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Keeping the Jewish voice alive

HOWARD SACKSTEIN



'Keith is home. We can all breathe again.'

A letter from SA Jewish Report chairperson

It's never good news when the non-executive chairperson of a newspaper asks the editor for space on the front page. I'm not going to sugar-coat it, the future of the SA Jewish Report rests in your hands!

For the past 25 years, the SA Jewish Report has created a unifying platform that reflects the unique richness and diversity of our Jewish community and provides credible news about South Africa, Israel, and the Jewish world. We have built the SA Jewish Report into a world-class non-profit media company and one of our community's greatest assets.

Today, our hard copy newspaper is read by more than 30 000 people each week, our weekly newsletter has more than 36 000 subscribers, our website is visited by more than 120 000 people each month, our webinars have been watched more than six million times, and the Jewish Achiever Awards have grown into one of the most important business events on the country's calendar.

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, against all economic sense, we decided to support our community by continuing to publish with little to no advertising and, at enormous cost, to deliver copies of the newspaper to people's homes as they struggled under lockdown.

We are enormously proud of how we helped our community through that impossibly difficult time.

We started our JR Live webinar channel. Remember our webinar with Simon Sinek; or Red Notice author Bill Browder; or the story of Silvia the Mossad spy from South Africa; or the *Woman in Gold*, restoring the Nazi looted Klimt paintings; or *The Last Kings of Shanghai* with Jonathan Kaufman? Our webinar with Douglas Murray got more than one million views on YouTube.

We used our reach and the generosity of our community to raise millions of rands for Afrika Tikkun; The Angel Network; the Chev; the JNF; and artists struggling under lockdown.

Since 7 October, it's taken courage to be the voice of our community. We've seen a concerted campaign to try shut down any voices that support Israel and the Jewish

people. We remain unbowed in the face of the vitriol and rabid anti-Jewish racism that permeates the political establishment and the fourth estate.

When we've called out antisemitic racism and the Press Council demanded an apology, we withdrew from the council rather than compromise our dignity and the integrity of our community by apologising to racists.

As the impact of 7 October 2023 became evident, we publicly exposed the barbaric brutality that the Hamas invasion of Israel wrought, and the South Africans murdered and taken hostage. We hosted hostages and their families on our shows, Colonel Richard Kemp, and Colonel Miri Eisin. We have also hosted in-person events for the foreign diplomatic corps to expose them to the plight of the hostages and their families.

Without us, the Jewish community would have no voice.

We think we have really played our part, but we cannot do it alone.

Although the entire board of directors of the SA Jewish Report are volunteers, the cost of printing

and distributing the newspaper are enormous. Each month, we pay approximately R350 000 just to print and distribute the newspaper, and that's before we've paid a single journalist, editor, designer, proofreader, website costs, email costs, Zoom costs etc.

As an immediate cost-cutting measure, from next week, we are reducing both our print run and our distribution points, but that will certainly not be enough. We understand that for many the SA Jewish Report is their "Shabbos read", and for the more elderly in our community, they cannot access the publication online.

Our model is however unsustainable without you.

If you have read our newspaper, or our newsletter, if you have visited our website or seen us on social media, if you have watched our webinars, or the Jewish Achiever Awards, if you have attended any of our events, then we say to you quite frankly, **it's time for you to please play your part.**

A voice takes courage. Keeping it takes a courageous community.

Be bold. Be brave. Protect our voice. Donate to the SA Jewish Report today.

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NICOLA MILTZ

South African-born Aviva Siegel is "smiling from ear to ear" now that she has been reunited with her beloved husband, Keith, 65, who was released from Hamas captivity after 484 brutal days in hell.

"I can breathe again, Keith is home," she told the SA Jewish Report. "I feel like a different person."

Her American-Israeli husband of more than 40 years was kidnapped by Hamas terrorists from their home in Kibbutz Kfar Aza alongside her on 7 October 2023. She was released on 26 November 2023 as part of a truce brokered by Qatar and Egypt after 51 days in Hamas captivity.

For more than a year, she campaigned tirelessly for Keith's return, participating in rallies, speaking before government officials, and calling on world leaders to secure the release of all hostages. She travelled abroad, meeting former United States President Joe Biden and other high-level officials to press for more diplomatic efforts. "I will never stop fighting until all our people are home," she said.

Keith was finally released on Saturday, 1 February 2025, reuniting with his close-knit family in an emotional moment that ended a nearly 16-month-long nightmare.

The South African-born grandmother has become a symbol of resilience, an unrelenting campaigner for the hostages, and a voice for those who couldn't speak for themselves. But at her core, she is a woman who simply refused to accept a future without the man she fell hopelessly in love with as a teenager in Israel.

Continued on page 3 >>

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Meeting with Netanyahu, Trump doubles down on relocating 'all' Palestinians from Gaza

BEN SALES – JTA

President Donald Trump doubled down on his controversial efforts to relocate Palestinians from Gaza, telling reporters that he would hope to resettle most if not all in neighbouring countries, perhaps permanently.

Trump made the comments at the start of a White House meeting on Tuesday, 4 February, with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Trump was less unequivocal in his statements on the future of the current Israel-Hamas ceasefire; normalisation between Israel and Saudi Arabia; and his plans to counter Iran.

In response to questions about the ceasefire, whose second stage is now being negotiated, Netanyahu repeated his vow to achieve the goals his government set out in the war, including releasing the hostages held by Hamas and dismantling the terror group. The ceasefire's second stage may place those goals in tension, as it is meant to include the complete withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza.

Since his inauguration last month, Trump has pushed Egypt and Jordan, which have peace treaties with Israel, to resettle Palestinians from Gaza on their territory. Both countries' leaders have rebuffed the requests, but Trump expressed confidence that they would accede to his demand.

"They say they're not going to accept. I say they will. I think that Gaza, maybe, is a demolition site right now. If you're at Gaza, there's hardly a building standing and the ones that are going to collapse. You can't live in Gaza right now, and I think we need another location. And I think it should be a location that's going to make people happy."

When asked how many Gazans he hopes to resettle, he said, "All of them. We're talking about probably a million-seven people, maybe a million-eight. But I think all of them can be resettled in areas

where they can build a beautiful life and not worry about dying every day."

Trump was also asked about whether he supported building Israeli settlements in Gaza. Far-right Israeli leaders and a segment of the population support building such settlements. It was unclear whether Trump understood the question. He responded, "I don't see it happening. It's too dangerous. Nobody can go there."

Trump and Netanyahu have both expressed a desire for a normalisation deal between Israel and Saudi Arabia, which would build on the Trump-brokered agreements between Israel and four Arab countries. Speaking about the chances for a deal, Trump was noncommittal.



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu with US President Donald Trump on 4 February 2025

"We're dealing with a lot of people, and we have steps to go yet, as you know. Maybe those steps go forward, and maybe they don't. We're dealing with a very complex group of people – situation and people."

Asked whether Saudi leaders were demanding a Palestinian state in exchange for a deal with Israel, he said they weren't.

"Everybody's demanding one thing, you know what it is? Peace."

The Israel-Hamas ceasefire took effect one day before Trump entered office, and his negotiating team was reportedly key to making it happen. Both Netanyahu and Trump refrained from elaborating on whether, or how long, the ceasefire would hold.

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Torah Thought



**Rabbi Sam Thurgood
Head of Jewish Life
and Learning for
United Herzlia Schools**

I write this article from the Prizmah Jewish Day School Conference in Boston, where I have come together with 1 500 educators from around the world – including a good number of South Africans, current and in origin – for three days of discussion about the future of Jewish day school education.

While the impact and takeaways of this conference are too great to summarise in a short article, one session that stood out for me was run by Dr Alex Pomson of Rosov Consulting on a more than 10-year study that he has run on the impact of Jewish day school education in England, America, and beyond. One of his findings is that while Jewish day schools have a significant impact on Jewish identity, commitment to marry and raise children as Jewish, and affiliation to Israel, they don't have a significant impact on many of the religious aspects of Jewish life, such as belief in Hashem, frequency of shul attendance, or keeping Shabbat. This is despite the fact that so many of our excellent educators invest so much in exactly these areas, and so many of our parents and families expect exactly these changes to come from Jewish day school education.

"Rabbi Sam," I imagine you saying to me, "this is very interesting, but perhaps you forgot that you were invited to write a *dvar Torah* on the weekly *parsha*?"

"Thank you," I say to your imaginary words "for keeping me on track, but I do indeed have the *parsha* in mind. As the Jewish people are standing

at the boundary of the *Yam Suf* (the Sea of Reeds or perhaps the Red Sea), they cry out to Hashem for salvation. A natural, and even praiseworthy response. There seems no way for them to save themselves, but Hashem can do anything, and it is to Him that they turn.

And yet, this isn't the correct response. Hashem asks Moshe, "Why are you crying out to me? Speak to *Bnei Yisrael*, and they will move!" The answer was not to rely on anyone else, even Hashem Himself, and even though the Jewish people didn't feel that they themselves had the pathway to salvation, the truth is that they did indeed.

I think of that when I think of the

decisions we make about our children and families. What Dr Pomson's data is telling us is that if we want our children to feel that Jewish identity, community, and continuity is important to them, sending them to a Jewish day school is a powerful way to increase the chances of it being the case. But if we want them to build a strong and meaningful relationship with Hashem, if we want them to go to shul, if we want them to make religious observance a part of their life, for this we cannot rely on our schools. For this we ourselves must be the ones to move – to go to shul, to make Shabbat special, and to model a relationship with our creator. Then we will, please G-d, see wonders.

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Australian Jewry faces avalanche of antisemitism

TALI FEINBERG

Australian Jewry is facing a "tsunami of antisemitism", according to South African expat and former chief executive of the New South Wales Jewish Board of Deputies (NSW JBD), Vic Alhadeff. South Africans who have migrated there are now traversing this rapid rise of antisemitic hate, which the NSW JBD describes as a "campaign of domestic terrorism".

The organisation reported on 2 February that in the Sydney area, there had been "more than 10 publicly reported serious incidents of antisemitic vandalism, arson, and worse in the past three weeks alone, which doesn't include the graffiti appearing on our streets daily or the abuse that goes unreported".

These incidents in NSW include the discovery of a caravan outside Sydney packed with enough explosives to take down the front of a building, and containing the names of two prominent Jewish institutions. Sydney, which is emerging as the epicentre of the crisis, is home to many South African Jews, most of whom live in the city's eastern suburbs, which have been disproportionately targeted.

"In the past 16 months, Australian Jewry has been subjected to a torrent of violent attacks unprecedented in the history of this community and this country," Alhadeff says. "From the calculated doxing of 600 Jewish artists; to racist graffiti at Jewish institutions; to incendiary antisemitic speeches; to fire-bombings and arson attacks on synagogues, politicians' offices, daycare centres and cars; to Jewish schools defaced with slurs, antisemitism has become normalised." He said the caravan with explosives "shook the community to another level, particularly because it could have caused mass casualties".

Author Joanne Fedler says that when she moved to Australia, antisemitism was the furthest thing from her mind. But now, "it feels as if a scab has been torn off, and the rampant racism at the heart of Australian society is being channelled against Jews".

Australian Jews are responding in a variety of ways, she says. "Some are panicking. Others refuse to be intimidated. I sense the community is pulling together. Speaking for myself, I'm angry. Furious. If this level of aggression were directed against any other minority in this country, it wouldn't be tolerated. But as British commentator David Baddiel writes, 'Jews don't count.'"

Researcher Craig Nudelman says that before moving to Australia, he would speak to Australians who would often point out how little antisemitism there was in their

country. "I thought we were coming to the lucky country, literally, but this is crazy," he says. "I feel bewildered and angry that this can happen in Australia, a bastion of free speech and democracy. We were very protected in South Africa – we didn't see graffiti like this all the time."

"People are scared, frustrated, and feel betrayed by fellow Australians and our government," says Nudelman. He notes that New South Wales Premier Chris Minns "has been really amazing. He spoke at our shul, and continuously reiterates that these people [who commit acts of hate] need to pay. But the federal government has completely betrayed the Jewish community."

Business strategist Dr Norman Chorn says that though he knew that "latent antisemitism was present in most reasonably advanced societies", he's now seeing it emerge. "This is a global threat," Chorn says.

At the same time, "The Jewish community in Australia is now almost completely united in its defence of Jewish identity and the right of Israel to exist," he says. The community has been vocal, and there's growing awareness among Australian citizens that this could threaten the social fabric of our society."

This was echoed in the NSW JBD statement on 2 February, which said, "It's incumbent on society not to become desensitised to this. This isn't normal. This isn't the Australia we know and love. To find our way back, every Australian must call out this behaviour, the terrorists perpetrating these crimes must be apprehended, and penalties must be strengthened. The Jewish community isn't asking for special treatment, only a return to normality."

Most Jewish Australians believe that the Australian Labor Party, currently in power, has "allowed this to fester too long," says Chorn. "Now, as we near the May election, they have been prompted to act via police and other clampdowns. The community believes this is too little, too late."

Alhadeff says what compounds the tragedy is that Australia is one of the most multicultural nations in the world. "But as the attacks escalate in severity and frequency, the community is feeling overwhelmed, alarmed, and increasingly



Antisemitic graffiti seen in Sydney at the beginning of January 2025

abandoned, concerned about tomorrow and anxious about our children and grandchildren. The fact that Australia has been home to more Holocaust survivors per capita than any nation other than Israel serves to heighten the anxiety."

There are "desperate, urgent calls, not just

from Jewish leaders but from politicians and media, for far tougher police action, more arrests, tighter legislation, and minimum mandatory penalties," says Alhadeff. Police and counter-terrorism agencies have deployed thousands of officers, with police helicopters conducting nightly patrols and beaming spotlights onto synagogues and schools. Some Jewish school students cover their blazer emblems in public and avoid public transport.

Says Fedler, "The truth is that laws and convictions don't solve a systemic issue. What's happening now is a chance for Australia to address its tolerance of racism – against First Nations people, Jews, and other

minorities – at a systemic level."

At the same time, many Jews feel abandoned by Australian activists, who don't see their causes as aligned. This is epitomised in a recent tweet by an Australian activist who wrote, "I'm so f*cking sick and tired of hearing about antisemitism here in Aus. It's bullsh*t. Let's talk about the number of women who are being killed. Let's talk about deaths in custody. But nooo, we'll talk about some f*cking graffiti instead." Many of her followers agreed with her, and a South African retweeted the comment, endorsing it.

Says Alhadeff, "The community feels under siege, yet it is resilient, strong, defiant, and determined to continue to be openly and proudly Jewish."

"We are told that most Australians condemn the antisemitism, yet the need for civil society to speak out more loudly and more strongly is ever-present," he says. "The situation is a blight on this country's ethos and values. Australia needs to – and can be once again – so much better than this."

'Keith is home. We can all breathe again.'

>>Continued from page 1

Their love story is one that defies the horrors of war. It's also a story that has touched the South African Jewish community.

Addressing a press conference at the Tel Aviv Sourasky Medical Center, Aviva said, "For me, to see Keith with us, living, breathing, eating, smiling, being emotional, is the most amazing, hugest, most unbelievable thing."

"We are on cloud nine," Sheli Siegel, Aviva's sister-in-law, told the *SA Jewish Report*. "It's like pinch me, pinch me!"

Sheli, originally from Johannesburg, is married to Keith's brother, Lee Siegel. She described the past year as "agonising", with the family living in "constant dread".

"Every time the phone rang, we thought – is it bad news? Had something happened? We feared the worst."

"Aviva, who was raised in Randfontein with her twin sister, Fiona Wax, and their younger sister, Sandy Feldman, is finally happy," Sheli said.

Since his release, Keith has been surrounded by his closest family at Ichilov Hospital, where an entire floor has been set aside for the Siegel family and one other hostage family.

"Aviva and the girls and hospital staff are attending to all his needs doing what Jewish mothers and grandmothers do best: fattening him up," said Sheli. "It's 'ess ess mein kind'

[eat, eat my child]."

His five grandchildren have visited together with other members of the family, each taking turns at his bedside so as not to overwhelm him.

"Keith has come home as Keith – the same warm, loving, sweet man, full of compassion and kindness," Sheli said.

Keith insisted on walking out of captivity and not being wheeled, she said. After hundreds of days of deprivation, "he stepped out on his own two feet, a symbolic act of resilience".

Aviva, who had fought so hard for his return, was the one to break the hard news that his 97-year-old mother had passed away while he was in captivity. She told him in the helicopter shortly after his release.

" Hamas terrorists forced Keith to write them a detailed thank you letter while holding him captive," his family said in a statement. "This is just one example of many that demonstrates Hamas's cruel and cynical behaviour, and highlights the urgency of bringing all the remaining hostages home."

During his handover to the Red Cross, he appeared thin and pale, but was able to walk, surrounded by masked and armed Hamas fighters. He was forced to accept two Hamas "gift bags" and a lanyard around his neck with a Palestinian flag and the insignia of Hamas's Al-Qassam Brigades. He was also forcibly paraded on a Hamas stage

in front of a banner proclaiming "Nazi Zionism will not win."

He told his loved ones that food was extremely scarce while in captivity, and that though he is a vegetarian, he occasionally ate meat products that were given to him in order to survive.

Keith's daughter, Shir, told a press conference that her father was held in inhumane conditions. He barely saw daylight, was starved, and was held in solitude for periods at a time.

He has been informed of the devastation in Kfar Aza and the names of 60-plus neighbours and friends who lost their lives on 7 October 2023.

Aviva credited US President Donald Trump for his role in Keith's return. "Your brave actions have brought Keith back to us. From the bottom of my heart, thank you. But our journey isn't over. You are our hope for those still in captivity." She also acknowledged the Israeli government's efforts, calling on leaders to complete the mission. "I trust you to see this deal through because it's the road to healing for all of us."

Reflecting on their ordeal, Aviva recalled the darkness of her own captivity and the fight to bring Keith home. "Keith endured almost 16 months of this nightmare. Now, we can start to heal. But, we must not rest; we must not turn away. The 79 hostages still in Gaza deserve better. Until they are all home, none of us can truly be at peace."

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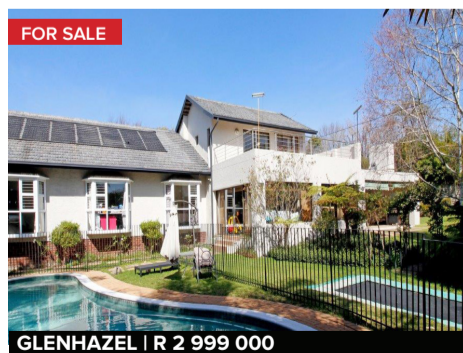
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Louk family keeps Shani's light alive

ELKA COHEN

“When I dance, I pray,” Israeli tattoo artist Shani Louk told her father, Nissim Louk, when he asked about her insatiable passion for dance festivals around the world. For her, music had the power to heal and connect. The Nova festival on Israel’s border with Gaza on 7 October 2023 would be her last.

The beautiful 22-year-old became a symbol of the horrors of that fateful day. One of the first and most harrowing images to emerge from the massacre was a video of her half-naked body, face-down on the back of a pick-up truck, paraded through the streets of Gaza by Hamas militants. The world recoiled in shock, leaving a scar on our collective memory.

On 8 October, newspapers across the world had Shani’s radiant face on their covers starkly contrasted with chilling screenshots from that video, in which armed Hamas terrorists stood over her lifeless body. “With her final message, Shani made the world confront the undeniable battle between good and evil,” said her grieving father. “The question now is: which side will the world choose?”

Nissim and his wife, Ricarda, shared their story at The Base shul on Sunday, 2 February, on their first visit to South Africa.

For weeks, they told how they held onto hope that Shani had survived. “There was no visible blood on the pick-up truck, and

we traced cash withdrawals from her credit card in Gaza,” they said. Reports indicated she might have been hospitalised with a head injury. Determined to bring her daughter home, Ricarda, a German-born citizen, flew to Germany to petition the government for assistance. “Shani’s German passport gave her a significantly higher chance of returning home from Gaza than her Israeli passport would,” Nissim said.

Ricarda pleaded for assistance across media platforms to help bring their daughter home, and Shani’s story resonated worldwide. “Until there’s

proof, you never give up hope,” Ricarda said.

Yet, despite their efforts, forensic experts ultimately confirmed Shani’s death. A fragment of her skull, recovered on Israeli soil, confirmed that she had been killed on

7 October. As painful as the reality was, Ricarda found solace in one small mercy. “It was a relief to know that Shani hadn’t suffered any of the inhumane torture, sexual abuse, and humiliation at the hands of Hamas.”

For seven agonising months, her parents, desperate to reconstruct their daughter’s final moments, continued searching for answers. Then, in a daring operation, Israel Defense Forces soldiers recovered her body from a 50m-deep tunnel hidden beneath an abandoned building in Gaza. “She was returned to us on her mother’s birthday,” Nissim said. “At last, we had closure,” Ricarda said.

Shani’s funeral drew hundreds, including from global media outlets. Amid his grief, Nissim recalled an encounter with a stranger that revealed more about his daughter’s legacy than he had ever known.

He was standing at his daughter’s coffin, when a young woman approached, adamant about addressing the crowd. She shared how, at her lowest point – alone, penniless, and without any hope left – an angel appeared. “Why is such a beautiful girl alone on the street?” she asked before offering her hand. That angel was Shani. “Hold my hand, stick to my light, and be part of my tribe,” she said. “That tribe is us,” Nissim declared. “It is the light of the Jewish people that will save the world from darkness and



Ricarda, Adi, and Nissim Louk

destruction.”

The Louk family embodies this mission. Despite unimaginable loss, they are travelling the world advocating for the long-term security of the Jewish people.

Nissim smiles through his tired eyes as he recalls cherished memories of his little girl. “Shani loved picking wildflowers from the forest in Moshav Srigim, where she grew up,” he says. “She was always a free spirit, so full of energy.”

Ricarda reflected on Shani’s fierce conviction later in her life when she decided to make her own way in Tel Aviv, determined to follow her dream of becoming a tattoo artist.

“Every mother wants to guide their child toward a good life, offering them all the options,” Ricarda said, “But Shani always carved out her own path.” Though she often questioned whether her daughter’s choices were the right ones, she quickly learned that

values and intentions, they will always find success.”

In the wake of Shani’s passing, Nissim and Ricarda unearthed a side of their daughter they never fully knew. “We heard so many stories from people who knew her – old friends and new ones she met on her travels.” They realised that the girl they thought they knew was far more than they ever realised.

Beneath her non-conformist rebellion, they discovered a woman with a profound connection to humanity, a yearning for unity, and a passion for helping others.

“Many people ask, ‘How do you keep living a happy life after losing your daughter?’” Ricarda said. “Sometimes, I don’t have the answer. But there’s no point in staying stuck in the past. We’ll never get Shani back, so we choose to hold on to the good moments – her smile, her love for travel, music, art,” she paused, her mind

filled with happy memories. “We have to keep moving forward, for her.”

“Her name means ‘light’, but she was more like a flashlight,” Ricarda said. “She lived fast, travelled widely, and embraced life with an intensity.” In hindsight, her family now understands why.

The event was a collaboration between The Base, the Jewish National Fund

South Africa, the South African Zionist Federation, and the Israel Centre of South Africa. The evening also featured an exhibition of Shani’s artwork, curated by renowned South African art expert Natalie Knight, with support from the Israeli and German embassies.



Nissim Louk in front of a photograph of his daughter Shani



Nissim and Ricarda Louk

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SA communal leaders affirm Israel connection at high-level meeting

NICOLA MILTZ

Jewish communal leadership met Israel's new foreign minister, Gideon Sa'ar, on 2 February to discuss the challenges facing South African Jewry in the wake of the 7 October attacks and the unpleasant dynamics in South Africa-Israel relations.

The high-level meeting which took place on Zoom on Sunday was attended by senior figures from the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD): Zev Kregel; Karen Milner; Mary Kluk; and Wendy Kahn, as well as South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) leaders Rowan Polovin and Jeff Shankman.

During the discussion, Kahn, SAJBD national director, gave a briefing on the status of South Africa's Jewish community, highlighting the pressures it has faced since the Hamas massacre of 7 October 2023 and the ensuing war in Gaza.

"We stressed the many South African friends that have stood with South African Jewry during this difficult time," Kahn said. "The African National Congress [ANC] stance certainly doesn't reflect the feeling of the majority of South Africans toward Israel. We also discussed the broader relationship between South Africa and Israel.

"We shared with him those that have stood with and supported our community in the past 16 months including many of the churches and political parties," Kahn said.

Despite South Africa's increasingly hostile stance toward Israel, the delegation emphasised the resilience



Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar

of the Jewish community and its unwavering commitment to countering misinformation, diplomatic aggression, and anti-Israel bias within South African political and media circles.

"We shared with Minister Sa'ar the many ways our community had countered the hostility in the media, in opposing certain ANC and government decisions and statements, and in campaigns on the street," Kahn said.

"We emphasised that our community and its allies are tenacious, and have responded emphatically to the appalling treatment of Israel by certain figures in our government."

Minister Sa'ar, in turn, gave an update on Israel's evolving diplomatic strategy, particularly its growing engagement with African nations. He highlighted the recent opening of an Israeli embassy in Zambia

as part of a broader effort to strengthen ties across the continent, a move that stands in stark contrast to South Africa's diplomatic isolation of Israel.

Kahn described the meeting as "warm and engaging", noting Sa'ar's willingness to collaborate with South African Jewry and the many non-Jewish South Africans who continue to support Israel despite the ANC government's adversarial policies.



WE EMPHASISED THAT OUR COMMUNITY AND ITS ALLIES ARE TENACIOUS, AND HAVE RESPONDED EMPHATICALLY TO THE APPALLING TREATMENT OF ISRAEL BY CERTAIN FIGURES IN OUR GOVERNMENT.

The delegation also briefed Sa'ar on the profile of the government since the last election in May 2024, with the formation

of a government of national unity and the shift in government dynamics.

Kahn stressed the importance of ongoing dialogue between South African Jewry and Israeli leadership, particularly given the global rise in hostility toward Jewish communities.

"It's imperative for our community, with our close relationship with Israel, to maintain strong communication with key government leaders. Just last year, a delegation from the SAJBD and SAZF met several Israeli government ministers, President Isaac Herzog, and others. We continue to see a deep concern for the well-being of diaspora communities, especially in these times of escalating hostility."

Polovin said the meeting was important, reaffirming the "enduring and unbreakable bond between South African Jewry and Israel".

"We emphasised that the ANC-led government's position on Israel doesn't reflect the views of the majority of South Africans. Pretoria's case against Israel at the International Court of Justice, which attempts to delegitimise Israel's fundamental right to self-defence against a genocidal entity, undermines South Africa's international standing and works against the interests of ordinary citizens."

Polovin said the SAZF and SAJBD remained committed to maintaining this "vital relationship" on behalf of the community and the country.

Former Israeli minister of Foreign Affairs, Israel Katz held discussions with the community in February last year as part of ongoing communications between the two countries.

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Hatred Down Under



A colleague of mine this week told me of a Jewish family that had been planning to emigrate to Australia for years and were finally leaving next week. In the past, it would make me sad that another family was leaving because I don't like the idea of the community dwindling. But, this week, my immediate response was surprise that they were still going. I would have certainly had second thoughts, what with the antisemitism the Australian Jewish community is experiencing.

Reading the story on page 3 is spine chilling. It's hard to believe that our expats are living with that kind of hatred and racism. It's so damn ugly, and it doesn't appear likely to stop because there are few, other than in the Jewish community, who seem to care about it.

For many of us, we have as many family members in Australia as we do in Israel. Over the years, there has been a steady stream of South African Jews heading to shores Down Under.

For years, there has been a sense that life in Australia was much the same as ours. Do you remember that old Chevy advert that apparently epitomised our life in South Africa, "Braai vleis, rugby, sunny skies, and Chevrolet"? Well, the belief was then – and now only without the Chevy – that our lives and Ozzie lives focused on those same things. And many expats who left over the years have had a great life and have done exceptionally well.

The truth is that Australians are different to South Africans and indulge in the so-called "tall poppy syndrome", which is a cultural expression Down Under which "feeds on the belief that anyone who appears to represent success, high ability, or admirable qualities must be attacked, demeaned, and cut down to the common level", according to researchers. So, if you stick your head above the parapet, it might well be chopped off. In other words, do what everyone does, and you'll be fine. Stand out too much, and you'll not be loved for it. South African culture is different, especially in our community. Here, we certainly admire and celebrate those who excel and stand out in their success.

So, it hasn't necessarily been easy for everyone who moved there, but for those who made it work, they have thrived. From the research I could find, there are close to 207 000 people of South African birth living in Australia, which isn't a small number.

In South Africa, we hear stories of how expats invariably feel the need to justify why they left with horror stories from South Africa. Never having been to Australia myself, so I can't verify this, I've heard from many sources that expats love stories about just how bad we have it here. Crime, loadshedding, our corrupt government, and one that hates Israel, are apparently common Shabbos table conversations.

That's not to say that they are wrong about all those issues, because they aren't, it is just a wonder why they would bother to spend so much time talking about it when they aren't here anymore.

But, I guess, they are worried about those of us who are still here. And I'm sure all of us appreciate that.

And now, we're concerned about their well-being, and apparently, we have a substantive reason to do so.



Perhaps the antisemitism sounds worse than it is or perhaps, because things are generally so good there, when there are threats like this, they feel worse. I can't say, but my

sense from expats is that they are genuinely scared.

And the truth is that the people who left here left behind the problems we still have. As a rule, Australia runs smoothly and people live without having to pay extra for security, medical aid, great schooling, and so on. And unlike in South Africa, they don't seem to have crises there very often. But this is a real crisis, one that is spreading there.

To all our readers in Australia, and we have many, we are with you, and we are here for you. Strength to you all!

While we're now aware of what's happening in Australia because of our many expats, family, and friends, it's also spreading across Europe and America.

Jews everywhere need to stand together. We must not accept antisemitism in any form. We need to stand up against it. As a community in South Africa, we're not exposed to that level of antisemitism in our society. However, as Jews around the world, we do have each other and Israel. Together, we are strong.

Before I sign off today, I want to reiterate what our chairperson, Howard Sackstein, said on our front page. Join us in making sure you continue to have all the information relevant to South African Jews, both here and abroad, at your fingertips. We want to continue to ensure you have all the information that impacts you available to you. Protect our voice! We do what we do for you, but we can't do it without you.

Shabbat shalom!
Peta Krost
Editor

Trump and South Africa: can the 'situationship' be saved?



OPINION

JOEL POLLAK

President Donald Trump suspended all funding to South Africa on Sunday, 2 February 2025, apparently in response to the country's recent Expropriation Act, which is meant to formalise the government's authority to seize private property for a public purpose. Many governments have such powers, but in South Africa, the danger is clearly that such powers will be abused to seize white-owned land.

Trump's message on Truth Social was clear: "South Africa is confiscating land, and treating certain classes of people VERY BADLY. It is a bad situation that the Radical Left Media doesn't want to so much as mention. A massive Human Rights VIOLATION, at a minimum, is happening for all to see. The United States won't stand for it, we will act. Also, I will be cutting off all future funding to South Africa until a full investigation of this situation has been completed!"

South Africa's opposition parties have fought hard to keep expropriation limited to the constitutional boundaries. But no-one trusts the government to adhere to those, even if the opposition controls the agriculture ministry. The fact is that South Africa has an image problem that is reinforced both by left-wing rhetoric and racial outbursts from extremists that make international news.

South Africa also practically begs for punishment with a foreign policy that embraces totalitarian, left-wing dictatorships and the terrorist version of the Palestinian cause. The fact that South Africa has formed a "Hague Group" to bolster international judicial institutions, which it has ignored itself at times, hasn't won many friends in Washington, often the target of these bodies.

This particular year brings the US unusual leverage over South Africa. The African Growth and Opportunity Act, a trade deal that benefits

South Africa and other African nations, runs out in September, and renewal is uncertain. The G20 meeting will be in South Africa, and the government has chosen the theme of "Solidarity, Equality, Sustainability". At least it didn't choose "equity".

The US will be the next chair of the G20, and Trump might simply decide not to show up and to question the purpose of

the organisation from afar. That would be humiliating for South Africa, and even if it thrusts South Africa into the arms of China or Russia, the American government might simply shrug.

But the relationship between the US and South Africa need not simply be confrontational. There are opportunities for rewards on both ends. South Africa could reform its policies, foreign and domestic, in line with Western norms, and in return, the US could boost investment in South Africa. The US could, for example, back a South African bid to host the Olympics, an event that could serve as an impetus for long-overdue reforms to South African public services.

Many confrontations with Trump end with reconciliation and friendship. That's because Trump cuts through obfuscation and inertia, and prompts reciprocal efforts toward a solution. His rhetoric isn't always accurate, but he's almost always right about the direction in which action is needed. South Africa should try to fall into line. You may lose this round, but you'll end up winning.

• *South African-born Joel Pollak is the senior editor-at-large and in-house counsel at Breitbart News and hosts Breitbart News Sunday. He is a Harvard graduate with high honours in social science and public policy and a law degree. He was once Democratic Alliance leader Tony Leon's speechwriter, and has a Master of Arts in Jewish Studies. Pollak has written several books, including How Trump Won: The Inside Story of a Revolution, and The Agenda: What Trump Should Do in His First 100 Days.*

• **Watch Joel Pollak on the upcoming webinar South Africa in the Trump era Thursday 6 February 2025, 19:00 SAST. Register: bit.ly/jrlive178**



Donald J. Trump
@realDonaldTrump

South Africa is confiscating land, and treating certain classes of people VERY BADLY. It is a bad situation that the Radical Left Media doesn't want to so much as mention. A massive Human Rights VIOLATION, at a minimum, is happening for all to see. The United States won't stand for it, we will act. Also, I will be cutting off all future funding to South Africa until a full investigation of this situation has been completed!

The South African government is now on notice, if it wasn't before, that it won't be "business as usual" with Trump in office, and there's no right to aid from the United States (US). One might well ask why South Africa needs the aid when it has money for war – er, "peacekeeping" – in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and other secondary priorities.

On the one hand, this is Trump's approach to foreign aid. Trump doesn't like the idea of Americans sending money abroad for any reason, even to US allies, especially when he feels that the generosity isn't reciprocated and that it would be in the self-interest of the recipient nations to pay their own way for defence, healthcare, and so on rather than relying on American support.

South Africa also practically begs for punishment with a foreign policy that embraces totalitarian, left-wing dictatorships and the terrorist version of the Palestinian cause.

On the other, South Africa is being singled out, partly because some of the people in Trump's orbit – Elon Musk, and to a lesser extent Tucker Carlson – have an occasional interest in South Africa, and partly because South Africa's policies on race really are egregious. We have our DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion), and so on, but nothing matches the scale and ambition of policies like Black Economic Empowerment, which, let's be honest, have failed.

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Nir Oz teacher, and Bibas family friend, speaks of their ‘Gan Eden’

LEE TANKLE

The Friday before 7 October 2023, Nir Oz kindergarten teacher Roxana Salimson told the children in the class to have a good Shabbat and Simchat Torah, but had no inkling that so many of her pupils would never return to the classroom.

She spoke to the *SA Jewish Report* in Johannesburg last Friday, 31 January, the same week her dear friend, Yarden Bibas, returned home without his wife, Shiri, and their two toddlers, Ariel and Kfir, after 483 days of captivity as hostages in Gaza. One of the children she sent off that fateful Friday was Ariel, 5, whom she described as “The sun. He is smiling all the time, and playing all the time.”

Roxana and her husband, Tato, who survived 7 October at Nir Oz, were in South Africa to visit Tato’s relatives and to have a surgical procedure. They intended to stay for only a week, yet stayed for a month because of Tato’s recovery. The couple, who returned to Israel this week, had been on Nir Oz for decades, ever since they made aliya from Argentina.

Roxana said so many of those she taught in her 37 years as the kibbutz kindergarten teacher had been impacted on that terrible day when their “*Gan Eden* [Garden of Eden]” was targeted by Hamas terrorists. She spoke of how four-year-old Omer, and his six-year-old sister, Arbel Siman Tov, were in her class the day before they and their entire family were murdered.

“We have had such a close relationship with the Bibas family, not only because I’m Ariel’s teacher, but because we live so close to Yossi and Margit Silberman, Shiri’s parents. They would come and say hello all the time,” said Roxana. “Our son also shared his Barmitzvah with Shiri. I hate to think about what happened to them that day, and what they have gone through since then.”

The Salimson couple had been anonymous in Johannesburg until they bumped into Liat Malek Alhadeff, a specialist radiologist walking through the halls of the Linksfield Hospital and hearing them speaking Hebrew.

She told the *SA Jewish Report* that she stopped to chat to them, telling them she was wearing orange, like so many in Israel and the rest of the Jewish world, as a reminder that Shiri and her two children were still captives. Malek Alhadeff was speechless when she found out that the Salimsons were from the same kibbutz and were close to the Bibas family.



Tato and Roxana Salimson with Liat Malek Alhadeff (middle)

“I had been speaking to my colleagues the whole day about the Bibas family, and when I entered that cafeteria, which is something I never do, and I met the Salimsons, I knew there was something else at play here,” she said.

Malek Alhadeff took them back to her practice, and they shared their story. “There wasn’t a dry eye in that practice,” she said.

Roxana said life on Nir Oz was 90% Garden of Eden and the rest of the time, not that at all. So, when they were woken at 06:30 on the morning of 7 October 2023 to the red alert and sirens, they weren’t too alarmed.

“Then, all of a sudden, we see a lot of shooting happening outside the house,” said Tato. “As soon as I saw them running around, it was like nothing we had ever experienced in our time on the kibbutz,” said Roxana.

Roxana and Tato were in their *mamad* (safe room) for about 11 hours while Hamas terrorists entered their home three different times, each time trying to get into the safe room, probably in an attempt to kill them.

“I just stood there holding the door to the safe room shut so they couldn’t enter,” said Tato.

While they were in their safe room, Hamas terrorists shot at their house and looted whatever they could. Terrorists shot through the window of their *mamad*, as well as many other points in their house.

“We don’t understand Arabic, and the entire time they were inside the house, they were screaming things in Arabic. We had no idea what was going on,” said Roxana.

It was only when things went quiet after 11 hours that they were able to escape through their window to see the devastation on their kibbutz.

“We were lucky in that we were able to get out of our house and it was in one piece,” said Tato. “As soon as we left, we saw that many houses had been burned.”

The first burned house they saw was that of their friends, the Silbermans, Shiri’s parents. “We later found out that not only were they dead inside the house, their bodies had been burned in it.

“I knew that they were killing people and taking hostages, but I never thought that they were burning houses with people inside,” said Tato.

After they were released from their home, they were taken to the kibbutz’s war room, when, said Roxana, “I heard about a family that was murdered, then another one, and then about a family that was kidnapped or missing. It continued from there. One family after another.”

While in the kindergarten, Roxana tried to help make this all seem less scary for the children and their parents.

“There were many people who were injured, but mainly children and frightened parents. The children wouldn’t leave them. I started to bring out colouring sheets, coloured pens, and crayons for them to have something to do. I approached the parents, and hugged them. There was nothing more I could do. They were in such a difficult emotional state. But because they were in the kindergarten, in a place that was familiar to them, it helped somewhat,” she said.

The next day, the Salimsons and other survivors from the kibbutz were escorted by the army to their bullet-riddled homes, where they collected what they could to begin their journey to the hotel in Eilat where they stayed for three months before being moved to an apartment in Kiryat Gat.

In South Africa, they were itching to get back to Israel so they could get back to their normal lives and start rebuilding the kibbutz that they have called home.

“We need to reconstruct the kibbutzim,” said Tato, “Our kibbutz is being completely rebuilt from the ground up. I don’t know who is going to return to the kibbutz, but I want to go back and feel safe in my home again.”

The couple said they were happy to see many of those who were taken from their kibbutz come home, like Gadi Moses, Arbel Yehud, and Yarden Bibas, but they know their home can never be truly revived until all the hostages are home.

Hostage release puts Israelis through emotional wringer

OPINION

ROLENE MARKS



Since 7 October, living in Israel is a series of paradoxes. If you ever wondered what it’s like to feel a confluence of contradicting emotions, this would be it. In recent weeks, as the first phase of the hostage deal has progressed, we have run the gamut of emotions from deep anxiety to elation that at last, after enduring unimaginable conditions in Gaza, our brothers and sisters are returning home.

As we progress through this initial phase, we are all too aware that not every release will be celebratory. We’re aware that soon we will have to brace ourselves for the body bags containing the remains of hostages who are no longer alive.

There’s no holier *mitzvah* than the redemption of the captive, however it does come at a massive price. For many in Israel, watching the disproportionate release of Palestinian prisoners, most of them with blood on their hands, is a bitter pill to swallow. Among those that have or are soon to be released, are terrorists who have committed some of the most heinous crimes in Israel’s history. How do you watch the murderers of beloved family members and friends walk free? It’s extremely difficult for many to bear.

Israelis are grappling with conflicting emotions of joy and

anger.

After elation, as the week progresses, the anxiety follows, and we await “the list”.

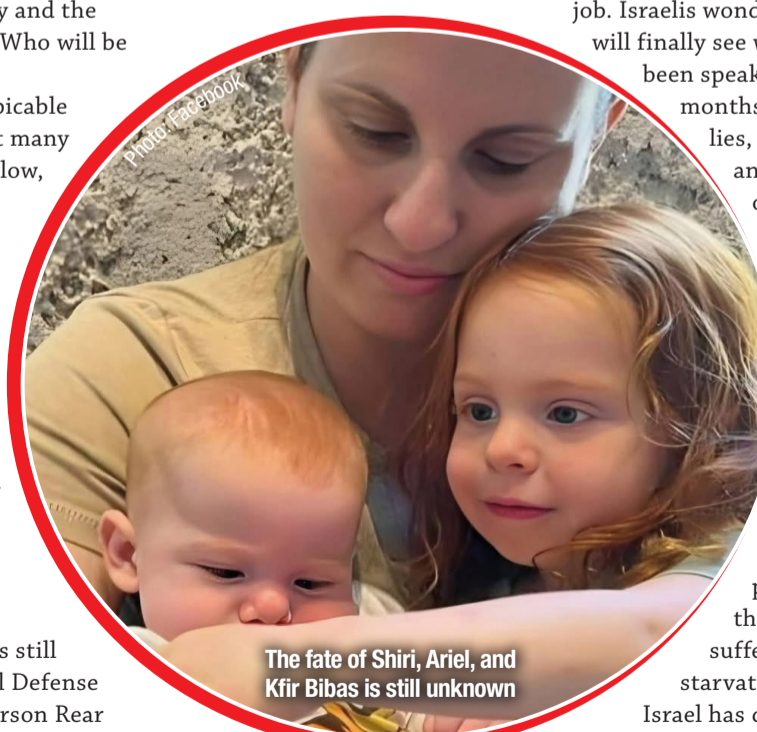
Hamas gives its list of hostages to be released to the government, and as we work our way through the 33 to be released during this first phase, the anxiety and the prayers start to build. Who will be next?

Contrary to the despicable WhatsApp groups that many people reading this follow, we don’t know who is alive or dead. We only know that eight of the list of 33 in this first phase are presumed dead. WhatsApp groups sharing their “lists” are causing immeasurable trauma for the families, all for the measure of clicks and followers.

Every week, we wait for three names: Shiri. Ariel. Kfir. Their fate is still unknown, but as Israel Defense Forces Chief Spokesperson Rear Admiral Daniel Hagari said, we remain “gravely concerned”. Yarden Bibas, released last week, has asked for his family, and there has been no news for him. His pain must be incomprehensible. We wait for the release of Eli Sharabi. Does he know his wife and daughters were murdered on

7 October, or that his brother, Yossi, was murdered in captivity? Our hearts shatter in a million pieces.

Our fears for the Bibas family in no way diminishes the concern we have for all the hostages. We want all of them home. Now!



The fate of Shiri, Ariel, and Kfir Bibas is still unknown

The elation of release also brings with it outrage at the theatre of the grotesque that Hamas has helped create with the help of Al Jazeera. In a “power” show of pressed uniforms, state of the art cameras, and signage and

staging, Hamas members have come out of their tunnels. There is even a woman flinging glitter over the masked terrorists. The aim is to create fear in the heart of every Israeli. The result has been the opposite. We are now more resolved than ever to finish the job. Israelis wonder if the world will finally see what we have been speaking about for 16 months – that Hamas lies, manipulates, and is a master of propaganda. Judging by the response to the atrocities of 7 October, we are more jaded than hopeful. For 16 months, the world has been told by Hamas propagandists that Gazans are suffering from starvation and that Israel has committed genocide, and now it is plain to see, those who bought into the propaganda were fooled, hoodwinked, and made a laughing stock.

The message saying “Nazi Zionism will never win” and others, posted in signage in Hebrew, Arabic, and English,

imperceptible to the mainstream media but loud and clear to Israelis and Palestinians, is designed to create fear and anger and rile up the Palestinians. The images of terrified hostages forced to smile and wave before being handed over to a feckless Red Cross is another message, taunting us. After the first initial shock at the spectacle, Israelis are feeling renewed strength and resolve to end this. The hostages are our priority – the living to begin the long process of rehabilitation, the dead laid to eternal rest. Every single one. Our spirit to fight hasn’t been diminished. If the world had any doubts about the monsters of Hamas, their masks have dropped, and they have been exposed in all their sadistic cruelty.

Some are asking, is it all worth it? Have we not just kicked the can further down the road? For Israel to start healing, we need all of our people back. We know the price is heavy and painful. We also know that the sanctity of life is what we hold most sacred, and this is why we have already won.

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

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- Spar Blairgowrie (Blairgowrie)
- The Fruit, Flower and Nut Market (Blairgowrie)
- Pick n Pay Bramley (Bramley)
- Waverley Shul (Bramley)
- Pick n Pay Dowerglen (Dowerglen)
- Spar Dowerglen (Dowerglen)
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- Engen Glenhazel (Glenhazel)
- KosherWorld Supermarket (Glenhazel)
- Michelo's (Glenhazel)
- Shoshana's Bakery (Glenhazel)
- The Base (Glenhazel)
- Yeshiva College (Glenhazel)
- Mina Lopato Nursery School (Greenside)
- Greenside Shul (Greenside)
- Balfour Mall Shopping Centre (Highlands North)
- Randjes Estate (Highlands North)
- Temple Israel Synagogue (Hillbrow)
- Great Park Shul (Houghton Estate)
- Exclusive Books Hyde Park Shopping Centre (Hyde Park)
- Thrupps & Co. (Illovo)
- Pick n Pay Killarney (Killarney)
- Checkers The Neighbourhood (Linksfeld)
- Dis-Chem The Neighbourhood (Linksfeld)
- King David Linksfeld (Linksfeld)
- Feigels Lyndhurst (Lyndhurst)
- Super Spar Lyndhurst (Lyndhurst)
- Tarentaal Retirement Village (Lyndhurst)
- Capital Hotel/Fitzgerald Apartments (Melrose North)
- Elphin Lodge (Modderfontein)
- Inyoni Creek (Modderfontein)
- Bet David (Morningside)
- Manor Pharmacy Morningview Shopping Centre (Morningside)
- Pick n Pay Morningside (Morningside)
- Sandton Shul (Morningside)
- Pick n Pay Northcliff Square (Northcliff)
- Engen Garage Norwood (Norwood)
- Pick n Pay Norwood Hypermarket (Norwood)
- Spar Norwood (Norwood)
- Oaklands Farm Supply (Oaklands)
- Pioneer House (Oaklands)
- Torah Academy (Orchards)
- Beit Emanuel Progressive Synagogue (Parktown)
- Tyrone Fruiterers (Parkview)
- Dee Jays Deli (Percelia Estate)

- Union of Jewish Woman (Percelia Estate)
- Beyachad (Raedene)
- Moishes Butchery (Raedene)
- Torah Academy Girls High School (Raedene)
- Pick n Pay Rosebank Mall (Rosebank)
- Sydenham Shul (Rouxville)
- Orange Grove Hebrew Congregation (Rouxville)
- Yad Aharon & Michael (Rouxville)
- 3 Roses Restaurant (Sandringham)
- Auria Senior Living (Royal View) (Sandringham)
- Capri Hotel (Savoy)
- Dan Pienaar House (Sandringham)
- Friends Bakery (Sandringham)
- The Pie Works (Sandringham)
- Sandringham Gardens (Sandringham)
- Shell Sandringham (Sandringham)
- Spar Sandringham (Sandringham)
- Tiberius (Sandringham)
- Exclusive Books Sandton City (Sandton)
- King David Sandton (Sandton)
- Kwikspar Parkmore (Sandton)
- Pick n Pay Lonehill (Sandton)
- Willowbrook Retirement Village (Sandton)
- Chabad House (Savoy)
- Cresthill Cafe (Sunningdale)
- King David Victory Park (Victory Park)
- Pick n Pay Victory Park (Victory Park)
- Sandton Sinai (Wendywood)
- Sandton Country Club Estate (Woodmead)

Klerksdorp

- Spar Leon Lewis (Klerksdorp)

Kroonstad

- Genesis Books (Kroonstad)

Krugersdorp

- Krugersdorp Synagogue (Krugersdorp)

Pretoria

- Jaffa Old Aged Home (Pretoria)
- Pretoria Hebrew Congregation (Pretoria)



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SA's new anti-Israel bloc – an 'insignificant' grouping

TALI FEINBERG

Even after Israel committed to a ceasefire with Hamas, South Africa continues its single-minded pursuit of the Jewish state. In its latest move, South Africa joined eight countries in forming a global bloc, The Hague Group, for the sole purpose of attacking and isolating Israel.

The group said it would co-ordinate "legal, economic, and diplomatic measures to hold Israel accountable". Ignoring human rights abuses and wars in their own backyards, representatives of the governments of Belize, Bolivia, Colombia, Cuba, Honduras, Malaysia, Namibia, Senegal, and South Africa flew to The Hague for some pomp and ceremony as they launched the group on 31 January. Hamas expressed its approval.

At The Hague, Alvin Botes, South Africa's deputy minister of the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO), said that Israel was "an apartheid state" and that "Israel continues to sow destruction as it seeks to further depopulate Palestinian territories". He also said Israel's presence "in Palestine" was "unlawful".

"This is just another act of grandstanding by our government in a desperate attempt to get global credibility," said South African Jewish Board of Deputies National Director Wendy Kahn. "South Africa's ongoing effort to demonise Israel has made no contribution to ending the horrific conflict over the past 16 months. It's only the commitment of the United States [US], Egypt, and Qatar that have brought about the ceasefire, including the pivotal return of hostages."

Representing South Africa at the launch were Botes and DIRCO director-general Zane Dangor, who read out the inaugural joint statement. It said the group was "guided by the charter of the United Nations [UN], and the responsibility of all nations to uphold the inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination, that it enshrines for all peoples".

It was clear that, according to the group, this right to self-determination was "enshrined for all peoples" except Jews. Dangor went on to say that The Hague Group was "determined to end the Israeli occupation of the state of Palestine".

The group committed to upholding the International Criminal Court (ICC) arrest warrants issued against Israeli leaders; prevent the provision or transfer of arms, munitions, and equipment to Israel; and prevent the docking of vessels at their ports where there is a "risk of the vessel being used to carry military fuel and weaponry to Israel".

In his speech, Botes stated that the group "marks a major step by states from the Global South to work collectively towards justice for the people of Palestine". He said The Hague Group had agreed on a "programme of action to defend the institutions of global governance, including the ICC and the International Court of Justice from egregious attacks, due to these institutions having dared to hold Israel accountable".

"South Africa will continue to do everything within its power to preserve the existence of the Palestinian people as a group ... and realise their collective right to self-determination," Botes said.

Minister of International Relations and Cooperation Ronald Lamola didn't attend the launch, but commented that "The Hague Group's formation sends a clear message: no nation is above the law, and no crime will go unanswered."

However, Dr Ehud Eiran, associate professor at the School of Political Science at the University of Haifa, said the launch of The Hague Group had received little

attention in Israel.

"Power plays are viewed as more consequential than a mechanism involving nine states," Eiran said. "For example, the ceasefires achieved with Hezbollah and Hamas are perceived as the result of Israel's military effectiveness, combined with US pressure."

Local political analyst Daniel Silke agrees. "I don't see this group of countries as that significant. I don't think it's going to carry much weight, and pressure from big players is going to be a lot more important. I think this is an attempt to 'keep the flag flying' as we move into the second phase of the ceasefire agreement."

Silke finds it interesting that this group has separated itself from the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa)-plus group. "It's almost as though BRICS-plus or Global South groupings were unable to reach consensus on this issue." Yet it provides South Africa with a "foreign policy leg to stand on, it gives 'global fuel' and elevates South Africa's status".

South African Zionist Federation spokesperson Rolene Marks said, "This is just the latest episode in the weaponisation of international law for conducting a global

The press conference launching The Hague Group



Photo: Facebook

vendetta against Israel. It's not the pursuit of international law we're seeing, but rather 'international lynch law', a truly shameful perversion.

"That the group statement includes no mention of Hamas or terrorism, while the only reference to civilians pertains to Palestinian civilians, tells its own story," she said. "Little wonder that Hamas enthusiastically welcomed the initiative."

Foreign policy analyst Professor Glen Segell said, "instead of constructive

engagement to assist all parties, the tone of this group is stirring up hate". For example, its media statement "broadcasts inaccuracies, apportioning blame at the wrong door, and fails to note efforts of Middle Eastern states and the US to find a solution for Gaza".

Conflict resolution expert Professor Hussein Solomon said, "These countries aren't heavy hitters. I don't think they're going to have any impact. I think South Africa must be extremely careful, because

the US has issues with South Africa, including our Middle East stance. In addition, we have our own troops dying in the Democratic Republic of the Congo etcetera, but we seem more interested in a conflict 9 000km away."

Like Silke, he finds it strange that this group wasn't created as part of BRICS. "I don't understand why there's a need for this group, and I'm convinced it will have no impact whatsoever," he said.

Marks notes that "far from being motivated by any genuine desire to resolve the conflict, what really unites these countries is a shared antipathy towards the West. Israel provides a convenient target, but this misuse of international bodies ultimately puts at risk all states compelled to defend themselves against terrorism."

This group represents "yet another departure from the values upon which our country is founded," Marks said. "It's nevertheless noteworthy that no Arab-speaking states have joined the group."

First aid required for US-SA relations

With United States President Donald Trump's first weeks in the White House being highlighted in the news, the SA Jewish Report asked former American diplomat and political analyst and commentator **J. Brooks Spector** for his opinions on aid, trade, and bilateral relations.

Why do you believe Trump put out that tweet on South Africa's Expropriation Act?

First of all, we must see this call to halt support of foreign assistance to South Africa as part of a much larger effort to draw down American foreign aid more generally, and to break down the structure of America's foreign assistance administration and absorb it into the state department.

In addition, there's a new goal designed to align foreign assistance more closely with Trump's foreign policy ideas rather than more usually supporting programmes designed to operate over the longer term and enhancing international health and welfare more broadly and beyond the specifics of immediate foreign policy goals.

Finally, of course, it's important to note that Trump was responding in an *ad hoc*, unstudied manner to misinformation given to him regarding the circumstances in South Africa, now that the land-reform measure had been signed into law.

More than half a decade ago, during Trump's first administration, there was a similar outburst about South Africa's supposed circumstances in response to claims "horrible things" were poised to happen or were already happening to the country's farming community.

What do you believe the impact will be?

In the immediate circumstances, this halt will obviously do damage to a PEPFAR (President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief) programme that has been especially successful over two decades in dealing with HIV/AIDS and related infections. PEPFAR is a partnership between the US and South African governments, the private sector, and international philanthropic foundations. Throughout its lifetime, it has brought the HIV/AIDS epidemic under control and supported treatment and preventative measures to bear as well.

Absent American support, it will be more difficult to carry out this vital mission, even though a majority of the funding is no longer from US government sources. Sadly, it will also reduce further any positive impact America's engagement with or influence in this country can have.

What do you make of President Cyril Ramaphosa's response?

President Ramaphosa's response was tempered and appropriate. In a word, it was "statesmanlike". Going forward, his government now must continue to explain and – especially – clarify how the new land measure is designed to improve the circumstances of South Africans. This would be to counter misunderstandings and misinformation about the measure and its intentions.

Was South Africa even on Trump's agenda before this?

Realistically, South Africa was only marginally in Trump's consciousness. He certainly doesn't have a deep historical knowledge or understanding about the complexities of the country. I suspect that, over the years, whenever South Africa has crossed his mind, it has been in response to the thoughts of a very small coterie of people with less than current understandings of the place who have had his ear.

Is there a possibility that this crisis could turn in South Africa's favour?

Yes, this is actually an opportunity to build a more nuanced understanding of the opportunities and challenges represented by South Africa's circumstances. But it will take carefully articulated efforts by South African officials and private citizens alike to make such an effort. The positives of PEPFAR as a joint project, the beneficial nature of US investment in South Africa, and the manifold actions and engagements of

private citizens from both nations all need to be brought forward.

It's important to understand, however, that South Africa's reputation in the thoughts of individuals in the Trump administration hasn't been enhanced by the rather public embrace by South Africa of Russia, China, and Iran, as well as its efforts at the International Court of Justice. That difficult reality must be addressed. South Africa and Russia's defence and security relationship in the midst of the Ukrainian invasion is also less than helpful from the American government's perspective.

Does this impasse have anything to do with South Africa's relationship and attitude towards Israel over the Gaza war?

South Africa's relationships with the three nations mentioned above are more consequential as they have a rather more direct impact on building a broader international consensus against Russia's invasion of Ukraine or Iran's push towards becoming a nuclear power. But, at the same time, the International Court of Justice effort clearly hasn't contributed towards building stronger rapport between the US and South Africa.

Do you believe sending Ebrahim Rasool, who has come out clearly as anti-Israel, as ambassador to the US was a wise move?

Naming Ebrahim Rasool as South Africa's ambassador to the US for the second time was actually a positive step. Recall that recently, he urged lessening the intensity of South Africa's rhetoric over Gaza, and, by implication, focusing more on bilateral ties instead. To the extent that Rasool works to build upon the already significant bilateral economic ties, as well as with the South African expatriate community in the US, his assignment may well be a successful tenure.

How do you believe Rasool needs to play his cards in order to get the best out of being ambassador in the US?

Beyond the points noted above, as a veteran of Washington and with his existing contacts in America, Rasool could be well-placed to motivate other African representatives to co-operate on creating proposals for initiatives on US and African trade and investment rather than being the more passive recipients of ideas developed solely in Washington. This might also include encouraging a renewal or extension of AGOA (the African Growth and Opportunity Act), a tariff-free window into America that is due to expire this year. To be sure, there's some significant discontent on Capitol Hill on the part of Republican members of Congress towards continuing South Africa's eligibility under AGOA and so that challenge is a significant task for the new ambassador.

What do you believe the impact of the halt on USAID to SA will be?

In a word, it will be baleful. At least at this point, beyond putting a halt to programmes like PEPFAR, it will probably have a negative impact on efforts towards the ongoing development of the Lobito Corridor project. That project aims to create a modern transportation infrastructure for the export of vital minerals from southern Africa to the world.

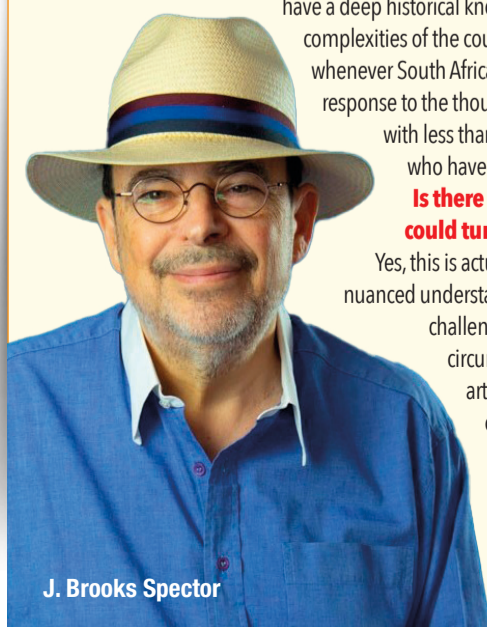
Do you think USAID will resume after 90 days?

Eventually, some foreign assistance will resume in some form, but America's reputation as a strong, steady partner for development or humanitarian assistance will suffer as a result of this precipitate decision.

Ultimately, how do you see the future of SA and US relations?

The ties – personal, professional, economic, intellectual, and cultural – are strong, and they will continue to grow. What's at risk, however, is the way the two governments will interact and relate to each other. Comments to the effect that if aid isn't forthcoming, South Africa should stop selling essential minerals to the US aren't helpful.

Fortunately, such utterances don't represent official South African policy. But the bilateral relationship is to some degree hostage to the way the US president sees South Africa, how he wishes to move the relationship, and in which ways. Such things, for now at least, are almost unknowable. As a result, there are caution lights flashing.



J. Brooks Spector

US funding freeze ‘potentially catastrophic’ say AIDS organisations

LULA PENCHARZ

United States (US) President Donald Trump has suspended United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in South Africa, among other countries, for a minimum of 90 days, which is likely to have a devastating effect on HIV and AIDS treatment and care programmes here, according to experts.

“The impact can be catastrophic,” said Dr Ali Bacher, the former chairperson of Right to Care in South Africa (2008-2022), a non-governmental organisation that works to make medicine and care available to HIV and AIDS patients. It effectively interrupts lifesaving HIV healthcare services for people whose healthcare treatment dare not be interrupted, he said.

“If the US government significantly cuts the funding, the ramifications for thousands and thousands of South Africans, mainly black South Africans, is too costly to even contemplate,” said Bacher.

The interruption of regular treatment and closure of treatment clinics could potentially lead to the HIV virus mutating and patients’ immune systems deteriorating for lack of medication, allowing HIV to progress to AIDS.

“With interrupted, irregular, erratic, or no treatment of HIV, a person’s life expectancy is between 2.5 to 12 years,” Bacher said.

Trump ordered the temporary funding freeze, saying it was in America’s best interests to review USAID partnerships and determine if they align with US foreign policy. Elon Musk, who grew up in South Africa during the 80s HIV epidemic, is pushing for USAID

THIS IS HOW HIV DEVELOPS INTO FULL BLOWN AIDS, AND THERE COULD BE DEADLY CONSEQUENCES FOR MANY SOUTH AFRICANS WITHOUT ACCESS TO TREATMENT.

to be scrapped as part of budget cuts, claiming the department is corrupted.

“South Africa has received roughly \$8 billion in PEPFAR [President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief] funding over the past two decades,” a Democratic Alliance press release calling for the lifting of the USAID suspension stated.

USAID functions as the humanitarian arm of the US government, and some argue that is what makes America great – its global work and formidable values. PEPFAR, which is implemented by USAID in South Africa, was launched by former Republican President George Bush in 2003. South Africa is one of the biggest recipients of PEPFAR funding, and since its inception and partnership with local non-governmental organisations, it has brought the South African HIV pandemic under control.

PEPFAR contributes 17% to South Africa’s budget for the management of the HIV pandemic, according to South African Health Minister Dr Aaron Motsoaledi in a recent media briefing.

Right to Care supports 245 primary health centres in Mpumalanga and the Free State, according to Bacher. The organisation’s R1.4 billion budget in 2022 “mainly came from Washington”, he said.

“The benefit for life by Right to Care and Washington cannot be put down in words,” Bacher said. PEPFAR has saved more than 26 million lives since it started, and covers the antiretroviral (ARV) treatment of 20 million people.



PEPFAR

Bryan Schimmel, who has lived with HIV for decades, reiterated that ARVs “aren’t a once-off cure, but have to be taken on a regular basis otherwise the virus mutates”.

The Foundation for AIDS Research

(AmfAR) reported that 101 368 South Africans “pick up new supplies of ARVs every single day, 365 days per year”. The interruption of regular treatment is concerning as it will be difficult to

get people back on treatment after the stop-work orders are lifted, the organisation said.

The order to stop work issued by USAID on 28 January has temporarily shut down PEPFAR-funded HIV clinics. According to News24, at least three PEPFAR-funded South African programmes “let staff and patients know they were temporarily shutting their doors last week”.

Said Schimmel, “Ninety days isn’t a short period in HIV terms” and the impact this stoppage will have on people’s lives “depends on how dire the person’s health was to begin with”.

Without access to testing and regular treatment, the virus can begin to mutate and attach to the white blood cells, weakening the immune system. This is how HIV develops into full blown AIDS, and there could be deadly consequences for many South Africans

without access to treatment. Patients are being directed to government clinics, but the backlog of patients is further interrupting treatment and making receiving treatment more difficult than it should be.

Though Schimmel is proactive about his health and on private medical insurance, he said that for less fortunate South Africans, their health is “usually compromised in the first place”, which would put them more at risk. ARV treatment allows for healthy immune systems to prevent drug resistant HIV and stop the transmission of HIV to others once the infected individual’s viral load is undetectable.

Said Bacher, “It is very serious, and please G-d they don’t stop it overnight.” Unfortunately, the effects of the suspension of PEPFAR funding in South Africa may soon become obvious.



BRIGA TOWERS IR YAMIM



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A stunning 164-square-meter apartment for sale with a 30-square-meter terrace facing the Mediterranean Sea, just 300 meters from a wonderful sandy beach in one of the most prestigious buildings in Israel called Briga Tower.

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A smart home with integrated blinds on all windows. 24/7 security, and extraordinary facilities including an Olympic swimming pool, spa with both wet and dry sauna, a tennis court, and a children’s playground. A private outside bar is open in the summer for the benefit of the tenants, and on the ground floor of

the most prestigious lobby you will find a synagogue and fully fitted gym.

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30% of the tenants in the building are from Anglo backgrounds specifically the United Kingdom, United States, and South Africa. The concierge team speak English as does the resident management team. Residents are all from a cosmopolitan and similar background.

The apartment is for sale directly from the owner at a price of 10.75m shekels.



For further information contact Dudi (David) Goder at dudi@goder.co.il or +972522450480

Starved, abused, confined – SA media ignores hostages' ordeal

LEE TANKLE

" Hamas terrorists would tell hostages, 'Nobody's looking for you. Nobody cares. You're going to stay here.' They would even say to the women that they were going to be a great mother to their children. And some of the women hostages were forced to cook for the family that captured them, but couldn't eat the food."

These are the words of Israeli journalist Naama Kadosh, who met and interviewed many released hostages and hostage families. Kadosh, who works for i24, was recently in South Africa to meet South African Jewry and be interviewed by local media. She hoped to share what she had learned about the situation in Israel, especially what she had learned from the hostages.

She told the *SA Jewish Report* that most media outlets weren't interested in interviewing her. One radio station made it clear that its standpoint was one-sided and definitely anti-Israel, so she didn't go through with it.

"I understood that they're blaming us basically for everything that's going on. I'm willing to debate with whoever wants to hear what I have to say and I'm open-minded, but it feels to me that they have taken a stand against Israel mainly from a lack of knowledge."

Kadosh said many media outlets didn't fully understand what the hostages went and are still going through in captivity.

" Hamas held the hostages in cages with small amounts of light," she said. "A lot of them at the beginning of the war were in cities in Gaza and houses. You must



Israeli journalist Naama Kadosh

understand that not only Hamas took part in the attack, a lot of Gazan citizens also took part. They just got into the kibbutzim, grabbed whoever they could, and crossed the border with them."

At the start of the war, she said, a lot of the Israelis were in citizens' houses. But then when the army started to bomb the area, they moved a lot of the hostages underground.

Kadosh said that many hostages faced starvation in captivity, with them getting one piece of bread a day with maybe some vegetables, and very little water, often having only one bottle of water for three days.

She said many were held in tiny rooms, often one square metre in size, in which one could just sit and it wasn't possible to

do anything. "They would just sleep on chairs, or you would sleep on the ground. Some of them had to poop and pee on themselves because they didn't have any type of bathroom there, and showered once every 40 days," she said.

"The ladies were sexually abused while in captivity," she said, "They faced a whole spectrum of abuse. I'm not even talking about what they did to the bodies. There was testimony of some terrorists burning them and branding them like cows with heated objects."

From her experience, once the hostages are released and reunited with their families, they initially have a sense of euphoria. However, after a month or two, the reality of what they have been through and seen starts to hit them and they start to process what it is that they experienced – whether that be physical, sexual, or psychological abuse.

She described the hostage negotiations as being like a game of Russian Roulette. "You don't know who's going to come out. You want to know if you're going to get a body or a live person. It's very, very hard to negotiate like that. It's like you speak in English, and they speak in Chinese. You're not even speaking in terms of the same values."

Kadosh said that while everyone was happy that the deal was happening and the hostages

were being released, the families of those attacked by terrorists had many reservations.

"The cost of the ceasefire deal is high," she said. "For every Israeli, if it's a woman, 30 female terrorists are released from Israeli prisons. If it's a man, 80 prisoners are released. And if it's a soldier, you're speaking about like 120 prisoners that are terrorists in Israeli prisons."

Many Israelis are worried about the repercussions of releasing convicted terrorists from prison.

"A lot of these terrorists committed a terror attack inside of Israel and killed a lot of people," said Kadosh, "So, of course, the families have mixed emotions about them being released after they killed their loved ones. But everybody understands that we must do everything to save one Israeli life. It's worth everything we've got."

Kadosh said Israeli nervousness about the release of the prisoners is based on the track record of the crimes past released prisoners have gone on to commit.

"We know that 99% of the prisoners that we're going to release in these deals are probably going to try to do it again. It's a risk we're taking because the life of our hostages is more important than these prisoners."

Though there is much debate in Israel about the deal, Israelis have come together over the past 15 and a half months to advocate for the hostages, mainly because it's in the DNA of the Jewish people to be resilient, she said.

"The war helped us to understand that we have to be more united inside of Israel," she said. "The war helped us to understand that our differences don't matter. We have more similarities than the things that divide us."

In *Midas Man*, a new biopic of Jewish Beatles manager Brian Epstein, a synagogue sets the scene

STEPHEN SILVER – JTA

In *Midas Man*, the new film out this month in the United States about late Beatles manager Brian Epstein, an early, pivotal scene is set in a synagogue.

In it, Brian (Jacob Fortune-Lloyd) sits with his parents, Harry and Malka (Eddie Marsan and Emily Watson), as they sit in the pews together as the only people in a Liverpool synagogue after services are over, each man wearing a kippah and tallit. Malka, who was called Queenie, says to her son, "It seems like only yesterday you and your brother were up there."

They discuss Brian's future, and his desire to be in the music business, leading an initially sceptical Harry to allow Brian to sell rock and pop records as an annex to the family's furniture and retail business. The success of this side venture ultimately propelled him to become the manager of an exciting new band, The Beatles, and the Jew most associated with Beatlemania.

Over the years, Epstein – sometimes considered the "fifth Beatle" – has been the subject of multiple books and, more recently, a statue in Liverpool. *Midas Man*, now streaming on the platform Olyn, represents the first film that makes him the centre of attention.

Though the movie spent the past several months on the Jewish film festival circuit, including a spot at the New York Jewish Film Festival earlier this month, Epstein's

Jewishness isn't its focus. It deals more with Epstein being a closeted gay man, his music career, and his relationships with the Beatles and his family.

But there are snippets of Epstein's Jewish story in addition to the synagogue scene. In another scene, a heart-to-heart during the wedding of Epstein's brother, singer Cilla Black (Darci Shaw) praises the "food and dancing" at the event, and suggests that for that reason, she'd like to have a Jewish wedding herself.

Later, we see Harry's funeral, where the cantor sings the prayers and they do the traditional rendering of garments, and at another point in the film, Epstein meets future business partner Nat Weiss (played by James Corrigan), they say "*Lchaim*" as they toast, and Weiss addresses him as "*boychick*".

The notes are the only ones the film hits about Epstein's Jewish upbringing and identity, which were so prominent that Beatles frontman John Lennon routinely invoked them while poking fun at his friend. Lennon quipped that Epstein's biography ought to be called *Queer Jew*, according to a biographer who travelled with the band.

Brigit Grant, the film's co-screenwriter, wrote for the British publication *The Jewish News* last autumn about how Epstein was born on Yom Kippur; how Epstein's grandfather was a Yiddish-speaking

refugee from Lithuania; and how she learned from an uncle that when Epstein studied for his Barmitzvah, he initially learned the wrong Torah portion but learned quickly enough to give a "very competent" reading of the correct one. Epstein also sought out Yom Kippur services while on the road with the band, and resisted

Epstein, is Jewish. Watson isn't and neither is Marsan, although he's played several Jewish characters in his career, including the father of Amy Winehouse in last year's biopic *Back to Black*. In 2021, Marsan played an anti-fascist Jewish character in a BBC series called *Ridley Road*, and faced what he called "relentless" abuse as

Midas Man than music composed by the band Epstein managed. *Variety* recently covered what it called the "nightmare production" of the film, which dragged on for years, had three different directors at different times, and was plagued by long-term uncertainty over whether the film would be allowed to use the Beatles' music.

It ended up being able to use covers the band performed, like *Money (That's What I Want)*; *Please, Mr. Postman*; and *Besame Mucho*. There are no original Lennon-McCartney compositions, although there are a couple of scenes where a character mentions that a certain song just hit number one.

The movie depicts the scenes before and after the Beatles' famous 1964 debut on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, with Jay Leno playing Sullivan, but not the performance. Instead, the famous *All You Need is Love* live broadcast is cut off before the song starts.

Epstein died not long after his father of an accidental overdose at age 32 in 1967. He had both a funeral in Liverpool – famously officiated by a rabbi who didn't know him – and a London memorial service attended by the Beatles and officiated by a different rabbi, but the film shows neither. The last we see of Epstein is him walking symbolically across Abbey Road before a title informs viewers of his death.

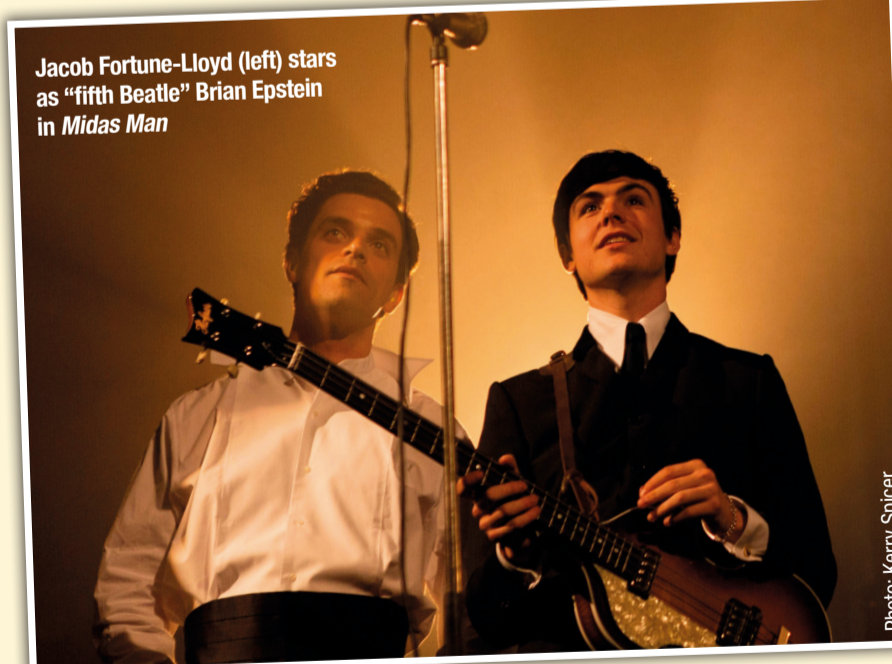


Photo: Kerry Spicer

entreaties to change his surname, she wrote.

The synagogue scenes, Grant wrote, were shot at Liverpool's Princes Road Synagogue, as the actual Greenbank synagogue that hosted both Epstein's Barmitzvah and funeral no longer exists, and Marsan wore Grant's late father's tallit in the film.

Fortune-Lloyd, who plays

a result.

"All I did was play a Jew. I dread to think what would've happened if I was actually Jewish," he tweeted at the time, according to contemporaneous reports. He has since deleted his account on the social network X.

Despite the omissions, the Jewish elements of Epstein's biography are more present in

Death of the sisterhood on 7 October

OPINION

JOANNE FEDLER



I wait and watch for the release of each hostage from Gaza, and cannot help the sobs that escape from deep inside me.

Like Jews all over the world, the fate of those kidnapped on 7 October 2023 has consumed my psychic and emotional energy for so long. I've whispered their names in prayers, they are familiar on my tongue. Those Bibas babies' faces appear in my dreams.

As young women like Arbel Yehud are paraded through marauding hordes of masked Hamas terrorists, my relief tussles with my outrage.

I'm grateful for everyone who returns alive.

But I know that not a single feminist organisation will speak out about the human rights violations they have endured, even in the godawful circumstances of their release.

When I was the age of some of these young women hostages, I became a women's rights advocate in South Africa.

I set up Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre to end violence against women in 1997. I sat on a law commission to draft new domestic-violence legislation, and was part of the focus group that worded the clause in the South African Bill of Rights enshrining every person's right to freedom from violence.

Violence, poverty, and denial of education are some of the root causes of women's inequality. But of these, it is violence that knows no privilege or grants any exemptions – it cuts across all divides. During my years in the field, I saw women from every background walk through our doors.

Yet, this always held a strange optimism for me, because I believed that no matter our intersectionalities, women could stay connected to one other. Women know what it is to fear male violence, no matter our religion, status, or background.

I stood sentinel at the gates of this imaginary City of Joy – a real place in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to which survivors come to rebuild their lives and a place I have always dreamed of visiting. I indented my life to the "sisterhood" and lived in its timeshare, unapologetically, fiercely, all my life. My religion was feminism. My community other women.

There has never been a woman or child who falls outside of this line of safety for me.

I trusted this as a sacred path, believing that it was in these spaces of commonality, that women's leadership would emerge to challenge the existing power structures.

I've never been one to draw lines between Jewish and non-Jewish sister allies.

But this changed on 7 October 2023.

One needs courage to learn the details of what was wrought on Jewish bodies in the terrorist attack by Hamas. A carnage so deeply misogynist, international feminist organisations could have rallied a universal revolution. Imagine the power of all women pulling together in a primal roar!

We waited.

Surely women's organisations would condemn, demand justice, be our voice?

For eight weeks, not a single international

women's organisation spoke up.

Michelle Obama didn't beseech, "Bring back our girls", as she did in 2016 when Boko Haram stole girls in Nigeria.

It was a cold, hard dawning.

My "feminist comrades" turned their backs on Israeli women, on Jewish women, on me.



Joanne Fedler at a rally showing support for the hostages in Gaza

Their silence wasn't the only betrayal.

There were "feminists" who denied the sexual violence of that dark day.

It has been a shock to realise that there's no sisterhood that includes Jewish suffering.

Besides the horror of 7 October, I've been navigating a secondary traumatising described by psychologist Jennifer Freyd in 1994 as "institutional betrayal", in which wrongdoing is perpetrated by an institution, in this case, my feminist homeland.

When someone we trust or rely upon for support or survival doesn't prevent our suffering or refuses to offer a supportive response to wrongdoing, we experience a new layer of suffering. If abusive behaviour is normalised, covered up, or victims are punished – which happens routinely in the military, universities, the legal, and healthcare systems – the trauma of the initial violence is compounded. This undermines the ability of survivors to recover.

Many of the women – and men – who were raped on 7 October didn't survive, so it's those of us left to witness their violation who are the "survivors".

I've tried my best to understand why women's organisations abandoned us.

Is it mistrust of the credibility of the victims? Are Jewish women's accounts of what happened so unbelievable, even in the face of footage and witness testimony? The foundational principle of feminism is that victims are to be believed, unless of course you deem it all "Israel Defense Forces [IDF] propaganda".

Or perhaps the atrocities are diminished by the "context", namely seen as part of a "liberation struggle" by Hamas? In all other contexts, international women's organisations have always denounced rape as a legitimate form of resistance. But perhaps an exception can be made when it happens to Jews.

Maybe these organisations are simply unable to include Israeli and Jewish women

in the narrative of what they are fighting for. Mutilated breasts, bloodied vaginas, and torn open pregnant stomachs of Jewish women have been deemed part of the "patriarchal oppressive colonial state of Israel" and the power of the IDF. Such bodies cannot be "victims".

Jewish pain has been erased and silenced. Our injuries cancelled.

Finally, on 1 December 2023, UN Women issued a statement, after much pressure from Israeli groups.

But the timing after such a telling lapse exposed the deep subterranean antisemitism that sits like a virus at the heart of this septic, partisan form of feminism.

Because they failed us, they have failed all women.

I've run from the hypocrisy, complicity, and cowardice of these corrupted institutions.

Now, I turn my heart to embrace the immense dignity and strength of the young hostages returned home. They have tough times ahead. They have been to hell and back. But they have survived, without the support of international women's organisations

speaking up for their release and freedom.

A wise friend in the United States – an African American human rights activist and political commentator – reminded me, "We need you calm and centred in the wisdom and strength of the Jewish people, especially the wisdom and strength of Jewish women."

And so, I look to the Jewish community for new feminist role models and see warriors like Elica le Bon, Noa Tishby, Eve Barlow, Einut Wilf, Susan Sandberg, and of course, Rachel Goldberg-Polin, who despite having lost her son, remains poised, dignified, and filled with grace.

If I had a single wish, I'd beg G-d to reverse it all, and bring Hersh home to her, tired and dirty after a music festival in the desert instead of maimed and tortured with a bullet to the back of his head.

I want to believe that a new feminism will emerge from the Israeli campaign MeTooUnlessURaJew and WeToo, built on the ruins of this betrayal, inviting women from all backgrounds and religions to be part of something better.

Over the past 16 months, I have taken solace from the brilliant and fearless activist Assita Kanko, a member of the European Parliament and a secular Muslim; Nova Peris OAM, the indigenous Australian athlete and former politician; and Erin Molan, the former television presenter for Sky News Australia.

They have given me hope that someday I'll be part of a new sisterhood.

The great Jewish feminist, Andrea Dworkin, said, "Women intend to save themselves when sacrificing some women, but only the freedom of all women protects any woman."

• Joanne Fedler is an author and writing mentor. Her 15th book, "The Whale's Last Song" will be published in South Africa in March 2025. You can find her on Substack at <https://joannefedler.substack.com> or www.joannefedler.com

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Iconic Lions Shul on auction

LEE TANKLE

The Lions Shul in Doornfontein was a hub of Jewish life in a once-predominantly Jewish area. Although it will be put up for auction on 20 February, because it is a heritage site, the outside cannot be altered and it will always remain a gentle reminder of hard-but-good times of old in our community.

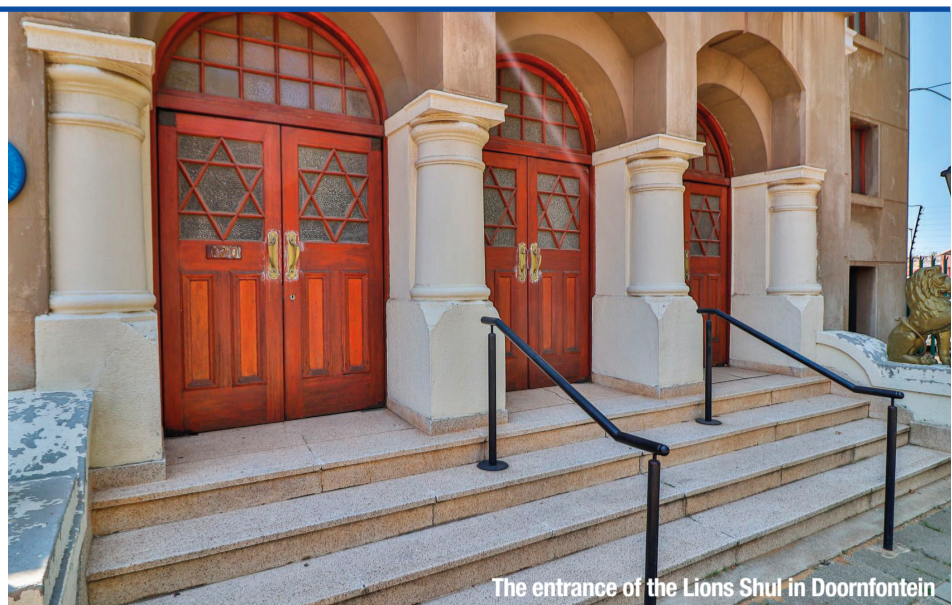
The Lions Shul was originally one of seven shuls in Doornfontein, a suburb that was the core of Jewish Johannesburg in the first half of the 1900s. It's the longest continuously operational shul in Johannesburg.

The shul, technically called the Doornfontein

Hebrew Congregation, was lovingly nicknamed the Lions Shul because of the two small cast iron lion statues painted gold outside the building that flank its front steps and watch over either side of the entrance.

It was the third synagogue to be built in the neighbourhood of Doornfontein, and was a mainstay for many in the community since it was constructed in 1905 for £4 000.

The synagogue was designed by Morris Jacob Harris, a Jewish architect who ran a practice in Johannesburg at the time and the son of Johannesburg's first rabbi, Mark Louis Harris. Constructed out of buff-coloured stucco and brick, the building's most prominent features are its



The entrance of the Lions Shul in Doornfontein

Male grooming lounges put 'man' into manicure

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

Facials, waxes, manis, and pedis are no longer exclusively female territory. For many men, personal grooming isn't just an increasingly mainstream pastime, it's an integral part of a holistic wellness routine.

"Grooming has definitely become more mainstream for men," says Justyn Spinner, the managing director of Bolton House, a men's grooming lounge in Rosebank, Johannesburg. "It's a reflection of a broader cultural shift where self-care is no longer seen as exclusively feminine."

"Getting involved in this industry was a way to champion a lifestyle where men embrace their individuality while upholding the art of dapper living. I wanted to create a space that goes beyond a haircut or shave, it's about fostering community, confidence, and a sense of pride in self-care."

Crystal Kruger, the national hair education manager at national male grooming group Sorbet Man, agrees that traditional views of masculinity have broadened to include self-expression and self-care. "Men now feel more comfortable embracing grooming as part of their identity without fear of judgement," she says. "The modern man views grooming as a sign of confidence and professionalism."

The prevalence of social media, where influencers and celebrities have exposed men to global trends in fashion and grooming, has also helped normalise these practices, she says. "Pop culture has made grooming aspirational, with men seeing the benefits of looking and feeling good as part of a lifestyle."

For American-born, Joburg-based entrepreneur Zach Bucheister, 36, grooming is an important part of his overall well-being. "While historically, it's not something that men are

pushed towards, as you get a bit older, you no longer feel as good as you'd like to," he says. "At this stage, you also become more confident in who you are and realise that taking care of yourself is a great thing to do. It makes you feel more comfortable in your own skin. My wife is a fan of me taking care of myself too."

Riding a motorcycle around the city, he began to notice that his pores were becoming clogged and so connected with Jared Hines, Spinner's business partner. "Bolton House has this male energy. They'll be playing jazz or country music, and they have wood floors and pressed ceilings. It's a vibe," Bucheister says.

He's since brought many friends to the establishment for their birthdays. "We have a little bonding time, a *l'chaim*, and a haircut or a treatment. Some of my friends spend more time there than I do. When my dad is in town, we always go there and have a chill."

Bucheister says grooming is part of overall wellness. "You go to the gym because you want to take care of your muscles. You read because you want to take care of your brain. Looking after your skin or your overall appearance allows you to take care of yourself, providing relaxation and confidence."

Hines, who has been in the spa industry for more than two decades, says that the rise of the metrosexual man was spurred by football star David Beckham in the early 2000s. Yet these days, grooming isn't about being metrosexual, it's about men finding a space where they feel comfortable. While there's still some initial reluctance, he admits, once men try new treatments, they're generally hooked.

Men often start with hairstyling or beard maintenance, and once they notice men having facials, manis, and pedis, they book those too – or their wives encourage them to try a treatment. Extending Bolton House beyond a grooming space to provide a lifestyle offering with poker evenings and upcoming whiskey tastings also helps draw in clientele.

His average client is around 40 and often in a high-powered position. "They're influential guys, so for them, it's about looking good, because also it portrays who they are in their position. They've realised that looking after themselves, being well groomed, and dressing well all comes together to actually make them more masculine."

Prominent businessman Nachi Kay, 52, believes that following a regular grooming regimen is about ageing gracefully, having a healthy lifestyle, and maintaining a professional image. "It's important to take care of yourself because even though you can't beat ageing, you can look and feel better as you grow older," he says. Though Kay has observed the increasing popularity of male grooming among younger men, he thinks it's a rarer practice within his age group.

"However, I've always been fit and strong – it's important. I'm a father and a husband and I employ many people, and I need to be around to do all this. Grooming is part of looking after myself."

From microneedling to waxes, facials, and massages, he says he always feels and looks a lot better after these treatments.

"It helps me to deal better with what is a very busy life," he says. Quoting a friend who says that each kilometre of his daily runs gives him another minute with his grandchildren, Kay says we need to take care of ourselves while we still can.

Ahmed Joudi is the owner of Urban Men, a network of men's grooming salons in Cape Town which has a substantial Jewish clientele. He says that in some instances, men are now taking more care of their appearance than their female counterparts. "In the old days, men found it difficult to book these hair and other grooming services in different stores, so we offer all of it in one place."

Depending on their age, profession, and culture, each man finds his own way to look good, Joudi says. "Younger guys like something funkier, whereas the man in the office doesn't want to look different, he wants to look clean and stylish."

He says manis and pedis for men aren't about colour, rather about tidying up and buffing the nails to make them look neat. Waxing is often done for nose and ear hair. "It's about being presentable."

"Ultimately, male grooming is a reflection of evolving societal norms, modern expectations, and the understanding that taking care of oneself is a fundamental part of living well," says Kruger.

domed towers at both ends and its bowed façade.

The inside of the shul is painted pale yellow and white, and it is offset by the dark wooden pews and the rich red carpet which flows down the centre.

Three small shallow glass domes fill the ceiling and the wooden women's gallery around three sides of the building add to its cosiness.

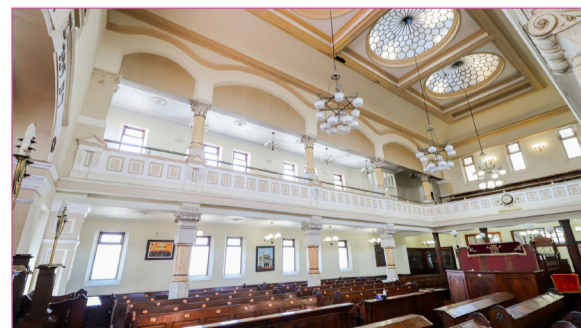
Beit Street, where the shul is situated, was "the commercial hub of this former Jewish suburb, crowded with kosher butcheries, shoemakers, tailors, blacksmiths, carpenters, and barbers," said Lions Shul Chairperson Aron Ziegler.

"In the early days, the suburb was a vibrant part of the town, crosscut by

bicycles, horses, carts, and trams. Hawkers and peddlers crowded the pavements, offering live chickens, eggs, ice, and coal for sale," Ziegler said. Then, in 1932, a fire destroyed much of the shul, but it was rebuilt completely with changes to the entrance and the removal of the minarets.

Ziegler said many members of the shul, who have been attending since they were children, are fourth-generation Litvak Jews who used to stay or work around Doornfontein.

"Those still coming to the shul remember the suburb with much affection, probably because everyone started on the same footing: as immigrants in a modern city, struggling to find their place and make things work for themselves and their families. And all immigrants knew that when they arrived in Johannesburg, they had to make their way."



The Lions Shul minyan always stood out because it offered an early 06:00 Shabbat service. "It started because of guys who wanted to have a Shabbos shul service but needed to get to work, which was mostly in town," said Ziegler. "In those days, a lot of Jews worked in the CBD. They could have their Shabbos minyan, but at 08:30, they were out, and they

could get on with the rest of the day."

Ziegler said this early service is what kept bringing people back to the shul all these years. Before the COVID-19 pandemic began five years ago, the shul had a steady attendance of 20 to 30 people for services each week, however since then, many of its members left the country or didn't want to drive to Doornfontein on Shabbat. There was also a substantial loss of some of its most prominent members, including Stan Rothbart, a member of the shul for more than 45 years; Michael



Baum, the shul's long-serving chairperson; and Ruby Lipschitz, one of the main organisers of the shul.

Ziegler also attributed the dwindling attendance to the state of Doornfontein itself, and that people might be afraid to travel to that area of Johannesburg.

"Once Stan Rothbart passed away and we were packing up his office and everything, we had to decide on the future of the shul," Ziegler said. "A decision was taken that without funding, we would be unable to continue."

The shul will be a part of an open auction hosted by property broker, Rodney Beck, on 20 February.

"We want to do this while we're still alive and with this, we'll be able to close the shul with dignity," said Ziegler.

The shul itself was declared a heritage site, and due to its status, even once the building is sold, the

new owners won't be allowed to alter the outside of the building," said Beck.

"We can't determine who is going to buy it or what they are going to do with it, but the outside of the

building has to be kept intact," he said.

"We're hoping that a Jewish institution is going to come in and save us, and then we can still run the shul," said Ziegler.

But he said that though many of the shul members are sad to part with it, they know it's the only way to move forward.

Ophthalmologists help us see straight

Say this in earnest. The story of the Israeli professor who was invited, disinvited, and then – spoiler alert – reinvited to speak at the Ophthalmological Society of South Africa (OSSA) conference is one of significant significance. Not just for South Africa, but for Jews and supporters of Western democratic values worldwide.

If I had a soap box that was strong enough to support me, that I could climb on to with my injured knee, and that I didn't fall off because I get dizzy when standing on something higher than my New Balances, I would be on one right now, imploring you to hear this.

"Hear ye!" I would say. And then I would repeat it, "Hear ye!" in case there were some "ye" who weren't listening.

The simplified facts are as follows. A few months ago, Professor Ido Didi Fabian, an Israeli ophthalmologist based at Sheba Medical Center was invited to speak at the OSSA conference taking place in Johannesburg in February. On hearing of his invitation, the Islamic Medical Association (IMA), supported by a few other like-minded Israel haters, issued a statement condemning it. They started putting pressure on the organising committee and the OSSA executive committee to withdraw Fabian's invitation because of his Israeli nationality. First indications were that the OSSA would withstand the bullying, but then the pressure started building up and he was disinvited. It sadly goes without saying that the "pressure" was in the form of threats, bullying, and intimidation.

The OSSA, which was inexperienced in this sort of situation, was clearly out of its depth, and without consulting its members, did what it thought would make the matter go away.

It didn't. Because of members like Dr Dory Neu-Ner who refused to accept the outcome. Along with others, he approached the OSSA and made it clear that this discrimination wouldn't be acceptable to members. It prompted OSSA to reach out in the form of an

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



anonymous poll to ask the simple question whether Professor Fabian should speak at the conference.

The result? Eighty-one percent said yes. And so, Professor Fabian was reinvited, graciously accepted, and will get to share his knowledge.

Great story. Awesome result. But why the soap box?

We so often assume that the loud and negative noise means support. We often think that as Jews and supporters of Western democratic values, we're on our own. We so often give power to the IMAs of the world who have betrayed their stated mission and rather focus on Israel hatred. We often think that by letting it slide "this time", they will get it out of their system so that next time will be different. We think that by not making a fuss we're not "giving them oxygen".

None of this true.

Eighty-one percent of members supported having Professor Fabian speak. Whereas it doesn't mean that this percentage can be extrapolated through all areas and across all countries, it does tell us that we might not have been dealing with things the right way.

The OSSA story isn't uncommon. The IMA has publicly stated that it intends to infiltrate the board of Discovery to focus on an anti-Israel agenda. Other organisations have threatened "Jewish" owned stores and companies. And in most cases, the strategy is one of quiet diplomacy.

We need to learn from the ophthalmologist and see the bigger picture. We need to stare down the bullies and make others see what might be blurred. The story is important because it teaches us that we have friends. That they stand with us in numbers. And that maybe it's us who are as blind as those who will not see.

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Protecting Jews on campus

Earlier this week, together with senior leadership of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD), I had the opportunity to meet recently appointed Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar.

In a warm and engaging meeting, the minister briefed the delegation on new developments in terms of Israel's relations within our continent. He also expressed his willingness to work with South African Jewry and the many others in South Africa who have shown their support for Israel during this difficult time.

We look forward to working with the minister on these exciting initiatives.

Next week, our students will be returning to university. This is always a most exciting time of the year, and we wish all of the students, new and old, all the best for the academic year.

Having universities that are perceived as welcoming spaces for Jewish students is key to our survival as a Jewish community. For this reason, the SAJBD spends a significant amount of time engaging with the universities at all levels.

Higher education is one of the core spaces in which we engage with people from a variety of backgrounds, some of whom have views with which we strongly disagree, and universities are places where such views can and should be aired but within a spirit of engagement and tolerance.

The global trend toward shutting down Zionist Jewish voices in universities must be combatted. Thankfully, we have been

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

ABOVE BOARD

Karen Milner



able to maintain some of the safest spaces for Jewish students worldwide, but we cannot rest and must continue to ensure that education remains free from bigotry and open for all.

Over the past decade and more, the South African Union of Jewish Students (SAUJS) has undertaken some exceptional work to secure Jewish students' rights and safety on campus. SAUJS also serves as a critical social space for our students to meet and engage.

This year, I'm so proud to see that National Chairperson Sasha Said, as well as the chairpersons at the University of Johannesburg, Stellenbosch University, University of Cape Town, and private colleges chapters are all women! Strong young women leadership is a clear sign of a vibrant and open community. SAUJS is an excellent leadership training ground, and our SAUJS leaders learn unbelievable skills that stand them in good stead not only at university but throughout their careers.

As a professor at a university, I see the role that SAUJS plays on our campuses firsthand, and I strongly urge all students in our community to join SAUJS and take an active role in standing up for fellow Jews on campus. Study hard, and have fun!

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

SA JEWS OF LITHUANIAN & POLISH HERITAGE ARE ELIGIBLE TO OBTAIN EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP & EU PASSPORT

A common misconception people have is that European citizenship and EU Passport can only be obtained if one has documents proving lineage. The fact is that not having documents proving lineage, does not lead to your disqualification of eligibility.

In many cases the required documents can be obtained in the European country of origin!



Having European citizenship offers more than one benefit, besides the fact that it makes traveling far easier than with a South African passport...

As we are all fully aware of the current situation in South Africa where we face many uncertainties not just for today but for our children's future too.

While we are still having it relatively good here. We know that the time will come where as Jews we will look for alternative options. **Then having a**

European citizenship will be that tool we are looking for.

As we know, the majority of South African Jews are descendants of Jews whose European citizenship was illegally deprived, and therefore you are now entitled to reinstate it and obtain your EU passport.

The most important thing to take into consideration is understanding that prior to the end of WWII, the European map was very different from the one we know today.

Countries like Poland and Lithuania did not exist as independent countries, and till 1918 these territories were only known as Lithuanian or Polish regions/countries of the Great Russia Empire who ruled all of north eastern Europe.

Until 1918 residents of these territories were of Russian citizenship – as Polish and Lithuanian citizenships did not exist. Therefore applications

for reinstatement of these citizenships can only be based on if one's ancestor was a Polish or Lithuanian citizen.

However, a descendant of an ancestor who left Europe prior to 1918 – will not be eligible.

In addition, since borders in Europe were shifted during and after WWII, one's eligibility for a Polish or Lithuanian citizenship depends on the City from which his/her ancestor lived in. Where borders shifted and cities changed nationalities Jews who left Vilnius and its region will be declined where as a similar application for reinstatement of Polish citizenship could be approved.



I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself.

With only a 4 hour flight to Warsaw and Vilnius this enables me to arrive quickly and safely to Poland and Lithuania, where I closely collaborate with local professionals in assisting me trace required documents for your successful applications to reinstate you as an European citizen.

"Having lived in Poland for 7 years I have great in-depth understanding of European immigration laws."

I have been operating in the South African market with our Jewish communities since March 2018, and visit every 3-4 months which will allow us to meet in-person.

I will be in South Africa From 17 February until the end of the month. Johannesburg and Cape Town - Book a consultation now!

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Louk family honoured by dignitaries in Pretoria

DIANE WOLFSON

The Israeli embassy hosted the family of Shani Louk at the Pretoria Hebrew

South African Zionist Federation, reflected on the significance of the Pretoria gathering, which he said was more than a meeting of individuals, but a demonstration

willingness to share their journey, and their determination to honour Shani's memory, which has touched us all deeply. They have shown us what it means to transform grief into a force for unity, resilience, and hope," Assness said.

He paid tribute to the organisation's project partners, community leaders, and supporters, saying that their dedication to their shared mission is our foundation. "It's through everyone's tireless efforts, advocacy, and unwavering commitment that we amplify the

impact and ensure that the connection between South Africa and Israel continues to be a force for unity and good," Assness said.

• See story about the Louk family on page 4.



Nissim Louk (right) talking to members of the Pretoria Hebrew Congregation

Congregation on 30 January.

Louk, 22, was one of more than 360 people who were shot, bludgeoned, or burned to death by Hamas-led terrorists at the Nova festival in Israel on 7 October 2023. Her body was then abducted by Hamas to Gaza.

At the event, her parents, Nissim and Ricarda Louk, were introduced to the dignitaries present, including diplomats from Germany, Lithuania, and the United Kingdom, by Adi Cohen-Hazanov, charge d'affaires at the embassy.

of the power of community, the strength of shared values, and the resilience of the human spirit.

"We have had the incredible privilege of hearing from Nissim and Ricarda Louk, their courage in the face of unspeakable pain, their

King David Victory Park weaves braids for Berger



King David Victory Park proudly participated in the Braids for Agam initiative on Thursday, 30 January, weaving yellow ribbons into braids to celebrate the release of Agam Berger from captivity in Gaza. While in captivity, Agam braided the hair of her fellow hostages, transforming a simple act of care into a powerful symbol of resilience and hope. The students honoured her courage and stand in solidarity with her, embracing the strength she represents.

Tuesday 11 February

• Chabad Seniors hosts *Emotional Freedom Techniques* with Hillary Kushner. Time: 09:40. Contact: 079 434 1293 or rak@chabad.org.za

Wednesday 12 February

• Chabad Seniors hosts *Medical Q&A* with Dr Adam Stern followed by lunch. Time: 12:30. Contact: 079 434 1293 or rak@chabad.org.za
 • The Jewish Learning Institute hosts a talk on *Decoding the Talmud*. Time: 19:15. Contact: 079 434 1293 or jli@chabad.org.za

Thursday 13 February

• Chabad Seniors hosts *Fun Physiotherapy* with Caron Shapiro and Tali Drutman. Time: 09:40. Contact: 079 434 1293 or rak@chabad.org.za



Sunday 2 March

• The Jewish Adventure Club hosts a walk/hike at Rietvlei Zoo Farm. Time: 07:45. Contact: 084 588 0565 or jarrodlevenstein@gmail.com

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