

SA JEWISH BOARD OF DEPUTIES CONFERENCE



Deputy President Kgalema Motlanthe, Eric Samson and Mary Kluk.



Zev Krengel and Yuli Edelstein.



Michael Schneider and Kgalema Motlanthe.

Go home or stay home, says Krengel

STAFF REPORTER

THE TOP six members of the ANC and the presidency were good friends of Israel, but (trade union umbrella body) Cosatu needed to be watched, outgoing chairman of the SAJBD, Zev Krengel, told the conference. Krengel who was elected unopposed as national president, was succeeded as national chairman by Mary Kluk from Durban.

"We need not overact to anti-Semitism. Jacob Zuma said he stood by Israel and supported a two-state solution. But Cosatu could become a problem and needs to be watched.

"The ANC will pull them in line and anyone who is anti-Semitic. There is a deep commitment to make Jews feel at home," he said.

Former President Thabo Mbeki used to use the Jewish litmus test to gauge if they felt at home. If they did, other minorities would too.

Krengel said South African Jews should either stay at home or go home.

Yuli Edelstein, Israel's Minister of Public Diplomacy and Diaspora Affairs, a guest speaker at the Conference, slammed critics of his country, who compare Israel to apartheid. "We have a free, democratic and open society for all. Everyone can vote, has recourse to the law, rights and obligations."

Edelstein extended a hand of friendship to South Africa and offered Israel's assistance, "whether it is technology, agriculture or water.

"It is a pleasure to see progress in the country since Mandela's liberation. Israel is always ready to assist."

Anti-apartheid activist Michael Schneider, secretary general emeritus of the World Jewish Congress, also a guest speaker at the conference, said there should be concern among Jews about the return of hatred of Jews with neo-Nazism resurging in Eastern Europe and a burgeoning number of Muslims living in Europe.

"Anti-Semitism, untruths and false notions are being spread. Police in Europe should pay more attention to what is being said in mosques on a daily basis. If Muslims start voting en-block in some countries, they could take control of governments in France, the UK and Germany," he warned.

Schneider said there were moderate Muslims and Jews should reach out on dialogue to them, and should sponsor new initiatives for mullahs and rabbis to meet, study the Qur'an and Torah together and find commonalities, he said.

The Internet was a powerful tool which was being successfully used for good as well as bad messages.

"It, and other social network media is being used by neo-Nazis and Jew haters and we have to find a counter to this," he said.

Schneider was a member of the African Resistance Movement during apartheid, before he fled to London to escape the Special Branch.

"I had a dream of seeing a free South Africa and I lived to see that. Now I dream of one day seeing peace between Israel and Palestine.

Jewish community can help defuse youth unemployment time-bomb - Motlanthe

STAFF REPORTER
PHOTOGRAPHS BY ILAN OSSENDYVER

UNEMPLOYMENT among the youth in South Africa is a ticking time bomb and the Jewish community can help out in this regard.

These were the words of Deputy President Kgalema Motlanthe, speaking at the 46th conference of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD).

"We have recently seen around the world how disgruntled youth have participated in spontaneous revolution because governments have not provided them with hope of a better future; while at the same time minority class groups continue to flaunt their wealth through conspicuous consumptive culture," he said.

South Africa was not insulated from those challenges, especially because it had close to 2,8 million young people between

the ages of 18 - 24 who were unemployed and not in any institution of learning.

"This statistic represents the ticking time-bomb that threatens to flame pent-up emotions within the youth if not urgently addressed.

"I believe that the South African Jewish Board of Deputies is well-positioned to help us answer some of these challenges because of the skills, knowledge and influence your members wield as significant role-players in the South African economy," he said.

"We also believe that, given your experience in developing an independent schooling system, the Jewish Board of Deputies can share and contribute immensely to our education improvement objectives through teacher training and other mentoring activities.

"We are also looking to your contribution through our business-adopt- a-school pro-

gramme to help uplift poor performing schools in rural and township communities."

The SAJBD Human Rights Award was posthumously given to anti-apartheid activist Arthur Goldreich. His sons, Paul and Amos received the award at the SAJBD Conference on their father's behalf.

The Mendel Kaplan - Eric Samson Community Service awards were handed to Gerald Leissner and Mickey Glass and the Lifetime Achievement Award went to Eric Samson.

A new book called Jewish Memories of Mandela, was launched and a copy presented to the guest speaker, Deputy President Kgalema Motlanthe.

It tells of the roles played by Jewish South Africans, ranging from doctrinaire Communists with little Jewish identity, to prominent Jewish community leaders, in the life and career of Nelson Mandela.

Blatant anti-Semitism rife in Chavez's Venezuela

STAFF REPORTER

THE VENEZUELAN government (of Hugo Chavez) was blatantly anti-Semitic, Sammy Eppel, a representative of the Venezuela Jewish community, told the SAJBD Conference.

There were "thousands of different communications" on a daily basis by government and officials which spread anti-Semitic views in the media in general and on TV.

Slogans such as "Terrorist state of Israel" were prominent. There were stories put out of Israeli girls painting bombs which were to be dropped on Palestinians.

"We are subjected to daily abuse by government media," he said.

Even at Christmas time, when, in Latin America the tradition was to have nativity scenes, the government placed pictures or statues of Israeli soldiers guarding baby Jesus and other anti-Israel propaganda.

Children were influenced by this anti-Semitism and the seeds of hatred were being sewn in the new generation.

The propaganda during last year's Soccer World Cup was outrageous, he said. During the TV breaks between the games, Israeli soldiers were shown kicking a ball into a group of cowering Muslim women.



Sammy Eppel.

"When we complained, we were told that if we reported the matter to Fifa, the players would be punished, not the government, so we should go ahead. We could not be punishing the team so we shut up," he said.

Some of the choices and challenges facing Indian Jewry at present, were little different from those that had faced Diaspora Jewry generally over the past centuries, Ralph Jhirad, India chairman of the Indian Zionist Federation, said.

There were three main Jewish communities in India: Bene Israel Jews - who arrived 175 BCE from Caanan after a shipwreck at Navgaon; Bagdadi Jews - who arrived at the

beginning of 19th century from Iraq and prospered due to trade and business they conducted with the British in India; Cochini Jews - whose first arrival was at the beginning of first century BCE, settled at Shingley near Cochin, the second arrival being during 1492 at the time of Spanish Expulsion.

The Indian Jewish community, he said, had been highly respected in India and hence the population was reasonably well-integrated into Indian society, where persecution or anti-Semitism did not exist.

Serge Berdugo, ambassador at large of the King of Morocco and president of the Moroccan Jewish community, said the South African Jewish community and the Moroccan one were among the very few last organised Jewish communities established as such in Africa.

"Once upon a time, not so far away, beautiful and numerous Jewish communities lived for years in Morocco and in all of northern and eastern Africa.

"From Morocco to Libya, Egypt and Sudan, Ethiopia, all along the southern Mediterranean to Minor Asia, the historical nest and centre of Judaism, very large communities lived in these lands of Islam and contributed to world knowledge and civilisation," he said.

Struggle activism also takes its toll on the children

STAFF REPORTER

THE CONGRESS of South African Students (Cosas) tried to put a halt to the hosting of Paul and Amos Goldreich, sons of the late anti-apartheid stalwart Arthur Goldreich, at Liliesleaf Farm in Rivonia, at the start of the SAJBD conference.

After hearing that they, and other Jewish struggle heroes would be attending a meeting and media conference at Liliesleaf - which is now a national monument - Cosas tried to pressurise Nick Wolpe, head of Liliesleaf, into refusing the Board permission to host the function there. Wolpe ignored the request.

However, many other prominent Jewish activists refused to attend. The feeling was that they had been ostracised during apartheid and now the community was trying to embrace them.

Children of Struggle activists suffered enormous trauma, much the same as their parents, said Paul Goldreich, at the event. Paul was in South Africa to receive the SA Jewish Board Director's Human Rights Award which was given to him and his brother Amos on behalf of their father.

He said he had a deep connection with the farm. He was a child of six-and-a-half on the night of the police raid, where all the adult occupants, including both his parents, were arrested.

"It was a night I cannot forget. It marked the end of our way of life as we knew it. We saw our parents being arrested and police taking all our belongings. They also questioned me," he said.

Paul said the raid was the start of a life where he experienced a profound sense of shame because his parents were in prison. It was the start of a life of a constant stem of abuse, attacks and shunning by members of the Jewish community and the broader com-

munity as well.

Paul, who is a psychoanalyst, said studies showed worldwide there was a high rate of mental illness among children of political fighters.

Steven Gruzd of the SAJBD said the Jewish community was proud of the life and work of Arthur Goldreich, who passed away in Israel in May, and the Board was privileged to host two of his sons at Liliesleaf (where the Goldreichs actually lived).

"As we know, the lives of the children of political activists were profoundly affected by their parents' activities. They too can be regarded in many ways as Struggle veterans. It is well known that many of the prominent white activists and Struggle leaders, seized in the police raid on this place in July 1963, were Jewish by birth, and many of the white people involved in other aspects of the Struggle had Jewish roots," he said.

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African Jewish Congress discusses black African 'Jewish' groupings

DAVID SAKS

IMMEDIATELY following the SAJBD national conference on Sunday, representatives from seven Southern African countries came together at the same venue for the meeting of the African Jewish Congress (AJC). Participating countries included South Africa, Botswana, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Mauritius, Swaziland and Zambia. Amongst the issues reported back on and discussed were the question of black African groupings claiming to be Jewish, the impact of the Middle East situation and welfare initiatives in Zimbabwe aimed at assisting both Jews and the general population.

The two international speakers, Israeli Minister of Public Diplomacy & Diaspora Affairs Yuli Edelstein and Michael Schneider, Secretary General Emeritus of the World Jewish Congress, focused mainly on the global campaign to delegitimise Israel and what was being done and needed to be done to counter it. Schneider described the diplomatic initiatives currently underway by the World Jewish Congress concerning the imminent UN vote on the proposed unilateral declaration of Palestinian statehood, as well as the ongoing need to counter the baleful influence of Iran in the region. Edelstein said that the root cause of hostility to Israel was not so much prejudice as

sheer ignorance, and emphasised the need for all friends of Israel, Jewish and non-Jewish, to continually find ways to make the real facts known to the wider public.

AJC President Mervyn Smith introduced the topic of black African groups claiming Jewish descent and/or that they practiced Judaism as their religion and requested input on what kind of policy should be followed in this regard by the AJC. The prevailing view was that since these groups were not halachically Jewish nor in fact practicing any recognised form of Judaism, there could not be any interaction with them that suggested extending recognition on a religious basis. However, this did not preclude engaging in normal outreach activities or general cultural exchanges with them.

Jewish-headed social outreach initiatives extending beyond the confines of the Jewish community featured in AJC committee member Ann Harris' report on Bulawayo. Harris described the work of SGOFOTI (Support Group of Families of Terminally Ill), founded and is co-headed by community member Ruth Bolnick-Feigenbaum. She also reported back on the opening of the Rabbi Moshe Library for primary school-age children, named after AJC Spiritual Leader and CEO Rabbi Moshe Silberhaft, at the Vulindledla Youth Centre on 25 July this year.

In his report on the current situation in Zimbabwe, Zimbabwe Jewish Board of Deputies chairman Sam Benatar said that there had been some improvement on the economic front, but unfortunately this had not been paralleled by any similar progress in the political realm.

In an audiovisual presentation, Rabbi Silberhaft showed some of the highlights of the AJC's activities over the past two years. This included the unveiling of new plaques honouring individuals associated with the Jewish Second World War detainees on Mauritius and the maintenance of the cemetery there, participating in the UN International Holocaust Day in Namibia and the ongoing work of the AJC Zimbabwe Fund in assisting needy members of the Zimbabwe Jewish community. He also described how he had been hospitalised following an attack by bees in Harare, quipping that was one 'BEE deal' that had gone very wrong.

At the conclusion of the meeting, Smith was re-elected as President, while Ann Harris was elected as a vice-chairperson and Benatar and Harold Pupkewitz from Namibia as co-vice chairmen. Ordinary committee members appointed are Laurence Miller and Li Boiskin (Cape Town), Richard Lyons (Botswana) and Irene Zuckerman (representing the International Council of Jewish Women).



Benita Levin, Danny K, Amanda Krawitz Herson, Steven Bacher and Wayne Sussman.

Don't be spectators in SA, Benita Levin urges

STAFF REPORTER

OUTRAGE ABOUT anti-Semitic remarks should not be kept quiet, but should be shouted loudly from the rooftops, Benita Levin of Radio 94.7, told the Conference in a session on "Our Roles, Rights and Responsibilities".

South African Jewish singer, Danny K (Koppel) started Shout SA, an anti-crime movement, about 18 months ago in response to an incident where singer Lucky Dube was shot and killed in a hijacking. He said it had galvanised the music industry into the fight against crime.

The ringtone of a song composed about crime, sold more tones than ever before in South Africa.

Amanda Krawitz Herson, a

brand manager who returned to South Africa after a 12-year stay in the United States said that on her return, she wanted to get involved in the country, but found it difficult.

"I didn't know how to integrate Jewish values and generosity and found it is about small things like LeadSA where all small deeds count," she said.

Wayne Sussman said there were amazing opportunities in which the Jewish community could become involved and one was South Africa's bid for the SKA telescope.

He said education in the country, and the standard of matric was not good enough.

"We have to get rid of dependency. It is not about Jewish rights and roles, but about our responsibility," he said.

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Pranas Domsaitis,
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