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ABSA JEWISH ACHIEVERS EXCITING GALA DINNER - JUNE 23

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GOOD READING / 13

SOUTH AFRICAN
Jewish Report
www.sajewishreport.co.za Friday, 05 June 2009 / 13 Sivan 5769 Volume 13 Number 20

Supporting Abbas: Is Obama backing the wrong horse?

PAGE 10

SHAVUOT COMES ALIVE AT CHABAD SANDTON

Rabbi Yossi Hecht celebrates Shavuot, the giving of the Torah to the Jews at Mount Sinai, with pupils at Chabad Sandton (PHOTO: NICOLA MILTZ)

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SAKS: Does 'left' and 'right' still have any real meaning? / 11

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Two Jewish Americans tackle Africa by bike / 3

IFP's Ruth Rabinowitz ends her 15 year parliamentary career / 4

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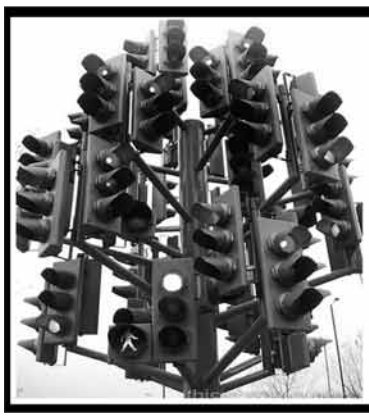

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PARSHA OF THE WEEK

Needed: the gift of peace

PARSHAT NASO
Rabbi Ann Folb
SAUPJ
Bet Menorah,
Pretoria

THIS WEEK'S Torah portion comes from the book of Numbers Chapter 4:21 through Chapter 7: 89 and is known as Naso, take. It refers to G-d's command to Moses to take a census of those who are involved in the service of the Tent of Meeting.

In addition there are several regulations in the portion which are designed to insure the holiness of the community. These include an ordeal which is imposed on a woman who is suspected of adultery by her husband and rules governing those who take Nazarite vows.

The portion also contains the words of the well-known priestly blessing about which I will comment momentarily.

It would, however, be appropriate for me to mention at this point that, although this portion is read this week in traditional Diaspora congregations, there is a difference among Progressive congregations worldwide and those traditional congregations which are in the State of Israel who do not celebrate two days of Shavuot.

This is so because, as most of you know, there is a special Torah reading assigned to the second day of Shavuot which takes precedence over what might ordinarily be read on that day, since it is also Shabbat.

This discrepancy will continue until July 4 when the traditional double portion of Chukat/Balak will bring us back together again.

As I have mentioned already, perhaps the most well-known verses in our portion come from Numbers 6: 22-27 which is otherwise known as the "priestly benediction" since it is commanded to Aaron by which he and his sons should bless the people. It is three short lines:

"The L-rd bless and keep you!

"The L-rd deal kindly and graciously with you!

"The L-rd bestow His favour upon you and grant you peace!"

A great deal has been written about these words which are used regularly in both Jewish and Christian liturgy. Most revolve around the manner in which G-d will bless and deal kindly with people.

I think, however, that what is most urgently needed in this troubled time is that which the last line implies and that is the gift of peace.

For each of us, peace may mean something different. Our rabbis say: "Peace is a precious thing, since for all the deeds and meritorious acts which our father Abraham accomplished, the only reward given to him was peace. But though shalt go to your fathers in peace. [Gen. 15].

"Likewise in the case of our father Jacob you find that he sought peace from the Omnipresent, 'so that I come back to my father's house in peace.' [Ibid]."

Each received peace according to his need. The Hebrew word for peace is shalom whose root is Shin Lammed Mem which is usually translated to mean wholeness.

Whether of an external or internal nature, wholeness is that attribute which makes for a sense of well-being, of knowing that all is right with us and the world and hopefully in our relationship with G-d.

Our ancestors understood that Shabbat offered a special opportunity to achieve that sense of wholeness as we wish each other a Shabbat Shalom, a Sabbath of peace when we greet each other on that day.

It is my hope that we will all take full advantage of the opportunity for peace which Shabbat offers. In that manner and with our collective effort, the world can become a better place for all of us. That will be the true fulfilment of Aaron's blessing.

SHABBAT TIMES

June 05 / 13 Sivan
June 06 /14 Sivan

Erev Shabbat

Starts	ends	
17:06	17:57	Johannesburg
17:27	18:21	Cape Town
16:46	17:38	Durban
17:07	17:59	Bloemfontein
16:58	17:52	Port Elizabeth
16:51	17:45	East London

Women of the World is 10 years old

Maria Ramos.

WOMEN OF the World will this Sunday, June 7, celebrate a decade of dedication to the community with a spectacular gala banquet at the Sandton Sun.

WoW said in a media release that the function will be attended by leadership from across the South African community. Guest speaker is Maria Ramos, Absa Group Chief Executive.

The function will include a charity auction and the drawing of winners of the massive "Lots of Distinction" raffle.

WoW was formed in 1999 as a response to the general pessimism in South Africa and has since become an innovative, much-admired and leading organisation in our community. It is made up of a vibrant group of women from a cross-section of the South African community.

WoW is dedicated to a three-pronged mission statement: "Nurturing the Nurturers" (ie women); "Patrons of Education" and "Promoting a Positive South Africa".

In this, WoW's 10th year, "these objectives take on new meaning along with a new urgency to be able to continue its good work despite the negative economic climate world wide."

Founder and chairman, Rochel Goldman, says the 10 years have flown by and been absolutely exhilarating. "We've inspired women to go back and inspire their own families and communities.

"We've been privileged to make a genuine difference to many schools, both in the Jewish community and in Soweto. And we've made people think twice before they put down their own country. We've always emphasised the positive."

The dinner is by reservation only but the "Lots of Distinction" draw is open to the public.

A stunning array of prizes include a Jeep Cherokee 4x4, two business class tickets to Israel, holidays, furniture, electronics, imported sterling silver Judaica, toys for boys, girls and kids and much more.

These can be viewed at Sandton Sun Hotel on Sunday June 7 from 11:00 to 15:00, alternatively, on the website www.womenoftheworld.org.za

• For more information on the dinner (or to book your place) or on the draw, contact Mandy on 083-380-5268.

New stamps issue celebrates Con Hill's art collection

Constitutional Court Judge, Justice Albie Sachs, launched an exciting series of commemorative stamps which celebrate artworks in the Constitutional Court building in Johannesburg. The official release of the stamps is today, June 5 with the stamps available at selected Post Offices countrywide. The stamps will serve as mini ambassadors of South Africa as they travel around the world when people send their letters. (PICTURE BY LETTIE FERREIRA.)

UPCOMING FEATURES 2009....

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The Golden Years
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Making sure Africa prejudices aren't recycled

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPH BY MOIRA SCHNEIDER CAPE TOWN

TWO INTREPID American college students are taking it upon themselves to "fight Western prejudices about Africa" by cycling 4 500 kilometres through some of its rugged terrain.

New Yorker Eric Silverman, 21, and Aaron Bodansky, 22, who hails from Seattle, Washington, are setting off on June 11 and plan to cycle through Botswana, Zambia, Malawi and Tanzania before reaching their destination of Nairobi, Kenya in mid-August.

The pair are studying at the University of Cape Town for a semester. Bodansky comments that he was motivated to come here because he figured the media representation of Africa was probably pretty inaccurate and wanted to see for himself what it was actually like.

Since arriving, he has travelled to the Kruger National Park, Namibia and Zambia with his father, who was unnerved at the boys' proposed expedition and had come out to investigate.

"He got to see that people in the rural regions are really generous, nice people - they're not targeting Americans and stuff," he said.

Silverman says a lot of his family and friends were also "very freaked out" about him travelling through Africa, especially on a bicycle. "I got an e-mail or two a day telling me I shouldn't go.

"Since no-one else in my family has actually been to Africa, they don't really know what it's like. They just see it through the media and through movies - that was part of our incentive to travel through Africa and document what we're doing.

"We're also going to call back to our organisation and they're going to update our blog and put pictures up and show that we're not actually going to get killed or anything. It's just going to be great trip, we're going to interact with different local cultures and try and dispel these myths and prejudices about all of Africa being violent."

In preparation for the trip, they have adopted a rigorous training schedule and, according to Silverman, "ride up and down the mountain a lot". While they have no fear of humans along the way, they will be taking "basic precautions" against wild animals "like not leaving meat next to your tent while you're sleeping", says Bodansky.

They will be going solo, so to speak, with no support vehicle following them. This means that everything they need such as medical kits and a tent will be transported on their bikes. They will have a satellite phone with them in case of emergency.

The pair hopes through the ride to raise money for Chosa, a charity for children and youth at risk in South Africa, with which they are both currently involved. They have formed a non-profit organisation, Cycle for Understanding, with its own website through which the public can make donations - www.cycleforunderstanding.org

"The goal of our organisation and the bike trip is to fight Western prejudices about Africa," Bodansky says. "Even educated people like our parents didn't really understand until they came here.

American students Eric Silverman (left) and Aaron Bodansky plan to cycle through Africa to correct misconceptions about the continent.

"The media only picks up on violence and wars and popular movies like Blood Diamonds and Hotel Rwanda depicting lots of dangerous things in Africa - you never get to see normal, everyday Africa. I think gaining an awareness of what it is really like could make a really big difference.

"Part of the reason the West is so reluctant to jump in with aid money is, I think, that maybe there's a subconscious belief in the Western world that Africa's a self-destructive place. We're trying to get as many people as possible to see another side," he says.

AROUND THE WORLD

NEWS IN BRIEF

STOLEN JERUSALEM ANTIQUITY RETURNED

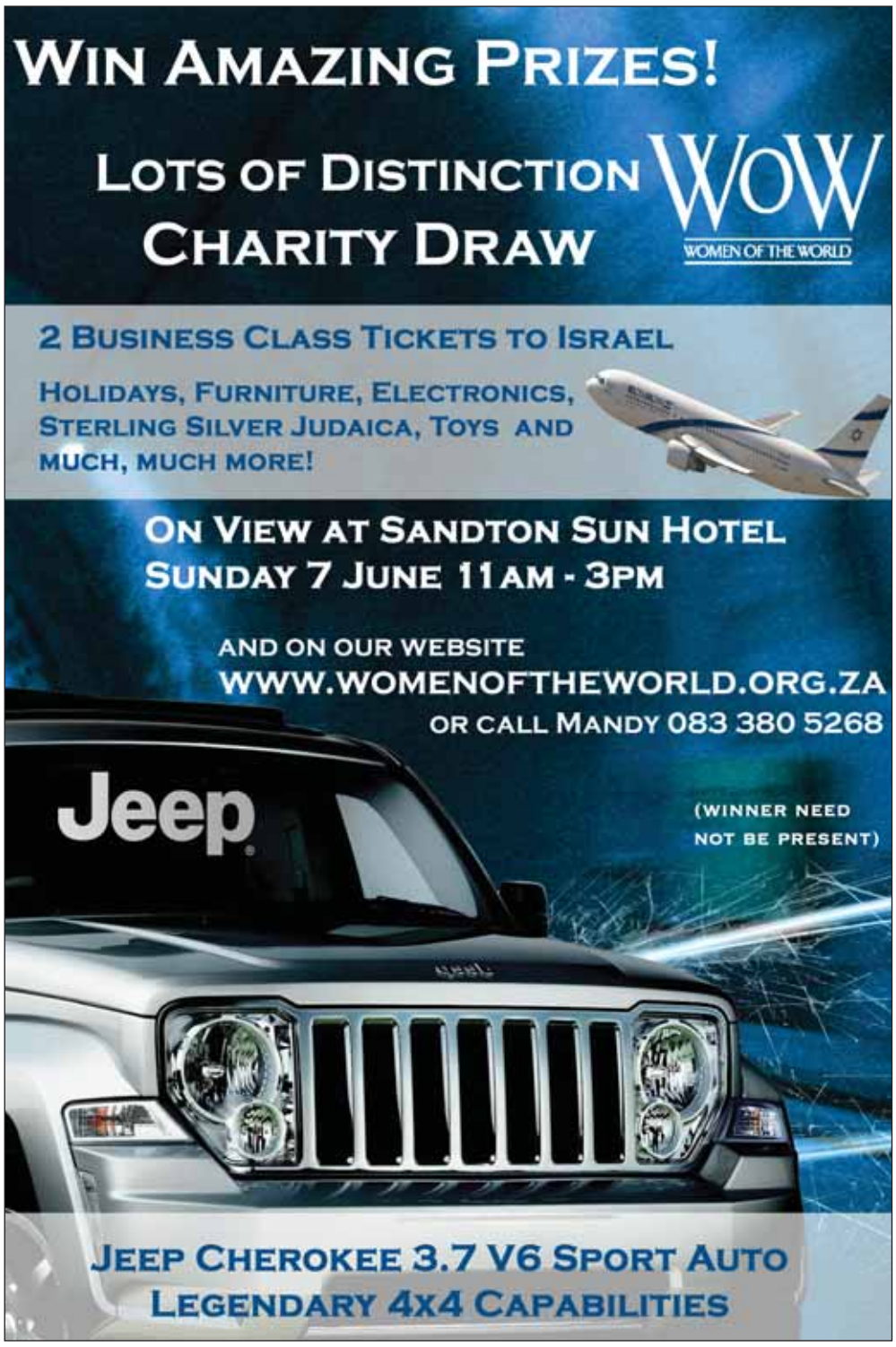
JERUSALEM - A stone that disappeared 12 years ago from a Jerusalem excavation site, has been returned.

The 46-pound fragment of a 1 200-year-old marble column, which disappeared from an excavation south of the Temple Mount in 1997, was returned to Israel in a wooden crate specially constructed for the antiquity, according to the Israel Antiquities Authority.

The antiquity was returned after the authority received an e-mail from a clergyman in New York state saying that a member of his congregation confessed to stealing it from the site while an archaeology student on an organised trip to Israel.

"For the past twelve years since then, rather than remind me of the prayer for Jerusalem, I am reminded of the mistake I made when I removed the stone from its proper place in Israel. I am asking for your forgiveness," said a letter that accompanied the antiquity when it was returned this week.

The stone will be returned to the archaeological garden from which it was taken. No action will be taken against the repentant thief. (JTA)



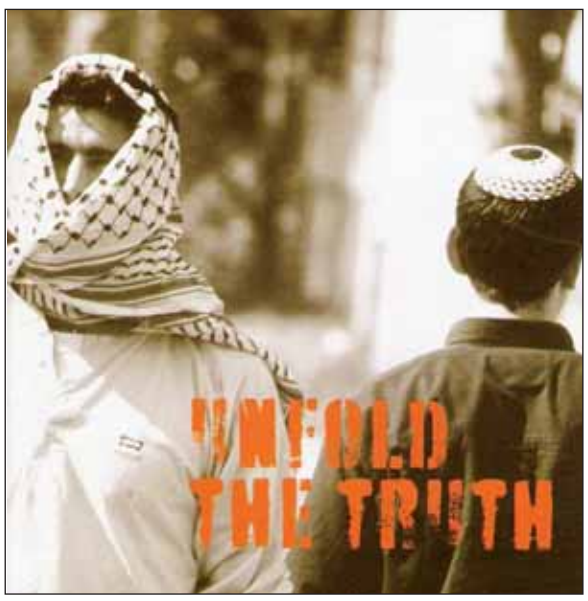
‘Let’s Talk Israel’ gets off the ground

OWN CORRESPONDENT

AN INNOVATIVE new communications tool showing the true face of the State of Israel and debunking various malicious accusations made against it, has just been released by the SA Jewish Board of Deputies.

Entitled “Let’s Talk Israel”, it is an interactive e-book that makes use of voice-overs, video footage and hundreds of carefully chosen images through which to convey a broad range of arguments and information.

Over 500 CD versions of the e-book have already been distributed to delegates at major international conferences in Jerusalem and London. It can now be accessed online at http://www.letstalkisrael.com/



“Let’s Talk Israel” was researched and put together by the staff of the SAJBD, headed by Associate Director David Saks, and in close association with the communications company MediaCor.

Part of the preparatory process entailed extensive consultation with leading Israeli academics, journalists and diplomats. These included Professors Gideon Shimoni, David Kretzmer, Asher Susser and Alexander Yakobson, communications expert David Olesker, Palestinian Media Watch Director Itamar Marcus, journalist and peace activist Benjamin Pogrund and Daniel Seaman, director of the Israel Government Press Office.

Saks explained that the project was intended primarily as a toolkit for those engaged in confronting anti-Israel propaganda in the public realm, in particular journalists, university students and Jewish communal workers. One of its basic purposes was to refute the “Israel = Apartheid” comparisons, something the South African Jewish community was best placed to address. The Board had decided to embark upon the project following requests for guidance from various international Jewish organisations that were grappling with the issue.

Saks said that a substantial part of the material tackles head-on the apartheid question and through a careful point-by-point analysis meticulously shows how baseless this analogy was.

However, it was important to stress that “Let’s Talk Israel” was not framed in terms of what Israel was not, which would have meant assuming a defensive position from the outset. Rather, it showcased Israel for what it really was, namely a “vibrantly democratic, multicultural and multi-ethnic society underpinned by an uncompromising respect for diversity and human rights”.

SAJBD National Director Wendy Kahn said the SAJBD had decided to embark on the project, even though promoting Israel did not fall within its core mandate, because comparisons between Israel and apartheid inevitably generated negative feelings against the local Jewish community.

If Israel was an apartheid state, then it followed that all Jews who supported it were in favour of apartheid, a dangerous perception that could not be allowed to take root.

“Let’s Talk Israel” identifies and sets out to systematically refute various charges commonly made by Israel’s enemies. These include claims that Zionism is colonialism, that Jews have no historic right to Palestine, that Israel’s claim to be a democracy is fraudulent and that defining itself as a “Jewish State” is inherently racist.

The material is grouped under five key “messages”, namely that Israel is a democracy, that it is a model of religious diversity and co-existence, that it is multi-racial and multi-cultural, continually seeks peace with its neighbours and is the historic and religious heartland of Jewish civilisation.

Wherever relevant, pointed comparisons are made with the respective records of Israel’s neighbours, including the Palestinian territories, when it comes to issues of human rights, civil liberties and religious toleration. From this, it can be demonstrated that no other Middle Eastern country comes close to matching what Israel has achieved in these areas.

While seeking to cover as broad a range of material as possible, “Let’s Talk Israel” does not claim to be the last and conclusive word on the questions it addresses, but rather posits itself as a “work in progress” that welcomes constructive input from its users.

All comments, suggestions and criticisms can be sent to David Saks at david@beyachad.co.za

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IFP’s Ruth Rabinowitz calls it quits after 15 years

DAVID SAKS

PARLIAMENT RECONVENED this year without the presence of Dr Ruth Rabinowitz, a stalwart of the Inkatha Freedom Party, whose 15-year parliamentary career ended shortly before the elections this year.

A relative latecomer to politics, Rabinowitz quickly established herself as a versatile, hard-working member of the party whose cause she wholeheartedly adopted shortly before South Africa’s inaugural non-racial democratic elections in 1994.

She played an active - if generally seldom recognised role - in the country’s transition to democracy and in the subsequent adoption of a new Constitution, and was involved on a range of portfolio committees.

Rabinowitz, neé Zilibowitz, was born in Springs to Lithuanian immigrants, going on to qualify with an MBBCH from Wits as well as gaining a diploma for teaching drama from the London Academy of Dramatic Art.

She has, she says, always battled between the creative and scientific spheres, since she has leanings towards both.

Thereafter, she married one of her teachers, who is a surgeon at (Chris Hani) Baragwanath Hospital. It was around the time when her three children were about to emigrate that she decided to go into politics.

“Being a Jewish mother, you have to have something to care about,” she remarked.

For a Jewish woman living in Johannesburg, joining the Inkatha Freedom Party, was an unusual decision, but for Rabinowitz it “made perfect sense”.

The subject of what form the country’s new Constitution should take, was a keenly debated topic within her family, where the children were very much involved in debating and law at university.

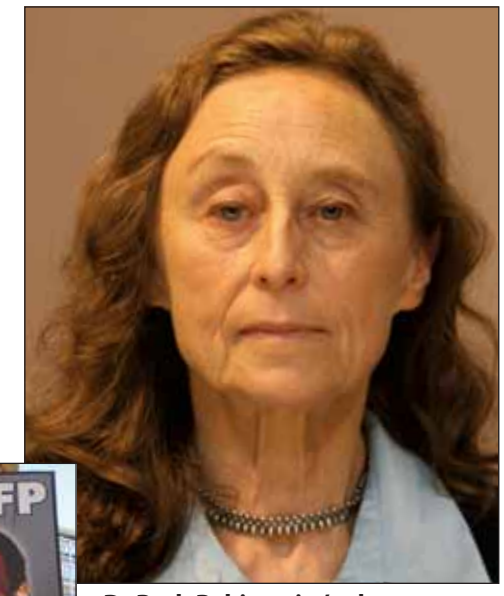
In 1993, Rabinowitz attended a conference to discuss the interim Constitution, organised in 1993 by her daughter, then chairman of the Wits Law Society. The proposals presented by the IFP representative came as a revelation to her.

“The model proposed was just right for South Africa. It was federal, very similar to the US Constitution in fact, and had just the right balance between central and regional powers,” she says.

What further inspired Rabinowitz to become active on behalf of the IFP was her sense of outrage over how the party, and in particular its leader Dr Mangosuthu Buthelezi, was being sidelined and continually misrepresented in mainstream discourse. The more she learned of this, the more it fired her to uncover the truth.

“Buthelezi was the best alternative leader for this country - he had international support and he had white support. The communists targeted him - smartly - vilifying and undermining him at every opportunity. They did so because he was dangerous - him. He was the one thing that could spoil their agenda,” she says.

Rabinowitz did not immediately join the IFP, instead embarking on a campaign in close consultation with some of its members to disseminate information and stimulate discussion on the Constitution. To this end she wrote articles, organised workshops and fundraised, and in due course her work brought her to the notice of the party hierarchy and ultimately to Buthelezi himself.



Dr Ruth Rabinowitz’s absence from Parliament will leave a void.

One of these workshops focused on putting out the truth about what the IFP was proposing. Several high-profile international figures took part, and this in turn helped to bring about the international mediation that was decisive in the IFP’s eleventh hour decision to participate in the elections on April 27 1994.

Had the IFP boycotted the elections, it would have seriously threatened the chances of a peaceful transition at a time when political violence was already rife. Rabinowitz was among those working indefatigably behind the scenes to help resolve the situation and is today proud of being able to play her part in the IFP’s eventual decision to participate.

The IFP ended up performing relatively well, winning decisively in KwaZulu-Natal and coming third in the national ballot. At the time, Rabinowitz was still not even a member of the party, but shortly afterwards she was brought on board, initially as a senator (1994 - 1997) and thereafter, until April this year, as an MP.

In the Senate, Rabinowitz focused her efforts on the debates surrounding the new Constitution, which came into being in 1996. During her years in the Assembly, her energy as well as versatility, saw her playing an active role on the Portfolio Committees for Health, Minerals and Energy and Arts and Culture.

In October 2008, she was largely responsible for the introduction of the Feed-In Tariff for Renewable Energy, Private Member’s Bill, aimed at the acceptance of “accept innovative, cost-effective solutions for providing power to the people”.

While no longer involved in formal politics, Rabinowitz has no intention of retiring from public life altogether, but will continue to work on and follow through with various projects she initiated during her years in Parliament.

AROUND THE WORLD

NEWS IN BRIEF

ORTHODOX UNION RAPS OBAMA ON SETTLEMENTS

WASHINGTON - The Orthodox Union said it was "deeply troubled" by President Barack Obama's approach toward Israel's policy on settlements.

In a letter to the president, Orthodox Union leaders wrote that Obama's typical "nuanced approach" was "glaringly absent".

"To the contrary, this policy has, to date, reflected a blunderbuss, one-size-fits-all attitude toward everything from building a new house on an empty lot in the midst of the city of Ma'ale Adumim to erecting new houses on an empty hilltop in Samaria," the OU wrote.

The leaders added that the current approach was "not only illogical, it is also counterproductive to your goals since it forces Israelis and their supporters into a defensive posture, as opposed to one open to negotiations and creative solutions." (JTA)

It's countdown to Absa Jewish Achievers Awards 2009

PETER FELDMAN

Maria Ramos.

ABSA GROUP Chief Executive Maria Ramos, will deliver the keynote address at the annual Absa Jewish Achievers Awards in Sandton on 23 June.

Ramos, who was formerly chief executive of Transnet, took over at Absa in March this year, and her address is bound to be both insightful and a thought-provoking.

The annual awards, which are the highlight of the business and social calendar, will be held in the Moroela Room, at Sandton Sun.

A distinguished panel of judges comprising Norman Lowenthal (convenor), Bryan Hirsch, Jabulani Sikhakane, Cheryl Buss and Geoff Rothschild will meet on Sunday, 14 June, to go through the many nominations that have already been received.

Suzanne Weil, whose company Dlamini Weil Communications is mounting this event, said a high calibre of nominations had already been received. "They all deserve to win, but there can only be one winner."

The family of the late Helen Suzman has given permission for the Lifetime Achievement Award to be named after this inspirational woman.

For the first time, the Jewish Achievers is going green. This means there will be no hard copies of the nomination and table booking forms. An electronic online system has been put into place to allow nominations to be sent in. This makes the process quicker, more efficient, and is considered the best way forward in this fast evolving electronic age.

Readers can log onto the www.sajewishreport.co.za website and click on the Absa Jewish Achievers link for all information regarding nominations and table bookings. The site will take the reader through the various stages. Entries close on Friday, June 5.

This is the 11th year that the SA Jewish Report has been associated with these prestigious annual awards, which pay tribute to the community's business, humanitarian and social achievers in various categories.

Absa Bank is again sponsoring the main "Business Achiever of the Year Award," which goes to nominees from both listed and non-listed companies. The criteria are that nominees must be members of the Jewish community, must serve either as MD or CEO of a major corporation, and must show consistent performance and credible empowerment procedures.

The other key sponsor is Johnnie Walker in the Entrepreneur Awards category. This is given to a member of the Jewish community between the ages of 18 and 40 years, who owns a small or medium enterprise operating in South Africa with empowerment credentials.

There is also the Helen Suzman Lifetime Achievement Award which is given to a member of the Jewish community for his or her lifetime contribution to SA Jewry by achieving reconciliation, change and empowerment in the fields of business and/or art or science, and/or sport and philanthropy

SA Jewish Report honours people from a broader community with the Cyril Harris Humanitarian Award. These are for people who make a contribution to the economy and community by improving both the quality of life and the fabric of society in general.

- The rules state that nominees must be South African citizens or hold a valid South African identity document.
- In categories "Business Achiever Award," "Lifetime Achiever" and "Entrepreneur" a nominee must be a member of the Jewish community.
- Only the Business Achiever and Young Entrepreneur nominees will be called in front of the judging panel. Other nominees are judged on the CV submitted by the nominator.
- The "Humanitarian Award" category is open to the broader community, irrespective of culture, creed or gender.
- Nominations are subject to adjudication by an independent panel of judges and the judges' decision is final.

AROUND THE WORLD

NEWS IN BRIEF

YOUNG INNOVATORS CAN VIE FOR NEW GRANTS

NEW YORK - Young Jewish innovators will receive some $400 000 through two new grant programmes.

The Centre for Leadership Initiatives, an operating foundation founded by Lynn Schusterman, has announced that it will award grants to alumni of its ROI fellowship programme, a leadership development programme it runs in Israel.

Through its new ROI Seed Fund, the centre will provide grants of up to $10 000 to help ROI alumni support projects in the start-up phase. And through its new ROI Innovation Fund, it will provide funding of up to $50 000 to projects of alumni that already are operational.

More than 400 young innovators have gone through the ROI programme since started in 2006, and Schusterman hopes to help alumni further develop their initiatives with this money.

"Since its inception four years ago, ROI has been providing young Jewish innovators from around the world with opportunities to network with peers, meet Jewish leaders from other countries and enhance their skills," Schusterman said.

"We hope that these funds will further support the amazing young people in the ROI community as they take their projects to the next level, and encourage them to work together to build a secure and bright future for world Jewry."

The foundation was set to start accepting applications for the seed grants June 1 and for the innovation grants August 31. (JTA)

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Above: The four members of the panel: Andile Ngcaba, chairman of Convergence Partners; Adrian Gore, chief executive of Discovery Holdings; Cyril Ramaphosa, executive chairman of Shanduka Group and Alan Knott-Craig former CEO of Vodacom.

Right: David Rabinowitz and Steven Kottler of "helping hands", collecting "cheques" for the Chevrah Kadisha from the guests.

SOCIAL SCENE

Rita Lewis jont@global.co.za

Chevrah raises funds in an innovative way

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY RITA LEWIS

THE CRÉME de la créme of South Africa's young Jewish entrepreneurs, moneyed, confident and focused, gathered at Investec in Sandton recently when the Chevrah Kadisha's fundraising division, "helping hands", organised a panel discussion with four of South Africa's "brightest stars", Andile Ngcaba, chairman of Convergence Partners; Adrian Gore, chief executive of Discovery Holdings; Cyril Ramaphosa, executive chairman of Shanduka Group and Alan Knott-Craig former CEO of Vodacom.

Some 600 to 700 attended the event which was opened by Philip Froom, chairman of "helping hands". Henry Blumenthal, MD of Investec Private Client Securities, welcomed the guests.

Members of the panel discussed their own "claims to fame" and the manner in which each had reached his position in life.

Many words of advice were given including sharing knowledge and the importance of finding a mentor and confidante who had already "made it" and with whom one could bounce off ideas.

Each panellist said he had a "protector" - someone who would cover for him - even if it was "your father in the Post Office or a partner".

From an early age one should endeavour to be "noticed" and must learn not only to listen to others, but to listen to one's inner voice.

Chief Rabbi Warren Goldstein spoke of tikkun olam - the importance of not only fixing the world but of recognising that it was broken, needed repairing and could indeed be fixed.

Assisting the Chevrah was one of the ways. It was professionally run, entrepreneurial and innovative, not withstanding that many people depended on it for their survival.

Rabbi Goldstein spoke of the importance of making investments - both in business and in one's spiritual future. He said irrespective of the amount, all tzedakah would be recognised - not just in this world but also in the next.

This "helping hands" event was part of the organisation's vision to create social events for young adults, from which funds for the Chevrah could be raised.

The idea was also to create awareness of the importance of the sustainability of the mother organisation and to create a culture of giving. This culture was already fairly evident at the event as many guests were seen handing in cheques taken from a "helping hands" so-called "cheque book".

Each of the "cheques" was printed with a designated amount - including some blank ones. Guests were asked to choose a cheque/cheques with the relevant amount on (or write their own amount on the blank ones) and hand them to the guardians walking around with boxes for the purpose.

The cheque numbers were later used in a raffle for which there were many very desirable prizes offered - including a week for two in Mauritius valued at R25 000.

Howard Sackstein discusses a point with Chief Rabbi Warren Goldstein.

Dina Tomson and Tammy Levy having a good discussion about the event.

Adi Balaly, Philip Froom and Leslie Milner.

Co-ordinator of the event, Cindi Bobroff with Gary Swill, Michael Jubiler and Simone Rabinowitz.

Judy Mindel and Larry Nussbaum check the food on behalf of Gary Friedman caterers.

Talya Farber, Lisa Lewis and Elaine Zagey with their "collection" boxes.

Elaine and Ronald Bobroff with their daughter Cindi.

Gidon Alter (right) being interviewed by the media.

COMMUNITY BUZZ

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SMITHFIELD

This town in the Free State was laid out on the farm Rietpoort in 1849 and named after Sir Harry Smith, governor of the Cape Colony (1847-52).

From Eric Rosendorff, of Melrose North, Johannesburg:

"I appreciated the article in Community Buzz on the Babrow family of Smithfield, as it brought back many memories. My parents were very good friends of the Babrows and, as a very young boy, I well remember car trips to visit the family in Smithfield and to join them, usually for a Sunday lunch at the Smithfield Hotel, which I always thought was owned by them, but I might well be wrong.

"Needless to say, travelling in those days from Bloemfontein to Smithfield, with numerous farm gates to be opened on a far from good main road, was quite an experience.

"One correction: Charles Babrow (the oldest of the three Babrow boys) settled in Bloemfontein where he had a pharmacy and an optometry practice, which if I recall correctly was called Brown's Chemist. Only after he sold the Pharmacy, did he move (possibly) to Cape Town.

"I recall how shocked my parents were when they heard the sad news of the tragic death of (the youngest brother) Arnold, and how very proud they were of the outstanding rugby achievements of Louis."

CAPE TOWN

Continuing the story of Louis Babrow:

"Louis' first University of Cape Town (UCT) club captains were Frank Waring* in 1932 and Morris Zimerman in 1933, the former destined to make his mark in SA rugby, business and politics and the latter in rugby, law and politics. Both men left an indelible impression on the young Louis Babrow.

"The first fresher practices were eye-openers for the new men. Despite the reputation that Louis brought with him from Grey College, he was put into the under-19C and there he stayed for his first season at UCT.

"In the second year he was promoted to the under-19A; a highlight was a Saturday morning call to play for the 4th XV in the Intervarsity. His centre partner that day was Richard Luyt, a future First XV stalwart who'd become principal and vice-chancellor of the university after a distinguished career in the British Colonial Service.

"Louis played three intervarsity games against Stellenbosch University for the First XV, a 0-0 draw in 1934, a 0-14 defeat in 1935 and a 8-9 loss in 1936 when he was captain."

From "Louis Babrow" by Leonard Kaplan.

* Frank Waring played for South Africa in the late thirties. He was a member of the National Party Government in the 1950s and was in the Cabinet as Minister of Sport.

The University of Stellenbosch students were known as the "Maties" and the UCT were the "Ikeys" supposedly because of the many Jews who were there.

MUIZENBERG

From Hyman Jocum:

"There was a municipality of Muizenberg and Kalk Bay from 1819 until 1913. It was during these years that hotels sprung up and Muizenberg became the premier seaside resort of South Africa.

"Thirteen men served as mayors during these 23 years. D W Gourlay, the mayor from 1905 to 1907, was the only Jewish one.

"In 1908 Scowens Hotel was sold to E H Jones, a prominent and wealthy property owner in Muizenberg who renamed it The Marine Hotel. During the Second World War it was owned by Harry Daitsch.

"These were the boom years of the hotel during which time it opened an off sales bottle store in York Road. Daitsch remained proprietor until 1979 when the property was sold to Shoprite Checkers and the building was razed."

MUIZENBERG

From Anna Segal (nee Shapiro), now of Johannesburg:

"Anna Segal remembers an occasion when she was a pupil at Muizenberg High School and the headmaster, Mr Andrews, told them that one of the earliest donations that the school received, had been from Cecil John Rhodes, the multi-millionaire. His donation was five pounds (R10 equivalent in today's currency)."

JOHANNESBURG

Anne Lapedus Brest with some more memories:

"The folk singing era. Who remembers the Nite Beat, run by Abe (who ran the tuck shop at the Yeoville Pool) and the folksingers Ian & Ritchie (Ian Lawrence and Ritchie Morris); Des and Dawn Lindberg (*And The Seagull's Name Was Nelson*) (Dawn wore her hair in two pigtails then); Dave Marks (*Mountains of Men & Master Jack*) Cornelia; The Troubadours; The College Set - Andrew Levy, Hugh Solomon, Norman Cohen); Keith Blundell and the Baladeers; Aubrey and Beryl Ellis; Mervyn and Jocelyn Miller (from Potch); Mel, Mel and Julian (Mel Miller, Mel Green and Julian Laxton).

"Hillbrow's eateries and coffee bars: Doneys Coffee Bar for the best cappuccino in town (who remembers Jeftah and The Duke?); Café Wien with the most comfortable seats; Café Krantzler, Dunk-a-Donut; The Milky Lane, the Florian, Mi Vami, Lucky Luke Steak House; Fontana (open 24 hours a day and famous for chickens roasted on the spit); Pikin'-a-Chicken; Porterhouse (Frulatto and the best pink sauce in town)."

• The Florian had in common with The Fort prison, just around the corner, the fact that sooner or later you would meet everybody you knew there, some that you hadn't seen for ages.

CAPE TOWN

From Dean Wingrin:

"I read your article about Lew Freeman and his experience of flying in North Africa in the April 24 edition of the SA Jewish Report.

"The reason why I'm contacting you is that I'm in the process of compiling stories written by those who served in or with the SAAF, describing their personal experience.

"These could be about their general experiences, a particular posting or a specific incident. In this way, I hope to preserve the knowledge and heroism of those who served in the SAAF, and perhaps even provide some inspiration to those who read the stories.

"May I please use the Freeman extract from your article? Are you in contact with other (Jewish) former airforce servicemen who would like to contribute? If they prefer to remain anonymous, then that can also be arranged.

"The Unofficial SAAF website: http://www.SAairforce.co.za"

ISRAEL

From Alec Saul, Israel:

"Israel is the only country in the world where the people read English, write Hebrew and joke in Yiddish. Israel is the only country where they call the @ a 'strudel'. Israel is the only country in the world where the bank robbers kiss the mezuzah as they leave with their loot.

"Israel is the only country in the world where no one has a foreign accent because everyone has a foreign accent. Israel is the only country in the world where the patients end up giving the doctor advice.

"Israel is the only country in the world where the graffiti is in Hebrew. Israel is the only country in the world where everyone on a flight gets to know everyone else before the flight lands. Israel is the only country in the world where some black men wear yarmulkes all the time."

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The CT shul where peace does not reign

MOIRA SCHNEIDER
CAPE TOWN

ALLEGATIONS OF financial mismanagement, poor administrative controls and lack of transparency on the part of the president and committee, formed the backdrop to a stormy annual meeting of the Green and Sea Point Hebrew Congregation attended by around 700 members on Sunday.

Matters have been simmering for well over a year at the 1 340-family shul, arguably the largest in the southern hemisphere.

In March 2008, the congregation's auditors wrote to the committee recording that there were certain issues from their recent audit that had not yet been satisfactorily resolved, as well as events that took place at the annual meeting the previous week that caused them "grave concern".

These issues related to tax compliance on the shul's part, voting at the annual meeting - which they describe as a "complete mess" - and allegations of possible vote-rigging.

"Based on the above, we are seriously considering our position as auditors of the shul," they stated, suggesting that a forensic audit carried out by an independent firm "may be an option".

In the event, a forensic audit was completed, resulting in a disciplinary hearing at which the shul's executive director for the past 20 years, Ian Maltz, was faced with six charges. Two were withdrawn, three of the remaining four dismissed and for the last one, in which he was found to have fabricated a letter about his pension and medical aid benefits for tax purposes, he received a written warning.

Among several allegations levelled in a letter by congregant Arthur Wienburg at the shul's outgoing president Haylen Lewin, were that he had given "one of his supporters" R5 000 from shul funds without the approval of the committee, described by Lewin as a "sadly skewed" version of events.

"Our rabbi has a fund from which he helps people in critical need of assistance. At a time when he had a certain call for humanitarian aid in what was truly an emergency and had no funds available, he asked whether I could advance R5 000 to him from shul funds."

This amount was later repaid. "If this was a transgression, it was one which I believe the vast majority of members of the shul will pardon," Lewin wrote in reply.

As to the issues of tax compliance, Lewin concedes that there were errors in tax deductions in the 2008 year. "However, once the amount was quantified, it was immediately paid to SARS by the shul on behalf of those employees who were overpaid.

"There is nothing owing to SARS." Regarding Maltz's fabricated letter, Lewin asserts that it "reflected the truth and was improper only in the manner in which it was done".

Prior to Sunday's meeting, a letter addressed to fellow congregants by Mr Justice Dennis Davis and Gerald Kleinman voices their "great dismay" at witnessing "the way in which the congregation has diminished in strength and unity over the past few years."

They describe the forensic report into the shul's finances as painting "a most disturbing picture" for which answers are required.

"If we continue as presently is the case, the survival of the shul as a viable entity will be in serious issue," they warn.

Members of the congregation approached after the meeting by *Jewish Report* complained that there was much talk of "shalom", but that the actual allegations were not being dealt with.

The results of the election held show a significant change in the committee with Lewin failing to secure re-election. "The people have spoken - I wish the new leadership luck," he said.

Incoming president, Aubrey Miller, was a leading member of the opposing camp in the previous dispensation. "The community spoke very loudly and clearly in terms of what they wanted," said committee spokesman Rael Levitt.

"They wanted change, patently were not happy with the status quo and one needs to move forward. There has been a bit of pain and hurt from the past and I think the first thing is to bridge those gaps and, secondly, to remember that it is a shul at the end of the day, and to keep the politics and issues of the past out."

Cape Town oldies marshal their tai chi arts

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPH BY
MOIRA SCHNEIDER
CAPE TOWN

ONE WOULD not associate the Chinese martial arts with residents of an old aged home, but this is where some of tai chi's most enthusiastic adherents are to be found. Since 2005, teacher Natalie Wittwen has given classes three times a week as part of Highlands House's health and wellness programme.

"I am constantly inspired by the enthusiasm and pure enjoyment expressed by the tai chi participants at Highlands House," she says. "It's the highlight of my week."

It seems that her feelings are echoed by her students who rave about the positive effects of the exercise. Basil Allen has been attending classes for three years and enjoys it "very much. I'm sure it's benefited me," he says. "I feel good and it's helped me with sleeping."

Another resident, Paula Mayer, has been participating for close on five years. "For me it's a way of life." Although she has "always exercised" she says a particular effect of tai chi is a drop in blood pressure "while you're in the class".

"Tell me, how old do you think I am?" asks Rose Cohen when I approach her. When I tentatively suggest 75, she exclaims, "85!" attributing her younger look to tai chi and walking "a lot".

She loves the classes and finds them beneficial both mentally and physically. "One must be active," she stresses. "You can't just sit on your backside and just gossip and do nothing."

Wittwen says that those who have attended regularly have noted a remarkable improvement in balance and strength in the legs, restoring or improving their movement. She says the unique exercise system is practised by people from every age group and background across the globe.

"It is an ancient martial art practised today for its tremendous health benefits." Wu-style tai chi, of which she is a registered teacher, specialises in natural movement, correcting posture, restoring physical vitality, invigorating body and mind, while elevating the spirit, she says.

"The twisting, spiralling, stretching, relaxing and balancing movements help to massage the internal organs and balance the body's energies. Exercise is incredibly important in balancing a healthy body and mind connection," she adds.

"As we age, we tend to lose our flexibility in the body, lacking in energy and thus, decreasing the zest for exercise. Taught in slow movement, tai chi exercises are gentle on the joints and keep them and muscles fluid and toned, assisting the body to ward off the onset of disease."

She says tai chi has been known to improve memory and has been proven to be effective in improving balance and mobility, and thus is promoted exercise for diabetics. Diabetes causes peripheral neuropathy, a condition that damages the nerves of the feet, thus affecting balance and walking.

Regular practice of this moderate exercise improves circulatory, lymphatic and neurological functioning.

Wittwen, a former dancer, found that some of her joints were taking strain, depriving her of the enjoyment of exercise. "After starting tai chi in the nineties, I have found the numerous health benefits appealing, so much so, that it was a natural progression for me to share this exercise system with others," she says.

Highlands House resident Paula Mayer (left) practises her tai chi moves with assistance from teacher Natalie Wittwen.

Jerusalem and Tel Aviv - a tale of two cities

LIONEL SLIER

"JERUSALEM IS emblazoned on the soul of the Jewish people and Tel Aviv symbolises the emergence into the 21st century of the Jews."

WIZO South Africa marked the centenary of the founding of Tel Aviv and coupled it with the 61st year of Jerusalem's unification by hosting a breakfast at the HOD Hall in Orchards, Johannesburg, recently.

A video was shown, firstly about Tel Aviv, now called "The City which Never Rests", a city at the centre of modern Israel, a Mediterranean resort, a city for holidays, business, conventions, technology.

But the history stretches back over 1 000 years to the port of Jaffa, today part of Tel Aviv, historically an entrance to the Holy Land. The Phoenicians left their mark and this can be seen in one of the nearly 200 museums.

Rabbi Dovid Hazdan of the Great Park Synagogue, explained the meaning of the words Tel Aviv. "'Tel' which means 'mound', contains the mound (layers) of history while 'aviv' represents 'youth, a spring'. Jerusalem is a journey into ancient history, an anchor of our soul.

"In South Africa we face north to know where Jerusalem is, just as 3 000 years ago our parents were facing Jerusalem."

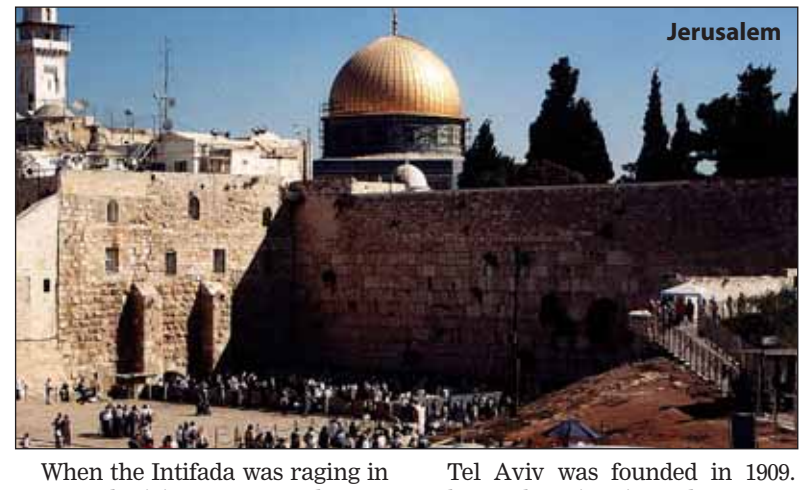
Rabbi Hazdan spoke about a trip he made to Israel with a group of pupils: "At the Kotel people were weeping over an event that took place 2 000 years ago and also for young soldiers buried just a short distance away on Mt Herzl. Sadness and tragedy is in the psyche of our people; but there is also hope and joy. After all the tragedies, people still say, 'Next Year in Jerusalem'.

"We in this generation have been able to experience what our fathers, grandfathers and great-grandfathers could not do and that is pray at the Kotel."

He added: "We have Jerusalem and we love Jerusalem. We have seen a miracle in our days. We must hold on to it. May the pain of those who fought for Jerusalem not be in vain. May those who suffered be comforted with the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem."

Reeva Forman, a committee member of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies and the SA Zionist Federation and also the organiser of the Israel Now Tours, spoke about her passion for Israel.

"I have a passion for Israel, the other home in my heart."



Jerusalem

When the Intifada was raging in 2002 and visitors to Israel were scarce, she arranged the first "Israel Now Tour" to take a group of South Africans to Israel to show love and solidarity in those tough times.

"Israelis thanked us for coming as though we were doing them a favour; in fact it was the reverse.

"Jerusalem is the religious connection to Hashem. Nothing can bring the Jewish heart closer to Hashem than the tunnel by the Kotel and people praying there beneath the Holy of Holies. This is one part of the Jewish psyche; the other is represented by Tel Aviv which shows the Jewish love of education, art and culture"

Tel Aviv was founded in 1909. Where the city is today, were stretches of sand dunes and 66 families gathered on the sand outside Jaffa and everyone was given a pebble with a number and each number represented a stand on which the person could build a home. It was like a lottery.

It was at the Independence Museum that David Ben-Gurion on April 14, 1948, in the afternoon, before the Shabbat came in, proclaimed the establishment of the State of Israel.

"Israel is the heart of the Jewish people and Jerusalem is the heart of Israel," said the commentator on an Israel Ministry of Tourism video, shown at the function.

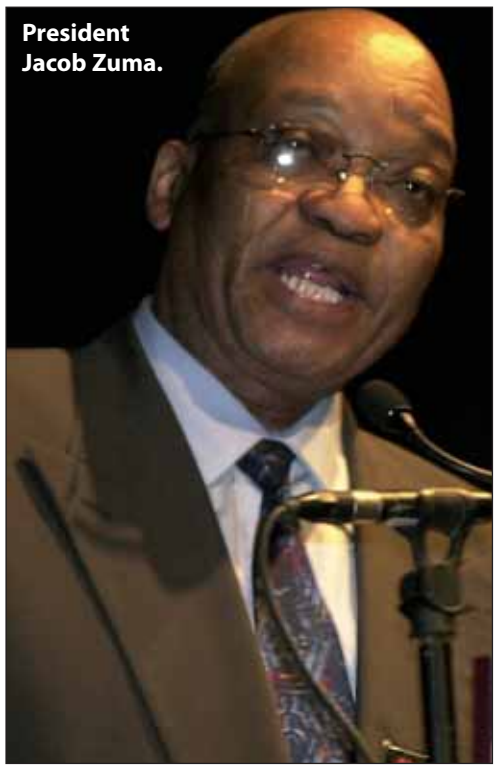
Tel Aviv

Zuma judgment raises more than just eyebrows

MOIRA SCHNEIDER
CAPE TOWN

THE DECISION not to prosecute (now President) Jacob Zuma was "poorly judged and wrongly taken" in the opinion of Professor David Unterhalter of the Wits Law School, who was speaking at a seminar titled "The Zuma Judgment: Justice or Travesty" held under the auspices of the Centre for Conflict Resolution at The Centre for the Book.

Unterhalter said there was nothing to suggest that the decision around the timing of charges went to the heart of the regularity of the prosecution or that improper influence had been brought to bear on acting head of the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) Mokotedi Mpshe.


President Jacob Zuma.

"Because the merits of the prosecution were untainted, the first duty of the prosecuting authority was to pursue the case and bring it to court," he stated.

The Zuma camp's claim of "political machinations" behind the prosecution should have been "properly investigated" by a court. "It was an untested allegation and you can't take a decision (based) on that," he said, repeating that "the decision not to go ahead was not justified".

Unterhalter added: "The main thing is that the prosecution was lawful - there's no doubt about that. Mpshe rushed the decision on shaky grounds and came to a conclusion not warranted in law and fact.

"It is deeply ironic that in a case where Zuma claimed improper interference was brought to bear... that Mpshe himself buckled under pressure."

Unterhalter said the case raised the question of the independence of our institutions, maintaining that we were "at the crossroads of our institutional life - independence isn't really what it seems to be. Will they simply be used for political battle and not be institutions for truly independent decisions?" he asked.

He suggested that Zuma should appoint an independent head of the NPA without delay, describing the body as "a wounded animal".

Dr Paul Ngobeni, deputy registrar of the University of Cape Town, said the response of the legal fraternity to Mpshe's decision was "emblematic of the problem we have in South Africa". He described criticism of Mpshe as "politically motivated" and accused the legal profession of "very selective" championing of causes.

"Because the outcome was not to their liking, that's where the complaint starts. Mpshe's decision should be seen in the context of a democracy - everyone has made their representations," he stressed.

Ngobeni said he disagreed with the assertion that former Scorpions head Leonard McCarthy and former national director of public prosecutions Bulelani Ngcuka should "simply" be prosecuted and that this was unrelated to the Zuma case.

Professor David Unterhalter and Mr Justice Dennis Davis at the seminar on the Zuma judgment. (PHOTO: MOIRA SCHNEIDER)

"McCarthy lied in an affidavit and said there was no political interference in the cases - Mpshe has an obligation and a right to dissociate himself from the process," he maintained.

Mr Justice Dennis Davis who was in the chair, quoted an American lawyer who had commented that prosecutors around the world had "tremendous difficulty" prosecuting high-profile politicians. "I think we have to take into account that it is not only a South African problem," he remarked.

Commenting further on public calls for McCarthy and Ngcuka to be prosecuted, Ngobeni said that this should be left to Mpshe to decide. At which point Davis chimed in: "How can we ignore that?

"It's the most egregious abuse of the criminal justice system - how can we turn our back on it?"

"They should be prosecuted," Ngobeni conceded.

"The real question is that constitutional democracy is a journey, it doesn't get won in a day. What this case showed more than anything else, is precisely how difficult that journey is," Davis said, adding, "but please don't deny that we've travelled significantly already."

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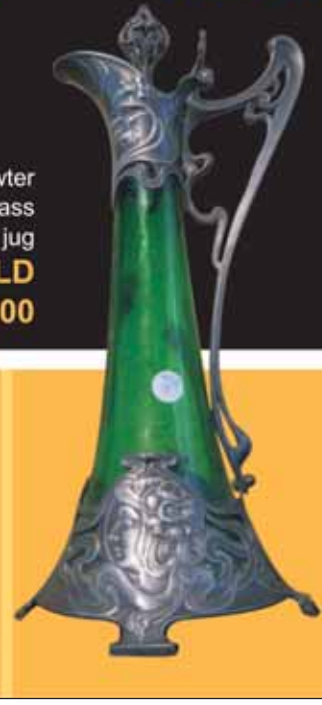
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OPINION AND ANALYSIS

FORUM FOR DIVERSE VIEWS

Jewish Report

Justice Goldstone's ME challenge

IN THE South African context - both the Jewish and broader one - Mr Justice Richard Goldstone is a name known and respected widely. His early involvement in Jewish organisations and his position as a judge of the High Court, and later the Constitutional Court, earned him admiration for his skill, energy and integrity.

His later role on the world stage - such as heading the International Criminal Tribunal in the former Yugoslavia - added further to his stature. He is someone of whom many Jews and South Africans are proud, for his having come from our own milieu, for being "one of us".

Now he has placed himself into what could turn out to be his most daunting challenge - the heading of the United Nations team which went into the Gaza Strip this week to probe "possible war crimes" during Israel's Operation Cast Lead in January.

Goldstone aims to spend a week in the area and said he intended submitting his report in August.

His mission poses difficult questions for Israel, the UN, Hamas and for him personally.

Firstly, Israel's decision not to co-operate with the investigation is understandable, given the consistently anti-Israel bias of the UN agency sponsoring it - the Human Rights Council. Previous enquiries have produced utterly predictable findings against Israel - one commenter labelled the process a kind of "Alice in Wonderland justice", where first the accused is found guilty, and only then does the trial take place.

This background makes Jews and Israelis sceptical about Israel getting a fair hearing. Foreign Ministry Spokesman Yigal Palmor said last week: "This committee has been instructed to find Israel guilty no matter what and there is no point in co-operating with such a masquerade."

Israelis ask why, with atrocities being committed all over the world, the finger is always pointed unjustifiably at Israel, with its complex existential struggle in one of the roughest neighbourhoods in the world.

Secondly, an interesting aspect of this commission is Goldstone's declaration that he will investigate "both sides". That means the behaviour of Hamas will come under the spotlight of a formal United Nations inquiry, something this terrorist organisation is thoroughly unaccustomed to.

If Goldstone is true to his word, he cannot but find that Hamas' firing of some 8 000 rockets into Israeli civilian areas is a clear case of a war crime.

Thirdly, the personal aspect of Goldstone's leadership of this team is significant. Being Jewish puts him almost inevitably in a no-win situation. If his report looks lenient and understanding towards Israel, its enemies will say it is because he is Jewish and has been improperly influenced by that fact.

On the other hand, if his report is very harsh towards Israel and more understanding to Hamas, Jews will say he is a "sell-out" and soft on terrorism.

When he headed the Tribunal on Yugoslavia it was relatively clear who the villains were, and who had to be prosecuted. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, however, with its mixture of vastly different forces, combatants and ideologies is much more complex and multi-faceted.

Is this commission of any real consequence? Are its findings going to influence the actual situation in the Middle East, or will the whole exercise simply be sucked into the morass of propaganda, blaming and hypocrisy that permeates the Arab-Israeli conflict, as has happened to so many previous enquiries and so-called "peace plans"?

We should be wary of being too cynical of this mission. Goldstone is no pushover. He has earned his reputation for integrity many times over. Despite the unflattering history of the UN in regard to the conflict, it is possible Israel will never again find anyone as serious about achieving a fair hearing from both sides as he is.

We will know in August whether Goldstone will emerge from this venture with a more enhanced reputation, or whether he will be confounded and tainted by it.

Hamas supporters demonstrate in Gaza on May 31, against Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas a day after a firefight between Hamas and Fatah in the West Bank which left six dead. (PHOTOGRAPH: ABED RAHIM KHATIB/FLASH90/JTA)

Supporting Abbas: Is Obama backing the wrong horse?

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AS THE United States presses for progress in Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking, President Barack Obama is redoubling Washington's efforts to strengthen Palestinian Authority President Mahmud Abbas.

The thinking is that with strong American backing Abbas will be able to carry the Palestinian street and deliver a workable peace deal with Israel.

But some analysts question whether Abbas has the clout to cut a deal that will be accepted by most Palestinians. They reckon Obama is betting on the wrong horse.

In his meetings last month with Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Obama made one overriding demand: that Israel evacuate illegal West Bank outposts and freeze all construction in existing Jewish settlements.

The move is calculated to enhance America's standing in the Arab world, bolster Abbas' flagging support on the Palestinian street and prevent the growth of what Washington considers obstacles to peace, namely Jewish settlements in the West Bank.

Abbas left Washington gratified and emboldened, saying he would not accept any modifications to the 2002 Arab peace initiative, which proposed trading peace for Israel's return to its pre-1967 borders and a deal on Palestinian refugees.

Earlier, Abbas said he would not meet with Netanyahu until the Israeli leader accepted the two-state solution and agreed to freeze all settlement construction, per Obama's demand.

The new American approach has left the Israeli side deeply concerned.

Israeli officials argue that the fate of settlements should be decided in a final peace deal and that, in the interim, normal life in those communities should be allowed to continue - including construction to accommodate natural growth.

In the Israeli view, many of the settlements will remain under Israeli control in any peace deal.

The Bush administration had supported that position. Last month in London, an Israeli delegation led by Cabinet Minister Dan Meridor, reminded US special Middle East envoy George Mitchell of the 2004 letter from President George W Bush that promised to help Israel retain large settlement blocs.

The Israelis asked: What was the point of freezing construction in communities that by all accounts would remain on the Israeli side of any future border?

They said they were surprised to discover that the new administration apparently did not intend to honour the Bush commitment.

Some pundits believe Obama may be withholding that commitment as leverage to press Netanyahu into accepting the two-state model for Israeli-Palestinian peace.

Obama also hopes to encourage the Jewish State to make concessions for peace by bolstering Israel's sense of security.

For more than two years, US General Keith Dayton has been training Palestinian Authority forces in the West Bank to keep the peace and fight terrorism. The idea is to provide stability to the West Bank and create a situation in which Israel can feel confident about withdrawing its forces from the area.

Obama also has promised to invest $400 million in developing an improved Arrow anti-missile system and, according to Netanyahu aides, told the prime minister in May that he would not press Israel over the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

Israelis on the left and the right are critical of the Obama approach.

They say the focus on settlements could divert attention from actual peacemaking, and as Israel and the United States tangle over bricks and mortar, the peace process will suffer.

They also argue that Obama is making a huge blunder in trying to construct an ambitious new Middle Eastern peace edifice with a Palestinian partner who cannot deliver, due to Abbas' political weakness.

Part of the problem is that the Palestinians have never been as disunited as they are today.

It's not only a question of Hamas in Gaza and Fatah in the West Bank (six people were killed in a gunfight between Fatah forces and Hamas late Saturday night in the West Bank city of Kalkilya); Fatah itself is deeply divided both between veterans and the young guard, and on key issues.

For example, Abbas heads a group that advocates advancing Palestinian goals by political means only; a second group holds that there should also be non-violent civil struggle; while a third group says the possibility of resorting to armed struggle or terrorism should be held in reserve.

Whereas Abbas is for the immediate establishment of a Palestinian state, Prime Minister Salam Fayyad and a small group of leading businessmen argue that first there should be a long period of institution-building to ensure that the state is not established on a foundation of corruption.

The upshot of all these divisions, says Menachem Klein, an expert on Palestinian Affairs at Bar-Ilan University, is that Abbas and the Fayyad government have little support in Fatah or on the Palestinian street. Only a Fatah-Hamas national unity government with wide popular support can provide a Palestinian partner that can deliver, Klein says.

For the past several weeks, Fatah and Hamas have been negotiating on a national unity government in Cairo, with little success.

Egypt has said it will give the parties until July 7 to come to an agreement. If they fail, it would mean more trouble for Palestinian unity - and for hopes for progress on the Israeli-Palestinian front. (JTA)