbrun said. "The violence suffered by Israelis, Palestinians, and the civil population in the region is heartbreaking. Israel's security is non-negotiable, but the protection of innocent civilians is equally irrevocable. We need de-escalation on every front. This requires an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and Lebanon to allow for humanitarian aid and to finally free the hostages, including an Austrian father of two. We must make room for diplomacy again."

Describing the global uncertainty caused by war, climate change, and incredibly fast ecological developments, Königsbrun said that "despite all the focus on the Middle East, we must not lose sight of the Russian aggression on Ukraine. Russia has committed an offence. Austria is a neutral country but neutral doesn't mean indifference."



Austrian Ambassador Romana Königsbrun



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# Be proudly Jewish, Ichikowitz tells Rising Stars

LEE TANKLE

For Ivor Ichikowitz, the chairperson of the Ichikowitz Family Foundation, there's no better time than now for young Jewish South Africans to be loud and proud about their Jewishness. This is why the Ichikowitz Family Foundation has become the sponsor of the Rising Star Award at the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards.

"So many young Jewish South Africans aren't necessarily recognised for their work," he said. "There are many who do stuff that's never celebrated because there's the sense that we have to hide our Jewishness here," said Ichikowitz, "This is a time for young South African Jews or any Jews in South Africa not to hide their Jewishness."

He believes the Rising Star Award speaks to the values of the Ichikowitz Family Foundation "of citizenship, heritage, and conservation". The foundation, Ichikowitz said, was founded on the belief that Africa's potential could be unlocked through

education, respect for human rights, a better understanding of Africa's history, and the conservation of its rich biodiversity. "It's committed to the kind of active citizenship that promotes the preservation of Africa's heritage, the conservation of its environment, and the empowerment of Africa's youth," he said.

"The Rising Star Award speaks to our belief that the Jewish community in South Africa is small in scale, but disproportionately influential in terms of business, science, and civil affairs," he said.

"The beauty of this award is that it's a very broad category. It encompasses many different things. The age group of the award – under 25 – is exactly the

generation that needs to be reassured that there is a future for them in this country, and a future for them to be proudly Jewish."

Ichikowitz said this demographic could contribute and set examples of positively contributing to the South African landscape and shifting the tides. "It's this generation that's going to take leadership of the continent, but not in 10 years, in the next three to five years," he said.

It's this ethos that his family foundation has tried to uphold through various projects over the years, Ichikowitz said, such as helping run the Tefillin Bank with Chabad, and a project called Jewish Memories of Mandela with the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, whose purpose is to show

that Jews aren't guests in South Africa but active contributors.

The foundation also has a project called the African Youth Survey, in which they research the youth in 18 countries across the continent to see what youth in Africa are feeling and experiencing, and provide a crystal ball into the future of the continent.

According to Ichikowitz, there has been a massive migration of young Jewish South Africans to other countries because they believe there's no future for them in South Africa, but "we believe exactly the opposite. We believe that South Africa has always respected its Jewish community.

"To make sure that the community is sustained, we have to encourage young Jewish South Africans to come out loud and proud, to tell the world about what they do, and to be a lot more visible and engaged as a community, not just as citizens of the country, but as Jewish citizens of the country, because we're absolutely an important part of this tapestry," he said.

Ichikowitz said the foundation was

sponsoring the Rising Star Award because it and the family wanted to make sure that young Jewish South Africans weren't just recognised in their community but on a larger scale so that they could show others that there is a future in South Africa.

"We need to change this narrative that there isn't a future for young Jews in South Africa, that there isn't a future for people who want to be proudly Jewish in South Africa, and that this country doesn't value us because it's not true," he said.

For Ichikowitz, a rising star is a young person who has a sense of community and believes that their Jewishness and the heritage that comes from it is part of the contribution that they make to their society. A rising star is also somebody making an impact on the lives of others in whatever way, whether through business, social entrepreneurship, charity, or solving social problems.

"A lot of what we do is aimed at making South Africa the best place to be a Jew in the world," Ichikowitz said. "We believe this helps drive it."



Ivor Ichikowitz

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