South Africa

National Affairs

The year 2004 marked a decade since the emergence of a democratic South Africa, and the milestone triggered much reflection. Speaking for the Jewish community, Chief Rabbi Cyril Harris noted the nation’s major achievements, political stability and a sound economy, although there still remained much to be done. Jews, he pointed out, were able to practice their religion freely, and, despite its diminishing size, the community was probably more “Jewishly vibrant” than ever before.

The general election, held April 14, saw the consolidation of power by the African National Congress (ANC), led by President Thabo Mbeki, and its allies, the Communist Party (SACP) and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). Together, they won 69.69 percent of the national vote and control of all nine provinces. The Democratic Alliance (DA), led by Tony Leon, won 12.37 percent, and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), led by Mangosuthu Buthelezi, garnered 6.97 percent, mainly from the KwaZulu-Natal Province. But the coalition’s landslide victory was less than a resounding mandate. The number of voters was down, as nearly 7 million people who were registered stayed away from the polls and thus only 38 percent of registered voters chose the ANC. By virtue of heading the DA, the second largest party, Tony Leon, a Jew, was leader of the official opposition. Another Jew, Ronnie Kasrils, was appointed minister of intelligence in the new cabinet. There were two other Jewish members of Parliament, Ruth Rabinowitz (IFP) and Ben Turok (ANC).

The ANC-led government maintained its tight fiscal policies. Despite a substantially improved growth rate (approximately 3.5 percent) and the creation of new jobs, unemployment remained high. About 251,000 jobs were created between March and September, leaving unemployment at 4.1 million, which was 26.2 percent of the South African population. The strength of the South African currency, the rand, was of great concern to exporters.

South Africa championed multilateralism in the conduct of global af-
fairs and supported the reform of international institutions such as the UN and the World Trade Organization (WTO). It devoted substantial attention to regional foreign policy, especially the consolidation of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and initiatives to resolve regional conflicts. The crisis in Zimbabwe continued, however, despite President Mbeki's attempts to encourage that country's president, Robert Mugabe, to enter into negotiations with his political opponents. South Africa worked hard to keep Africa—and the southern hemisphere generally—on the global agenda, as formulated by the G8 industrialized nations.

Despite the governing coalition's strong parliamentary majority, tensions existed within it, especially over policy towards Zimbabwe. Another area of contention was the continuing wide disparity between whites and blacks in income, landholding, employment, education, and housing. There was a program called Black Economic Empowerment, a form of affirmative action, but its application and effectiveness remained unclear. The privatization of state-owned enterprises, to which the government was committed, proceeded slowly. Increasingly, President Mbeki tended to show impatience with his critics, including such antiapartheid veterans as Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu.

HIV/AIDS remained a major problem. About 5 million South Africans—20 percent of the adult population—were HIV positive, and an estimated half million had developed AIDS. Following a major row between the Ministry of Health and the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), a nongovernmental activist group that called for the use of antiretroviral drugs to combat AIDS, the government finally began to implement an antiretroviral program in 2004.

Even though a so-called National Crime Prevention program was in place, crime and lawlessness continued to plague the country. High-profile cases of corruption were increasingly featured in the newspapers, including the upcoming trial of Durban businessman Schabir Shaik, charged with fraud and with bribing the deputy president, Jacob Zuma. The case was scheduled for early 2005.

Warren Goldstein, the chief rabbi elect, delivered a prayer on behalf of the Jewish community at President Mbeki's inauguration. In an editorial entitled "Being Part of South Africa," the SA Jewish Report (Aug. 13) proclaimed that Jews "owe it to this country—and our own consciences—to give whatever we can to help all its peoples develop, and to participate fully in the building of a new South African nation in which we can be proud and feel at home." In November, a delegation of Jewish
leaders led by SAJBOD (South African Board of Jewish Deputies) national chairman Michael Bagraim had a fruitful and productive meeting with an ANC delegation led by President Mbeki. Bagraim reported that he was “very optimistic regarding the future of our relationship with the government.”

Israel and the Middle East

The South African government continued to pursue a pro-Palestinian line, although its official position was that Israel had a right to exist. The newly appointed ambassador to Israel, Major General Reverend Fumi Gqiba—a presidential appointee rather than a career diplomat—condemned suicide bombings at a luncheon in his honor organized by Jewish leaders, and said: “Israel is there to stay. Nobody will destroy it or wish it away. But the Palestinian state can also not be wished away.” Yet there were disquieting suggestions that not everyone in the governing party agreed. A July posting on the ANC’s Youth League Web site indicated fundamental hostility towards Israel, and stated that the very existence of the Jewish state was a “vexing question.”

Alon Liel, an Israeli who had served as ambassador to South Africa from 1991 to 1994, visited in April and expressed alarm at the deterioration in relations. He told the SA Jewish Report that there was no country “outside the Arab world that has done more to harm its relations with Israel than South Africa. The government has emptied its relations with Israel of any content. The Israeli embassy is almost completely isolated here.” Referring to South Africa’s attempt to mediate the Israel-Palestine dispute in 2003 by bypassing the Israeli government and dealing with former Israeli officials (see AJYB 2004, p. 477), Liel acknowledged President Mbeki’s good intentions. But he noted that the government’s use of the South African paradigm in the Middle East was flawed. “The nature of the conflict,” he said, “is completely different from the old conflict between black and white in South Africa, and the South African government doesn’t seem to understand.”

The next month, Daniel Pinhasi, the acting Israeli ambassador, denied that the decision to close Israel’s South African trade office in Johannesburg was a sign that Israeli-South African links were being downgraded. Pinhasi explained the closure as a budgetary move, like a similar decision to close the trade office in Argentina. But he did consider the step regrettable, since it would add to the negative atmosphere between the two countries.
In June, South Africa hosted a meeting of the UN's Committee on the
Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, in Cape
Town. This committee had been established in 1975, the year the UN
passed the "Zionism is racism" resolution, and this year's theme was
"Achieving the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People: The Key to
Peace in the Middle East." Recalling the way that the 2001 World
Conference Against Racism, in Durban, had been hijacked by extreme anti-
Israel and even anti-Semitic elements, the Jewish community sought to
ensure against a repetition, and South African authorities acted to alle-
viate its fears.

Addressing the committee, President Mbeki argued there would be no
solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict without the participation of the
Palestinian Authority and President Arafat, and therefore it was wrong
for Israel to prevent him from leaving his compound in Ramallah. Mbeki
believed Arafat was sincere in seeking a solution to the conflict, and con-
cluded, "We recognize the need for an independent sovereign state of
Palestine with its capital in Jerusalem. None of us can feel secure while
we see so many people dying all the time. It must be part of our prin-
cipal African agenda to make sure that we engage this issue." An editorial
in the SA Jewish Report (July 2) responded that a solution would "only
be achieved when the Palestinians themselves stop trying to destroy Is-
rael and focus their energies instead on building up their own society. This
does not mean giving up their legitimate desire to be free of the harsh Is-
raeli occupation over their lives and territory. This is achievable, even
though the road is difficult."

Toward the end of the year, South Africa took steps to repair relations
with Israel. In September, a senior delegation from Likud, Israel's ruling
party, met for two days in Pretoria with a high-powered South African
dlegation headed by President Mbeki. South Africa's Department of
Foreign Affairs described the sessions as "an integral part of ongoing ef-
forts by South Africa to assist both Israelis and Palestinians to find com-
mon ground with a view to developing a just, lasting and comprehensive
resolution to the current conflict." Pro-Palestinian groups condemned the
meetings, the Palestinian Solidarity Committee describing them as an
"outrage."

Ehud Olmert, the Israeli deputy prime minister and minister of trade
and industry, visited South Africa in October both in order to discuss the
Israeli-Palestinian conflict and to conclude an agreement on trade and
investment between South Africa and Israel. Olmert told South African
Jews that the "political gesture" their government made in meeting with him should reassure them, and the SA Jewish Report (Oct. 29) welcomed the apparent warming of relations. This visit too attracted Palestinian protests.

The Jewish community, meanwhile, maintained its close ties to the Jewish state. Jewish young people continued to attend programs in Israel, Zionist youth movements were strong, and the South Africa Israel Chamber of Commerce increased its presence. Dr. Efraim Zuroff, director of the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Israel, launched a very successful Israel United Appeal-United Communal Fund (IUA-UCF) campaign in March, and in June, the Women's Zionist Organization of South Africa sponsored a series of concerts in Cape Town and Johannesburg to demonstrate support for Israel.

Anti-Semitism

There was a marginal increase in reported anti-Semitic incidents during 2004. These came mostly in the form of verbal abuse and hate mail, threats, graffiti, and calls to talk shows, and there were reports of individual Jews being threatened. Swastikas were sometimes seen at sports matches involving Jewish day schools. The majority of these actions were attributed to members of the Muslim community. Hostility mounted particularly in the wake of Israel's killings of Ahmed Yassin and Abdel Aziz Rantisi (see above, p. 234–36). Sheikh Ebrahim Gabriels, president of the Muslim Judicial Council, was particularly vitriolic in his response to the death of Yassin, referring to Jews as "filthy people" who manipulated the gentiles through strategies spelled out in the Protocols of the Elders of Zion. In a case that drew great public outrage, a six-year-old child was dressed up as a suicide bomber at a Muslim rally in Pretoria.

In September, Voice of the Cape, a Muslim radio station, interviewed Sheikh Mogamat Colby, a South African studying at a madrasa (Islamic school) in Egypt. Colby claimed Jews murdered, raped, and killed mothers, children, and babies, and cited the Protocols of the Elders of Zion to show that Jews controlled "our land, all the means of the radio stations, the newspapers, the televisions—and this is how they have full control over the whole world." The SAJBOD lodged a complaint with the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA). Voice of the Cape posted an apology, but this was not satisfactory to the SAJBOD, which resolved to pursue the matter further.
Holocaust-Related Matters

Holocaust denial continued to be peddled by diverse extremist types. Far-right newspapers such as Die Afrikaner often contained such material, as did the Scribe, an organ of the Pretoria-based Radio 584, a Muslim station.

The Jewish community fought Holocaust denial in the courts, as the SAJBOD’s ongoing legal battle with Radio 786, a Muslim station run by the Islamic Unity Council (IUC), continued. This affair began in 1998, when the station aired an interview with Yaqub Zaki, a historian at the Muslim Institute in London, in which he denied that Jews had been gassed during the Holocaust and claimed that only about one million Jews had died then, from infectious diseases. The SAJBOD complained to ICASA that the interview violated the code of conduct for broadcasting services, which barred offensive material that was likely to harm relations between sections of the population. In April 2001, the Johannesburg High Court ruled against the SAJBOD on a technicality (see AJYB 2002, pp. 511–12). In November 2002, Advocate Roland Sutherland, chairman of the Broadcasting Complaints Commission, ruled in favor of the station and dismissed the SAJBOD complaint (see AJYB 2004, pp. 480–81).

In March 2004, the SAJBOD applied for a hearing to have Sutherland’s decision overturned. Mervyn Smith, a past president of the SAJBOD and a member of the subcommittee handling the matter, told the SA Jewish Report (Mar. 5) that this was “a huge case for the country and one of the biggest in the history of South African Jewry in terms of freedom of speech. When judgment is eventually given it will be a definitive judgment both in this country and abroad on hate speech and what is permissible.” This time the Johannesburg High Court upheld the SAJBOD application, directing ICASA to convene a formal hearing on the SAJBOD’s complaint and the IUC to pay the SAJBOD’s costs. The IUC’s request for leave to appeal against the ruling for a formal hearing was dismissed.

Dr. Ze’ev Mankowitz delivered the fifth Ernest and Renee Samson Anniversary Lecture, “From Holocaust to Homeland: Between History and Memory,” at the Cape Town Holocaust Center in September. The center also prepared curricular materials for high schools on the subject of the Holocaust. The project, called “The Holocaust: Lessons for Humanity,” was sponsored by Archbishop Emeritus Tutu, a patron of the center.
**JEWISH COMMUNITY**

**Demography**

Further analysis of the 2001 national census indicated a Jewish population of about 72,000 amid a total of 44,819,777 South Africans. It showed that 95 percent of the country’s Jews lived in Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban, and Pretoria, and, within these cities, were highly concentrated in certain suburbs.

According to recent statistics drawn from the Israel United Appeal-United Communal Fund (IUA-UCF), Jewish emigration from South Africa had slowed significantly. Only 200 contributors to the fund emigrated in 2003, the lowest figure in years, and the Cape Town community’s emigration rate dropped by half. Yehuda Kay, national executive director of the SAJBOD, told the *SA Jewish Report* (June 25) that the figures gave cause for optimism about the community’s stability, but cautioned that it “was too soon to assess their long-term significance.”

Norman Bernhard, rabbi emeritus of the Oxford Synagogue in Johannesburg, suggested the establishment of a Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society of South Africa, which would identify South African Jews who were having difficulties abroad and encourage them to return and replenish South African Jewry.

**Communal Affairs**

Fissures within the Jewish community came to the surface several times during the year. In March, Jewish Voices of South Africa, launched in 2002 by Jews who felt that the established communal structure was not committed to democratic values, held its annual general meeting. The chairman, Ivor Chipkin, spoke of a “fundamental shift” he thought was taking place within South African Jewry, as many Jews who did not feel represented by the dominant Orthodox leadership sought space for a more progressive approach. In an editorial comment under the title “Jewish Alternatives,” the *SA Jewish Report* (Mar. 12) noted that the festival of Passover and the tenth anniversary of South Africa’s democracy marked “a special opportunity to attempt to heal one of the saddest rifts in the community — between the mainstream Jewish community and left-wing Jews who became activists during the antiapartheid struggle.”

The theme of the Cape Council centenary in August was “Living as Jews, South Africans, and Zionists.” Speaker after speaker — most no-
tably Ebrahim Rasool, the Cape premier—spoke out against fundamentalism, whether Christian, Jewish or Muslim. The keynote speaker, Rabbi David Rosen, director of international interreligious affairs for the American Jewish Committee, cautioned particularly against the fundamentalism of "Jewish insularity," often accompanied by what he called "delegitimization of those outside that group, in order to reinforce a sense of self-righteousness, thus leading to internal disunity and strife and doing more harm than good to the community at large." On the second day of the gathering, Jewish AIDS activist Nathan Geffen criticized the community's "unconditional support" for Israel and its failure to condemn Israel's "human rights abuses" against Palestinians. But Mervyn Smith, former national president of the SAJBOD, responded that the SAJBOD could not publicly criticize the government of Israel since that would be "highly destructive" to the fabric of Israel-Diaspora relations.

Following the conference, an important controversy about Jewish political behavior took place in the columns of the *SA Jewish Report* (Sept. 3, 10). Joel Pollak, a speechwriter for DA leader Tony Leon, took the Cape Council to task for praising Cape premier Rasool's remarks against fundamentalism while overlooking his words at a rally following Israel's assassination of Ahmed Yassin. "Rasool," Pollak noted, "described Yassin as 'one of the greatest inspirations' and prayed that Palestinians 'stand up to these enemies and never succumb, that they fight, and they fight under a flag of Islam.'" Furthermore, according to Pollak, Rasool did not distance himself from blatantly anti-Semitic statements made by others on that occasion, including some that cited the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. But the national chairman of the SAJBOD, Michael Bagraim, responded that the SAJBOD was not a political party but a "Jewish lobby organization whose purpose is to build relationships with government rather than to catch votes through point scoring or to indulge in publicity seeking."

South Africa's adoption of the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act was acclaimed in the Jewish community for its protection of religious liberty and outlawing of hate speech. But Judge Ralph Zulman warned Jewish leaders that the law could have unexpected and uncomfortable implications for the country's Jews. It might, for example, interfere with existing admissions policies at Jewish institutions, since non-Jews seeking entrance to Jewish schools or old-age homes would be able to lodge complaints of discriminatory treatment if not admitted. Zulman suggested that Jewish institutions prepare a joint strategy on this matter.
A new coordinating council for the Jewish community of East London was launched in November. It comprised representatives of all East London's Jewish organizations, including the SAJBOD, hevra kadishah (burial society), Union of Jewish Women, Women's Zionist League, and the two congregations, one Orthodox and the other Progressive.

A number of communal celebrations punctuated the year. The United Institutions of Oudtshoorn celebrated its 120th anniversary. Oudtshoorn, referred to in the late nineteenth century as “the Jerusalem of Africa,” was known for its ostrich feather industry, in which Jews were prominent. The Piketberg Jewish community, the Hebrew Order of David, and the Cape Council of the SAJBOD celebrated their centenaries.

South African Jewish leaders continued to build bridges to the wider population and to assist the disadvantaged. Habonim Dror provided financial aid and established a joint project with the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) to supply antiretroviral treatment for HIV-positive persons. Tikkon ran a wide variety of programs promoting life skills, peer counseling, AIDS education, academic support for high-school students, alternatives to violence, and poverty relief. The Union of Jewish Women (UJW) joined up with a Jewish professional fund-raiser and a Muslim couple to initiate a program to fund foster care for abandoned children. The South African Union of Temple Sisterhoods continued its ongoing programs: feeding 3,000 children daily, and assisting the sick, aged, single mothers, and families in need of financial and moral support. The Jewish National Fund supported the Walter Sisulu Environmental Center in Mamelodi, near Pretoria. Herzlia-Weizmann Primary School provided books to Ntwasahlobo Primary School in Khayelitsha, located outside Cape Town.

Notwithstanding such charitable endeavors, Chief Rabbi Harris took the community to task for not sufficiently supporting them. He said, “There’s an unfortunate reluctance, a sort of suspicion about interacting with the black majority—particularly on the part of the older generation—which is absurd. We’re ten years down the line in democracy, our Board of Deputies has a very praiseworthy Proudly Jewish South African campaign and yet there’s a kind of resentment.” And Harris went on, “We’re not saying that Jewish causes should take a back seat—but if you give 100 percent of your tzedakah to Jewish charities, you are doing something which is un-Jewish, because we have a reputation for always having cared for others outside our community.”

A special Freedom Seder was held at Liliesleaf Farm, Rivonia, once the headquarters of Umkonto we Sizwe, the armed wing of the ANC.
Liliesleaf Farm was the site of the famous Rivonia raid that led to the imprisonment of Nelson Mandela and others, including prominent Jews.

In December, Jewish community leaders took part in the National Consultative Conference of the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious, and Linguistic Communities (CRL) in Durban. The CRL was launched in 2003 “to promote and develop peace, friendship, humanity, and national unity among cultural, religious, and linguistic communities.”

Religion

Rabbi Warren Goldstein vacated his pulpit in Glenhazel, Johannesburg, to take up his position as chief rabbi elect in February. He was a fourth-generation South African with considerable experience in intergroup work, having coauthored, with Dumani Mandela, Africa Soul Talk, a dialogue on the values that should permeate the new South Africa. Goldstein’s doctoral thesis, “Remoralizing Legal Systems: Insights from Jewish Law,” dealt with the contemporary relevance of Jewish law. There was some criticism of the procedure through which his appointment was secured, but none about his qualifications. In an interview with David Saks, senior researcher at the SAJBOD (SA Jewish Report, Feb. 13), Goldstein said that it was important for Jews to be loyal South Africans and to take pride in South Africa’s new democracy. Expressing optimism about the Jewish future in the country, he identified three priorities: to ensure the community’s continuity and health; to make a positive impact on South Africa; and to benefit the State of Israel. Gala receptions were held in Johannesburg and Cape Town in honor of the outgoing chief rabbi, Cyril Harris. In Cape Town, communal leader Elliot Osrin paid tribute to Rabbi Harris, noting that he had “given our community a sense of dignity, a sense of pride and above all, a sense of direction.”

The Johannesburg Bet Din (religious court) was involved in a major legal wrangle after it placed a Jewish man in herem (excommunication) for, among other things, refusing to comply with its ruling that he pay maintenance to his former wife. Although the man had originally agreed with the former wife to abide by the Bet Din decision, he subsequently applied to the High Court to set that ruling aside. The annual rabbinical conference, held in Durban, pledged full support to the Bet Din. Justice Frans Malan of the High Court found in favor of the Bet Din, describing herem as a legitimate “expression of communal disdain” directed at a person whose conduct was “not in full compliance with the ethical dic-
tates of Jewish society.” In light of the publicity that the case engendered, the Union of Orthodox Synagogues hosted a special breakfast for lawyers to apprise them of the role of the Bet Din.

Johannesburg continued to see a mushrooming of small Orthodox synagogues—six separate Chabad branches, four of Ohr Someach, and various religious Zionist congregations—and the debate on their possible impact accelerated. While some considered them a sign of religious vibrancy, others saw evidence of fragmentation. Most Johannesburg rabbis supported the phenomenon, as did Chief Rabbi Harris, who said he had no objection so long as these bodies were financially and spiritually viable. Harris suggested that the larger synagogues meet the demand for more intimate services by organizing such groups on their own premises to run parallel to the main service, but others felt that the motivation for the small synagogues had less to do with intimacy than with a desire to pray in the company of others with a similar level of observance.

In other religious news, the Green and Sea Point Hebrew Congregation celebrated its 70th anniversary, and bid farewell to Rabbi Dr. E. J. Steinhorn; the Claremont Hebrew Congregation, Cape Town, celebrated its centenary; Rabbi Daniel Sackstein was inducted as rabbi of the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation, the mother institution of South African Jewry; and Phina Hoberman was appointed to the Board of Directors of Women of Reform Judaism at its 44th assembly, held in Minneapolis.

**Culture**

Two noteworthy exhibitions at the South African Jewish Museum during 2004 were “Studio Encounter: Portraits by Irma Stern,” and “Hidden Treasures of Japanese Art: The Isaac Kaplan Collection.” An Israeli film festival was held in Cape Town, Johannesburg, and Pretoria.

The Arts and Cultural Trust gave its lifetime achievement award to Sylvia Glasser, the initiator of Moving Into Dance Mophatong, a multiracial dance group founded in 1978.

Publications of Jewish interest included *Judaism: A Growing Tradition* by Rabbi Dr. David Sherman; *Ali: The Life of Ali Bacher* an autobiography by the former national cricket captain and cricket administrator; *The Moon Can Wait*, a biography of the former Zimbabwe politician Abe Abrahamson, by Paul Clingman; *The Free Diary of Albie Sachs*, an autobiographical work by the human-rights activist and constitutional court judge; *Mulik the Zulik* by Holocaust survivor Shmuel Keren-Krol; *South African Jewish Board of Deputies (Cape Council, 1904–2004)*, edited by

**Personalia**

Chief Rabbi Cyril Harris was given a special award by Keren Hayesod in Israel; veteran human-rights activist Helen Suzman was honored by the Jewish National Fund; Edna Freinkel received the Bronze Order of the Counselor of the Baobab from President Mbeki, for exceptional service to education; Alec Rogoff, doyen of the Durban Jewish community, was awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of Natal for his humanitarian contributions to it; and Mervyn Smith, past president of the SAJBOD, earned the Lexus Lifetime Achiever Award for his communal service. Marlene Bethlehem, past president of the SAJBOD, was appointed deputy chairperson of the Commission for the Protection of the Rights and Culture of Religious and Linguistic Communities.

Among prominent South African Jews who died in 2004 were Hal Shaper, lyricist and composer; Norman Sandier, educator; Louis Babrow, international rugby player; Lionel Abrahams, poet and writer; Ethel de Keyser, antiapartheid activist; Rolfe Futerman, pioneer of Israeli air power; Raymond Tucker, antiapartheid activist and human-rights lawyer; Franz Auerbach, educator, human-rights activist, and communal leader; Ray Alexander, antiapartheid activist and trade unionist; and Aaron “Okey” Geffin, international rugby player.

*Milton Shain*