

# South Africa

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## *National Affairs*

**T**HE PERIOD FROM MID-1996 to the end of 1997 saw the continuing transformation of South Africa in the post-apartheid era. The African National Congress (ANC) consolidated its power in the Government of National Unity (GNU) led by President Nelson Mandela, while the National Party (NP), under F. W. de Klerk, was the official opposition. In May 1997 Roelf Meyer, a leading member of the NP, left to start a new movement with Bantu Holomisa, formerly of the ANC. Three months later de Klerk retired from politics and was replaced as leader of the NP by Martinus van Schalkwyk. In September 1997 Meyer and Holomisa established a new party, the United Democratic Movement.

At the ANC national conference held in Mafikeng in December 1997, Nelson Mandela stepped down as president of the organization. He was replaced by Thabo Mbeki, widely respected as a pragmatist with a sound grasp of economic matters. President Mandela remained South Africa's president, scheduled to retire in 1999 when the country goes to the polls.

The ANC-led government introduced a new Growth, Employment and Redistribution policy (GEAR), as well as reforms in housing and educational policies in 1996. The special ministry responsible for the Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP) was abolished. Affirmative action gained impetus as the nation tackled past injustices. Nonetheless, huge discrepancies in wealth and living conditions remained. The economy grew by about 2 percent, and inflation decreased marginally to about 7.5 percent, the lowest in 24 years. Foreign investment remained unsatisfactory, notwithstanding the announcement by the government of new economic policies, including substantial privatization, fiscal discipline, and endorsement by the International Monetary Fund.

During the period under review, there was a substantial reduction in political violence across the country as a whole, although violence in KwaZulu-Natal Province continued. Criminal violence remained at a shockingly high level, against a backdrop of high unemployment, estimated at about 20 percent.

In his message to the Jewish community for the Jewish New Year in 1996, President Mandela praised Jews for their "major contribution to the well-being of South Africa in every sphere: enriching our culture, helping build our economy, and giving impetus to our intellectual achievements. The community has given

our nation many who participated in the struggle for democracy, some at great cost and sacrifice. We know that we still face many challenges in transforming our country—it is my earnest plea that the Jewish community should continue to help us meet these challenges. It is my hope that the peace process in the Middle East will continue, and that it will bear fruit. Our experience has taught us that with goodwill a negotiated solution can be found for even the most profound problems” (*The Citizen*, September 14, 1996).

#### APARTHEID AFTERMATH

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) began its task of investigating crimes committed under the apartheid regime. Under its provisions, individuals who applied for amnesty would not be brought to trial if they made a full disclosure of their actions since 1960. Investigators and researchers uncovered much new evidence to help complete the assessment of South Africa’s history between 1960 and 1994. Such evidence includes the discovery of more than 260 secret graves, believed to be those of cadres of the armed wing of the ANC (Umkhonto we Sizwe), killed by apartheid security forces. A database of more than 14,000 human-rights abuses was compiled by investigative units, and thousands of victims received acknowledgment, counseling, and support.

Gesher, a social-action group based in Johannesburg, was the first Jewish organization to make a submission to the TRC, in January 1997. The submission was jointly compiled by Gesher chairman Geoff Sifrin, Rabbi Daniel Beller, and Steven Friedman (director of the Centre for Policy Studies, Johannesburg). The document, as outlined by its authors, provides “a particular view of Jewish tradition which, we believe, helps us better to understand the choices facing our society as it attempts reconciliation: we are concerned to show how elements of Jewish tradition can help South Africa deal with the important challenges it faces.” The document went on to note that, in the South African situation, “people who have thought of themselves as bystanders must ask themselves how they ought to have acted, or in what ways they implicitly supported the apartheid system or failed to carry out their moral duty. They need to take appropriate responsibility for the system in which they lived, the atrocities committed under that system and for the process of reconciliation” (*South African Jewish Times*, February 7, 1997).

In March 1997 a minor storm erupted in the pages of the *Mail & Guardian* when Claudia Braude criticized the Jewish community’s behavior under apartheid, in particular the role of Percy Yutar, a prominent Jew who prosecuted Mandela in the Rivonia Trial in 1963–64. Of particular concern was the refusal of the Board of Deputies’ journal, *Jewish Affairs*, to publish Braude’s article, which instead found its way into the *Mail & Guardian*.

A major oral submission was made to the TRC in November 1997 by Chief Rabbi Cyril Harris. He said: “We must examine the past, must admit failings for

the past—those failings must prompt us all to move forward in some way, to do something now and in the years ahead to build a better country for the millions of our brothers and sisters who live in this country and hope for a better future.” Harris welcomed the work of the commission, which he saw as giving “new meaning to wrongdoing and forgiveness.” He acknowledged that most members of the community had in one way or another benefited from apartheid, although they had not initiated the apartheid system. Harris also reminded commissioners of the disproportionate role played by Jews in the struggle against apartheid. While acknowledging that many of the most prominent activists were not practicing Jews, he suggested that “they were moved by either Jewish and, more often than not, humanitarian motivations to speak out.” Rabbi Harris also noted that in elections Jews voted against the NP “more so than any other white group,” and had participated in various protest groupings such as the Five Freedoms Forum, Jews for Justice, and the Black Sash.

Notwithstanding the substantial anti-apartheid activism identified, Rabbi Harris confessed on behalf of the community “a collective failure to protest against apartheid.” “The entire thrust of Jewish moral teachings,” he said, “together with the essential lesson of Jewish historical experience, as the most consistent victim in the world, should have moved the community to do everything possible to oppose apartheid. Distancing oneself from the anguished cry of the majority and myopically pursuing one’s own interests can never be morally justified.”

Rabbi Harris went on to tell the commission about Tikkun, a Jewish communal program whose name means “repairing.” “We are applying Jewish skills, resources, expertise and know-how to be of maximum benefit to the upliftment program,” he said. (See “Community Relations,” below.) Responding to a question put by a commissioner about a proposed wealth tax for whites, Rabbi Harris said he thought such a tax was reasonable and that he would be willing to put his weight behind it.

### *Israel and the Middle East*

President Mandela’s planned visit to Israel in August 1996 was postponed until October 1996, due to the president’s tight schedule and on medical advice that August in Israel was too hot. Then, in the wake of increased tensions between the Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority, the visit was again delayed.

A high-level Israeli trade delegation visited South Africa in August 1996. Its members met with hundreds of local business executives to discuss investment and held talks with the government about a new trade agreement.

South Africa’s new foreign policy, especially its self-proclaimed even-handed policy toward the Middle East, was a source of concern to Jewish leaders. When the government hosted Iranian president Ali Akbar Rafsanjani in September 1996, Seymour Kopelowitz, national director of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBOD), made the community’s feelings quite clear: “It’s well

known that Iran has sponsored terrorism against selected targets across the world and vehemently opposes the current Middle East peace process by giving support to Hizbollah and other organizations who wish to derail it." The board called on President Mandela "to urge President Rafsanjani to withdraw opposition to peace negotiations in the Middle East." Dialogue and not hostility between Muslims and Jews, argued the board, would advance peace everywhere in the world (*SAJT*, September 20, 1996).

*City Press*, a Johannesburg Sunday newspaper, was critical of the board's statement, claiming that the Jews in Israel "don't have a good record themselves. The Jewish community in South Africa must begin to owe allegiance to the country and start to think like everyone else in this country. They must not support President Mandela when it suits them and turn their backs when they think of Israel" (September 15, 1996). The board vigorously objected to *City Press* calling into question the Jewish community's allegiance to South Africa and pointed out that Jews had a democratic right to voice their opinions and to criticize the government. "Under no circumstances did the Board prescribe to President Mandela or the Government who he or they should see. Indeed, we asked the President to urge Rafsanjani to withdraw Iranian opposition to the peace process in the Middle East, knowing he and the South African government are firm supporters of the process" (*City Press*, October 6, 1996).

In a discussion with Jewish leaders, Mandela expressed understanding for Jewish concerns regarding relations with countries like Libya and Iran, but explained that he would not turn his back on friends who had assisted the ANC during the liberation struggle.

In December 1996 news broke of a 3-billion-rand (approximately \$600 million) arms deal between the South African government and Syria. There was loud criticism from the National Party and the Democratic Party (DP), both of which considered the proposed deal counterproductive to Middle East peace and to South African foreign and economic interests. Speaking in Johannesburg, DP leader Tony Leon indicated surprise at the government's intention to supply arms to a country that "continued to violate internationally defined concepts of human rights." Both Syria and Israel should, he maintained, be subject to the same audit of human rights. "And equally, if it is found that, by introducing arms via Syria to that region it would destabilize the area, the same question must be asked about supplying arms to Israel. I'm not asking that special treatment be given to Israel. All I'm asking is that both countries be judged by objective criteria. And when that is done, Israel, warts and all, is going to be considerably ahead of the pack in the Middle East" (*SAJT*, March 7, 1997).

Acting Israeli ambassador Victor Hartel also condemned the proposed sale. He was joined by the South African Zionist Federation (SAZF), the SAJBOD, and the South African Union of Jewish Students.

The U.S. State Department informed the South African government that the American assistance program could be curtailed if the military sale went ahead.

President Mandela's spokesman, Park Mankahlama, said his government's policy would not be dictated by any country, no matter how powerful. The United States's enemies were not South Africa's enemies, he declared. Notwithstanding its tough public posture, the cabinet, fearing the anger of Washington, made its support for the arms deal conditional on the approval of Deputy President Thabo Mbeki. At the end of 1997, it appeared that the deal had been aborted.

The tilt of the government's Middle East policy was further evident in President Mandela's visit to Libya in November 1997. In Parliament, Tony Leon proposed a motion condemning the planned granting of the Order of Good Hope Award to Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi. National SAJBOD chairwoman Marlene Bethlehem considered the award "offensive to the Jewish community because of Libya's dismal human rights record and also because of its involvement against both Israel and Jews."

Another source of tension for the Jewish community, indirectly related to the Middle East, was the emergence of a largely Muslim vigilante group, People Against Gangsterism and Drugs (PAGAD). The movement came to prominence in August 1996 when it was involved in the execution of a leading Cape Town gangster. Within a short while, concerns arose that more extreme elements within the group had agendas other than drug control, and that the group was in contact with radical Middle Eastern groups. When PAGAD leaders threatened to call in Hezbollah and Hamas to assist them in their struggle against gangsters, the government issued a warning that outsiders would not be allowed to intervene in the internal problems of South Africa.

In February 1997 a radical Muslim group, Qibla, chanting "Death to America" and burning Israeli flags, marched on the Israeli embassy in Cape Town. A similar march took place in Johannesburg, organized by the Islamic Unity Convention. Ze'ev Luria, political counselor at the Israeli embassy, warned that vigilance against this small minority was necessary because of possible links to the Iranians.

On the eve of Yom Kippur 1997, Muslims held a pro-Hamas demonstration outside a Pretoria mosque and placed a full-page advertisement in the *Pretoria News* (October 10, 1997) criticizing the newspaper's "biased and one-sided version of events in the Middle East." The ad appealed to President Mandela to take account of the "facts" of hostile attacks on the people of Palestine.

In the wake of these tensions, Tony Leon warned Jews not to fall into the trap of believing that all Muslims were anti-Semites or fundamentalists. Speaking at a WIZO Fortnightly Forum in Johannesburg, he reminded Jews that they were better off under the new government than under the old. Jews, he noted, had the same problems as all other middle-class whites, relating to crime, economics, education, and health care. The threat to the Jewish community, contended Leon, "comes from within—from those who are leaving the country" (*SAJT*, March 7, 1997).

Following two suicide bombings in Jerusalem in May 1997, President Mandela

sent a letter of condolence to Israeli president Ezer Weizmann, noting that the news "was received in South Africa with shock and despair. . . . We cannot condemn the act strongly enough and we trust that this tragic event will strengthen the resolve of all concerned to bring about a lasting peace."

In September 1997 Ben-Gurion University of the Negev conferred an honorary doctorate on President Mandela at a ceremony in Cape Town that was attended by parliamentarians, academics, and associates of the university.

There were new diplomatic assignments in this period. In September 1996 Frank Land, a career diplomat, replaced Malcolm Fergusson, South Africa's ambassador to Israel since May 1993. Uri Oren was appointed Israeli ambassador to South Africa in August 1997.

### *Anti-Semitism*

Although anti-Semitism was of marginal significance in South African public life during the period under review, a number of troubling incidents occurred. These included repeated anti-Semitic remarks made by a senior lecturer at the Cape Technicon in Cape Town; a grotesque cartoon with anti-Semitic implications in an advertisement placed by the University of the Witwatersrand in a number of leading newspapers; anti-Semitic phone calls to call-in radio programs; graffiti with anti-Semitic sentiments; letters to various organizations warning of nefarious Jewish practices; Holocaust-denial letters; and anti-Zionist letters and comments that were often anti-Semitic.

Of greater concern was an emergent Islamism in which anti-Israel sentiment very often spilled over into blatant anti-Semitism. When a mosque was bombed in Rustenburg in January 1997, members of the Muslim community made statements suggesting that Israel's Mossad intelligence agency was behind the bombing. Anti-Semitic comments were regularly made on Radio 786, a Cape Town Muslim radio station. In September 1996, Lester Hoffman, chairman of the Cape Council of the Board of Deputies, noted that a special media subcommittee was monitoring all media reports and would take action where necessary. In March 1997, following a program on Radio 786 in which Dr. Ahmed Huber, interviewed in Switzerland, suggested that the Holocaust was exaggerated and the peace process in the Middle East an American Zionist swindle, the board complained both to the Minister of Telecommunications and to the Broadcasting Complaints Commission. In April an "out of court" settlement was arrived at: the SAJBOD would withdraw its allegations, and Radio 786 would publicize an apology in its newscasts.

A poster appearing in Hebron, in the West Bank of Israel, in July 1997, in which Muhammed was depicted by a Jewish extremist as a pig, had substantial repercussions in South Africa. In Pretoria, the Islamic community held a heated protest outside the Israeli embassy, and a stone was hurled at a passing car. In Cape Town,

Muslims protested in front of the Israeli embassy. Following the march, a Cape Town Jewish home that housed a Jewish Book Center was firebombed. Phone threats were also made against a Jewish old-age home and a synagogue. Widespread condemnation of this violence was expressed by the ANC, the Catholic Bishops' Conference, the Methodist Church of South Africa, Imam Rashied Omar, vice-president of the World Conference on Religion and Peace, and others. Omar claimed to speak on behalf of Cape Town's Muslim community. However, the Muslim Judicial Council, the official body representing Muslims, was silent. In a letter to Marlene Bethlehem, President Mandela promised that "the police are taking every possible step to deal with the incident."

## JEWISH COMMUNITY

### *Demography*

A national census was conducted in September 1996, but the results were not scheduled to be released until early in 1998. There were indications of stepped-up emigration of young Jews, but no definitive data. In July 1996 a lengthy article in *Rapport*, an Afrikaans Sunday newspaper, claimed the Jewish community had been reduced from 250,000 to 80,000. Jewish communal leaders reacted indignantly, pointing out that the Jewish population had, at its highest, in 1970, numbered only 118,000, and claiming (in an inflated estimate) that the figure in 1990 stood at 105,000. According to Mervyn Smith, president of the SAJBOD, crime and violence were driving young people out of the country. In Tony Leon's view, Jewish emigration was visible largely because it was highly qualified people in the professions who were leaving the country, and Jews were disproportionately represented in that category.

### *Communal Affairs*

Crime, welfare, and the need to establish sound relations with the wider population dominated the Jewish communal agenda. At the Cape Conference of the Board of Jewish Deputies in August 1996, Cape Council chairman Lester Hoffman spoke of renewed waves of emigration among the youth against a backdrop of crime and a perceived shrinking job market associated with affirmative action. At the same conference, Raphael Smith stressed the need for the board to create a positive image of the new South Africa and advocated that young Jews be brought into "the Jewish community business" as full partners. National president Mervyn Smith considered rationalizing social welfare a priority, in particular incorporating different agencies into one fund-raising process.

In September 1996 the minister of Safety and Security in the Gauteng legislature, Mkhabela Sibeko, addressed the Gauteng Council of the SAJBOD about

efforts to curb crime. Speaking on the same panel, Andrew Feinstein, member of the provincial legislature for the ANC, claimed that the government had had many successes in this area. Peter Leon, leader of the DP in the Gauteng legislature, disagreed with him, maintaining that crime had steadily worsened.

In an editorial titled "War on Crime," the *South African Jewish Times* questioned the government's ability to deliver on its plans to limit violence. "If a government cannot offer protection for its law-abiding citizens, for personal property and for environmental rights, and cannot ensure efficient law enforcement, then it is never going to succeed in other important tasks. Then economic prosperity will elude it and democracy will disappear into the mists of misery" (October 10, 1996).

In February 1997 a women's interdenominational meeting was held in Johannesburg under the auspices of the Union of Jewish Women (UJW), to protest the government's failure to provide security. In May the South African Union of Jewish Students (SAUJS) joined the ANC Youth League in a Johannesburg "Take Back the Night" march, in response to crimes of rape and violence against women.

In April 1997 an anticrime "Prayer, Protest and Plan" meeting was held by religious leaders in Johannesburg under the auspices of the Office of the Chief Rabbi, the Beth Din, the South African Rabbinical Association, and the Union of Orthodox Synagogues (UOS). Twelve hundred people attended. "We are living in a state of absolute anarchy," exclaimed Rabbi Yossi Goldman, chairman of the South African Rabbinical Association. "We are stretcher cases, ICU cases. Life support machinery is needed—and what does the Government give us? Plaster and Panado [bandaids and aspirin]!" Chief Rabbi Harris called for perpetrators of crime to be "shunned, outlawed, sent to Coventry" by their own families and communities. "We have to create a new and positive climate—an atmosphere that respects life, limb and property, which rejects and shuns each and every criminal as a damager of South Africa's chance of progress." A call was made for visible policing (*The Citizen*, April 8, 1997).

Tensions within the wider society were reflected in the Jewish community. A special project, Shalom Bayit (Peace in the Home), was established toward the end of 1996 to help deal with Jewish domestic abuse. Stanley Rothbart, honorary vice-president of the Society for the Jewish Handicapped, told a Jewish social-services conference in Johannesburg that the community had "recorded increased incidents of individual and family instability, substance abuse, divorce, loss of earnings and the impact of trauma on individuals and families." The increase in such traumas was confirmed by Brenda Solarsh, speaking at the 50th anniversary of Jewish Community Services in February 1997.

In January 1997 major donors and trustees of Jewish organizations in Johannesburg set up a commission of inquiry into the financial affairs of Jewish organizations and institutions. Known as Operation 2000, the commission included among its tasks an assessment of the viability and feasibility of Jewish day schools

in Johannesburg. Sam Abrahams, formerly of the Arthur Anderson management firm, was appointed to head the commission.

In March 1997 a prominent communal leader, Russel Gaddin, criticized Jewish leaders who employed "scare tactics" to raise funds. In his view they were sowing "the seeds of despair" with their bleak and negative—and, he claimed, untrue—portrayal of the community's condition. However, in June, Selwyn Wald, chairman of the Society of the Handicapped, spoke of a situation of mounting peril for the underprivileged in the Jewish community, caused by the economic climate, draining emigration, and apathy.

Chief Rabbi Harris hit out at Jewish emigrants to countries such as Australia and Canada for abandoning their moral obligations to elderly parents and to the South African Jewish community. Doctors were especially criticized, since they had been educated at great cost to the government. Rabbi Harris suggested imposing a tax on Jewish emigrants to countries other than Israel, which would go toward maintaining the South African Jewish community. He recommended a figure of \$250 per family per annum.

Notwithstanding communal concerns about security and welfare, Chief Rabbi of the Commonwealth Jonathan Sacks told the 39th national congress of the SAJ-BOD in August 1997 that the Jewish community would meet the challenges. "You will get through, because this country is strong and, more importantly, because you, as a Jewish community, are quite exceptional. There are very few, if any, Jewish communities in the world that have your warmth, your sense of loyalty to the Jewish heritage, the strength of your Jewish institutions, your commitment to the State of Israel and, above all, your sense of community."

At the same conference, Geshet chairman Geoff Sifrin called for the board to be more open to diversity, argument, dissent, and debate and to be a home for all sectors of the Jewish world. "In the past," he maintained, "the Board was not open to diversity and pluralism and gave a message that only certain narrow conservative attitudes to Judaism, Israel and South Africa would be tolerated," with the result that "many Jews felt alienated from the Board."

At the conference Rabbi Harris was presented with an award for outstanding leadership. Two months later, at a gala banquet in Cape Town marking the tenth anniversary of the chief rabbi's appointment, special tribute was paid to Rabbi Harris by President Mandela. "Chief Rabbi Harris is the spiritual leader of the community which has played an indispensable part in our national life. In years to come, when the history of our transition is written, his name will be among those leaders who lent a hand in the efforts to establish democracy, to heal divisions, and to start the process of building a better life" (*SAJT*, November 21, 1997).

A number of communal organizations celebrated anniversaries in the period under review: the Union of Jewish Women its 60th, Our Parents Home and Jewish Community Services their 50th, Magen David Adom its 50th year in South Africa, and Arcadia Jewish Children's Home its 90th year of caring for children.

## *Community Relations*

The need for South African Jewry to reach out to the wider community was underscored by Chief Rabbi Harris when he introduced his booklet *Jewish Obligations to the Non-Jew* at a special gathering in Johannesburg in July 1996. In his remarks, Harris pointed out that the chief crime of South Africa's apartheid era had been separate development, and that the antidote was joint development. His booklet was "deliberately concise and concentrated," in order to stimulate debate on how the Jewish community could help build the New South Africa. The booklet was published under the auspices of Tikkun.

Speaking at the *South African Jewish Times* Business Achiever of the Year dinner in September 1996, Deputy Minister of Finance Gill Marcus called on the Jewish business community to share in a partnership with the government to "bring new life, a new vision, a new creativity" to the country, and to reach out to other groups that had not been as privileged as the Jews.

A number of community projects were initiated. Temple Israel in Johannesburg undertook to help support a day-care center in the inner city. The Union of Jewish Women started a project of providing clothing for rape victims who arrive at a district surgeon's office with their garments badly torn.

The South African Board of Jewish Education (SABJE) established a computer outreach program for pupils, teachers, and administrators at primary and high schools in Alexandria, a black township in Johannesburg. Gesher, a Jewish group promoting active involvement in South African society, continued to engage in social action.

Kim Feinberg established the Foundation for Holocaust and Tolerance Education in Johannesburg. Feinberg was South African coordinator for Steven Spielberg's Survivors of the Shoah Foundation.

In September 1997 the *Sunday Independent* ran a lengthy article on the possible Jewish roots of the Lemba ethnic group in the foothills of the Zoutpansberg mountains in Northern Province. This black group, according to anthropologists, had some customs that suggest a link to ancient Semitic cultures. A spokesman for the 40,000-strong South African Lemba community (there are 15,000 more in other parts of southern Africa) claimed that the group originated from a Jewish tribe in Sana'a Yemen (September 14, 1997).

## *Israel-Related Activity*

Addressing the IUA-UCF (Israel United Appeal-United Community Fund) campaign opening in October 1996, Jewish Agency and World Zionist Organization chairman Avraham Burg warned Jewish leaders against putting local needs above those of Israel or assuming that Israel no longer needed financial aid. Raising funds for Israel prevented the growth of a "shtetl mentality" and actually enhanced the raising of money for local needs, he maintained. Burg announced the

creation of a new program, Mabit, whereby Israelis could contribute funds to help preserve Judaism and unite Jewry. Speaking for the IUA-UCF campaign again in March 1997, Burg warned of a dangerous trend among Jews in South Africa and elsewhere to ignore the problems of Jews in the world and to focus only on their own concerns. In September 1997 Errol Goodman was appointed national director of the IUA-UCF.

South African Jews shared world Jewry's concern over efforts by Israel's chief rabbinate to delegitimize non-Orthodox Jews. In an editorial titled "Who Is a Jew?" the *South African Jewish Times* (June 13, 1997) condemned the exclusivity of the Israeli religious leadership: "Thus, at this point, for Israel to be a homeland for all Jews, it has to respect and protect the diversity of beliefs of all who live in the country, and by extension, the heterogeneity of a long heritage. In a democracy, a dictatorial attitude, however justly or legitimately felt, is bound to deepen divisions, rather than show a respect for religion per se."

The Mizrahi Organization of South Africa and Krok Vision, together with the International Institute in Israel, established a joint project, He'atid, the Future, in October 1995. It offered leadership training courses in Israel for carefully selected individuals concerned with social and economic development in their countries. Shirley Zar, head of town planning at the Witwatersrand Technikon, Johannesburg, introduced the Israeli "moshav" model of cooperative village in the black community. Her program was supported by the South African Associates of Ben-Gurion University and included a partnership involving the Israeli government, Ben-Gurion University, the local Jewish community (under the umbrella of Tikkun), the South West Gauteng Farmers' Cooperative, and Murray and Roberts Properties.

Aliyah 2000 was launched in August 1996 by the South African Zionist Federation, a project offering a wide range of information programs intended to present Israel as a viable alternative for Jews emigrating from South Africa, together with the inducement of attractive absorption packages. "We are concerned that so many of our community are leaving South Africa and so few are coming to Israel," explained Hertzal Katz, chairman of Telfed, the organization for South African immigrants in Israel.

A chair in criminal law was established at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in the name of Justice Basil Wunsch, in tribute to his dedicated service as a jurist and to the South African Jewish community.

## *Religion*

"Jews for Judaism" was established under the auspices of the Union of Orthodox Synagogues (UOS) in July 1996; it was affiliated with a group of the same name founded in the United States in 1985. Headed by Rabbi Craig Kacef, the organization was formed to combat the growing number of cults springing up in South Africa and to make the Jewish community aware of anti-Jewish missionary work.

Chief Rabbi Harris commended the government for passing the Divorce Amendment Act of 1996, which would help to rectify the plight of *agunot*, "chained women," and others whose spouses would not give them a religious divorce, even though the marriage was terminated civilly. The amendment provides that where a couple has undergone a religious marriage, the civil divorce may be withheld until a religious divorce has been arranged.

On Simhat Torah morning in 1996, 24 women assembled at a private home in Glenhazel, Johannesburg, where they took part in a women's Torah reading, without incident. One year earlier, a similar reading was disrupted by male members of the Jewish community.

In February 1997 Rabbi Ben Isaacson returned from Zimbabwe to serve the newly founded L.I. Rabinowitz Jewish Center in Johannesburg, named after a former chief rabbi of South Africa. The new congregation is committed to Hakhlah but is not part of the UOS. Rabbi Isaacson said that he would abide by Beth Din rulings and that decisions would be made in consultation with Israeli and local rabbis. The center planned to concentrate on issues facing Jewish women within the framework of Jewish law, as well as "helping those staying in South Africa with the fears and burdens facing them on a daily basis, such as crime and emigration," said Rabbi Isaacson.

A new Orthodox synagogue, Emet Congregation, was founded in Johannesburg, and a new community center-synagogue was opened in George. Adath Jeshurun Congregation in Johannesburg, founded in 1936 by German-Jewish immigrants, followers of Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch, celebrated its 60th anniversary.

At the biennial conference of the UOS held in Johannesburg in May 1997, Rabbi Harris called for greater communal discipline, saying, "We are not in a normal situation, but we are in a threatening situation." He was referring to the fact that many synagogues that were no longer spiritually or financially viable insisted on hanging on instead of taking the obvious step of amalgamating with other synagogues in the area. Acknowledging that "shtieblech were indeed able to exert a high-level spirituality," Rabbi Harris said that Johannesburg was becoming full of "mini-shuls," to the detriment of the wider community. "Our community is far too fragmented and, in these difficult times, we must consolidate as much as possible." He also called for increased giving of charity, greater involvement in the broader community, and less pessimism.

South Africa's first woman rabbi, Bonnie Lee Leavy, from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, was appointed to serve Pretoria's Temple Menorah, under the auspices of the South African Union for Progressive Judaism.

In May 1997 the World Union for Progressive Judaism (WUPJ) held its 28th convention in Johannesburg and Cape Town, with over 350 delegates representing 26 countries attending. The theme of the conference was "Confronting Radical Change." Tribute was paid to President Mandela (who received the group's Humanitarian Award), to F.W. de Klerk, and to the local Jewish community for its support of the freedom struggle. In his opening address, WUPJ executive di-

rector Rabbi Richard Hirsch rejected the role of chief rabbis as obsolete and unnecessary, denounced Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks of Great Britain for refusing to attend the funeral of Rabbi Hugo Gryn, a distinguished Reform rabbi in London, and attacked the Israeli rabbinate's exclusivity. "If, as we declare long and loud, we are one people with one destiny, then we must have one world-wide policy. The winds of pluralism cannot prevail throughout the Diaspora and suddenly stop blowing when they reach the eastern shores of the Mediterranean," he said.

### *Education*

The South African Board of Jewish Education (SABJE) announced a mid-1996 increase of 16 percent in school fees at King David School, Johannesburg. The chairman, Jeffrey Bortz, cited as reasons for the hike an increase in teachers' salaries and interest rates and the loss of pupils through emigration. Bortz pointed out that the SABJE needed to eliminate a large debt to the banks of approximately 10 million rand. A few months later Bortz indicated that the midyear measures had brought financial stability, helped by a 50-percent cut in the fee assistance program. In addition, the Hebrew Teachers' Training Seminary was to be phased out in three stages. There were further fee increases at the start of 1997.

Starting in 1997, Carmel College, Durban's only Jewish day school, was managed by Crawford Education Holdings, a private education company. This followed a general reduction in the number of Jewish pupils in the school. The Jewish character of the school was protected by frequent consultations between the Durban Hebrew Schools Association and Crawford.

In August 1996 the Isaac and Jessie Kaplan Centre at the University of Cape Town hosted an international conference on "Jewries at the Frontier." The conference was organized jointly by Professors Milton Shain (University of Cape Town) and Sander Gilman (University of Chicago) and attracted leading scholars from all over the world. In September 1997 the Kaplan Centre and the Institute for Contemporary Jewry at the Hebrew University held a joint international colloquium on "Zionism in the English-Speaking World—The First Hundred Years."

### *Culture*

"The Jewish Sound," an hourlong program of Jewish music, drama, and phone-ins, hosted by Rabbi Yossi Goldman and sponsored by Chabad House, began airing on a community radio station in Gauteng Province in August 1996.

Moira Blumenthal Productions was the big winner at the First National Bank Vita Awards for its production of the play *Kafka Dances*. L. Rubin Booksellers, specializing in Jewish books and religious items, was forced into liquidation after 94 years in Johannesburg. The SAJBOD and Rand Afrikaans University hosted "The Dreyfus Affair: An Exhibition of Art, Truth and Justice" in August 1996.

The exhibition, which was also displayed at the Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies at the University of Cape Town and at Rust en Vreugd in Cape Town, comprised material from the private collection of Dr. Lorraine and Martin Beitler of Miami, Florida.

### *Publications*

Some noteworthy new publications of Jewish interest were *People of the Book* by Marcia Leveson; *Reverberations* by Phyllis Lewson; *Cutting Through the Mountain*, edited by Immanuel Suttner; *Last Walk in Naryskin Park* by Rose Zwi; and *Bibliography of South African Jewry* by Veronica Belling.

### *Personalia*

Justice Richard Goldstone was installed as chancellor of the University of the Witwatersrand. Goldstone recently returned to South Africa after a two-year term as prosecutor of the United Nations War Crimes Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. He continued as a judge on the Constitutional Court.

Meyer Kahn, a leading industrialist, was appointed chief executive of the South African Police Services for two years.

Justice Cecil Margo received an award from the Friends of the Israeli Defense Forces. In 1948 he responded to Ben-Gurion's urgent appeal for him to come to Israel to advise on the establishment and organization of the Israeli Air Force. Prof. Colin Tatz of Macquarie University in Australia received an honorary doctorate from his alma mater, the University of Natal.

Among prominent South African Jews who died between July 1996 and December 1997 were Etienne Mureinik, a distinguished legal academic specializing in constitutional and administrative law; Clive Menell, a leading industrialist and deputy chairman of the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund; Leonard Schach, lawyer turned theater director; Jack Penn, world-renowned plastic surgeon; Issy Sachar, prominent businessman and indefatigable Zionist worker; Sally Herbert Frankel, renowned economist; Ethel Aaron, founder of the famous Aarons, makers of *pletzlach*, *taiglach*, and other traditional Jewish confections; Tamar Smith, tireless Zionist and communal worker and humanitarian; Ronnie Bethlehem, a prominent businessman murdered by hijackers; Olga Kirsch, South African-born poet resident in Israel; Muriel Maisels, honorary life president of the World Zionist Organization of South Africa; and Rudolf Raphaely, a leader in South Africa's international trade, philanthropist, and Jewish communal worker.

MILTON SHAIN