

# AUSTRALIAN JEWISH QUARTERLY

MAGAZINE OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIAN JEWRY

## TRAGEDY IN UKRAINE

The war in the context  
of Jewish history

MEET THE 2022  
COHORT OF THE ECAJ  
JEWISH ADVOCACY &  
LEADERSHIP CORPS

AMNESTY AND BDS  
The hypocrisy of  
anti-Israel activism

# GET INVOLVED

## CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

The Australian Jewish Quarterly is accepting submissions on all subjects relating to Australian politics, the Jewish world or the Jewish state. Submissions or brief pitches can be sent to the editor at [aryvchin@ecaj.org.au](mailto:aryvchin@ecaj.org.au). Please include the word "Submission" in the subject line.

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# Antisemitism

## **SEE IT?**

## **EXPERIENCE IT?**

## **REPORT IT.**

### **WHY REPORT IT?**

As the elected representative national body of the Australian Jewish community, the Executive Council of Australian Jewry (ECAJ), liaises with government, the media and law enforcement to help keep our community safe.

It is vital therefore that we have accurate data on antisemitic incidents, whether vandalism of property, verbal abuse, online threats, leaflets or posters, or acts of violence.

### **WHERE TO REPORT IT?**

Incidents of antisemitism occurring in Australia can be reported directly to Julie Nathan, the ECAJ Research Director, and author of the annual Report on Antisemitism in Australia.

Report antisemitism to: [julie@ecaj.org.au](mailto:julie@ecaj.org.au)



Executive Council  
of Australian Jewry Inc.

# THE RISE OF ZELENSKY AND THE TRAGIC DESTRUCTION OF UKRAINE

WORDS ALEX RYVCHIN

I've been asked to speak about the situation in Ukraine drawing on my own connection to that place both personally and professionally. I'm not going to focus on the wider politics and tactics of this war, as I'm sure we're all closely following daily developments. I want to talk about the story of the Jewish people in that land and to examine this war through our unique perspective and history.

To tell you about my own history there, I was born in Kyiv and my family home prior to our emigration as refugees and refuseniks in 1987, was located a block from the site of the largest single massacre of the Holocaust, the Babi Yar ravine.

My father is from the eastern, predominantly Russian-speaking parts of the country, a small town called Krasnograd just outside Kharkov, which may or may not still exist in light of the Russian offensive.

Kharkiv is where my father studied before moving to Kyiv and my dad hears from his old college buddies, that the city is now a charred hellscape

and its people, who were hardly known for their Ukrainian nationalism are now filled with a deep loathing towards Russia for what has been inflicted on them.

My remaining relatives in Kyiv are experiencing food shortages, difficulty obtaining medicine, curfews, and the terror of daily bombardments.

The roughly 20,000 Jews in Australia who identify as Russian Jews, Soviet Jews, or Russian-speaking Jews, are in most cases not Russian at all, and may have never set foot in Russia.

Many, like my family are from cities and towns in Ukraine, mostly from the Black Sea city of Odessa. Many more are from cities like Minsk and Gomel, in Belarus. But in order to be understood in times before people could point out Ukraine or Belarus or Moldova on a map, and because we all emigrated when 15 republics, each with their own language and culture, were brutally forged into a single Soviet Union, we came to be known simply as Russian Jews.

Since joining the ECAJ back in 2013, aside from advocating for the community to the public, it has been a mission of mine to advocate within the community about what happened to the Jews of Ukraine and the wider Soviet Union during the Holocaust.

There was a prevailing view that I encountered that the Holocaust began with Kristallnacht and ended at Auschwitz.

But the systematic annihilation of the Soviet Jews which commenced months before the creation of gas chambers or the formal adoption of the Final Solution at Wannsee in January 1942, the existence of some 2,000 killing fields that disfigure Ukraine, the scale of the killing, the levels of local collaboration and the complete extermination of whole communities leaving no survivors or witnesses, remained largely unknown.

I felt that for there to be a complete integration of the Russian-speaking Jews into our wider Jewish community there had to be an understanding of that unique story and experience.



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*The ECAJ acknowledges and thanks these organisations for their generous support of our work*

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I take some satisfaction in that a monument to the Babi Yar victims was erected in Bondi in 2014, which Malcolm Turnbull and Tanya Plibersek unveiled, and that through a collective communal effort our community now has a more complete understanding of the Holocaust and our people's history.

For me, it was also deeply personal. I was raised on stories from that place. My mother recalls that when the television tower was constructed on the site of the Babi Yar massacre, the same tower that was all over the media when it was struck by Russian fire just a week ago, human bones were strewn all over the adjoining footpaths. That callous disregard for history, the crushing of all sentiment and memory, marked the Communist experience and our bitter association with that world.

Every Soviet Jew living in Australia has experienced some variation of these stories. Their own local killing field. Vulgar street antisemitism. Exclusion from jobs or study because of their Jewishness. And this has shaped how many of us have experienced and viewed this war.

There is a complexity here. You see, when Israel is in peril, there is no ambiguity, no question as to sides. But for families like mine who lived in Ukraine for as many generations as we can trace, who are linguistically and culturally linked to that place, whose families fell in battle defending those lands from Nazi invaders, whose relatives ended up in forest pits and ravines, often at the hands of their Ukrainian neighbours, it has produced feelings and thoughts that are in many ways difficult to place.

My initial reaction to the war and I know many Ukrainian Jews felt the same way, was of a great dread for what might lie ahead. Every single war, revolution, political or economic upheaval in that place has reliably resulted in mass slaughter of the Jews. This rise of Ukrainian national feeling as war became imminent caused fear among every Jew that our people



would be trapped between the clash of Russian and Ukrainian nationalisms. That the collapse of order would lead to devastation targeting our communities. But thankfully so far that hasn't yet come to pass.

Once those initial fears passed, we began to fully comprehend the scale of the tragedy and the outrage that was being inflicted on the Ukrainian people.

And while our people have undeniably suffered at the hands of Ukrainian nationalism, no one can deny that the Ukrainians themselves have experienced unimaginable loss and hardship, often through policies directed from the Kremlin.

I'm thinking in particular of what is known as Stalin's manmade famine when in the early 1930s in a policy aimed at breaking the class of people the government deemed wealthier peasants or "kulaks", impossible production quotas were imposed on Ukraine and everything the peasants produced was confiscated, resulting in a famine that killed at least 5 million Ukrainians in what is one of the great crimes of the 20th century. Like this war, it was totally needless.

Following the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, many Ukrainians greeted the Germans as liberators from Soviet tyranny. Some would volunteer for special assignments as camp guards, Trawniki men they were called, and they were usually the most sadistic and brutal of the guards.

But the Germans saw the Ukrainians as a people to be exploited, deporting millions to Germany as slave labour and drawing up plans to plunder the rich natural resources of Ukraine and to repopulate it with ethnic Germans. Some 6 million Ukrainians died during the War, the majority fighting in the Red Army.

Seeing the country face fresh invasion, seeing maps of the encirclement of Kyiv once again, troop convoys bound for Odessa, the deaths of civilians all under the contrived pretext that the invaders are liberators from Nazism and tyranny, is just unfathomable. When I watch the clips of Ukrainian civilians confronting Russian soldiers, of the coast guard off Crimea telling the Russian warship where to go, both sides speaking in perfect Russian, it very much has the feel of a civil war.

The countries each have their own language, culture, national traditions, but they are also kinsmen. There is no natural animosity between Ukrainians and Russians. The borders shifted so many times that millions of ethnic Russians live in Ukraine. Many Ukrainians have family in Russia. The eastern parts of the country have always been predominantly Russian-speaking.

This isn't the Arab-Israeli conflict where the parties are separated by entrenched ethnic, religious and national differences and there is a cycle of war and hostility.

This war feels wholly unnatural, unnecessary which makes the bloodshed particularly unforgivable. Another remarkable feature of this war is of course the rise of Zelensky as a global figure, a symbol of resistance and valour unseen since Golda Meir and Churchill. His background as an actor makes him highly telegenic, he comes up with awesome catchphrases, that will adorn t-shirts and social media for years, "I need

ammo, not a ride," he responded when offered evacuation by the Americans. What is truly extraordinary when viewed in the context of Ukrainian history is that this unifier, this great Ukrainian leader, this patriot is a Jew. Many have said that he downplays his Jewishness. But anyone who understands the culture and identities of that region knows that you can't downplay your Jewishness. Your name, your face, your documents, these days the "personal life" section of Wikipedia, out you as a Jew.

Everyone in Ukraine knows that Zelensky is a Jew, certainly his political rivals ensured the alleviation of any doubt, but it hasn't hurt him and as hell descended on the country, it hasn't really mattered. And he has never sought to deny it. When Zelensky says he came from an "ordinary Soviet Jewish family," he doesn't downplay his Jewishness, he aligns himself with every one of the Jews who either emigrated in the years before the collapse of the Soviet Union or remained.

The rise of Zelensky is even more remarkable when he is viewed alongside other Ukrainian national figures.

Prior to this war, the great nationalist hero of Ukraine was Stepan Bandera. Bandera led a division of the ultra-nationalist Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) during the Second World War.

For Bandera, the goal was always Ukrainian independence which made him widely admired then and to this day.

Just days after the Nazis had driven out the Red Army, Bandera declared an independent Ukraine and pledged to cooperate with Nazi Germany. His men joined the German Einsatzgruppen in massacring Jews throughout the Ukraine, providing invaluable local knowledge in identifying Jewish communities and exposing their hiding places. They were also present at Babi Yar.

The very name "Bandera" has even entered the lexicon of Ukrainian Jews



to denote an antisemitic thug of the most staunch and unsparing variety.

Bandera badly misjudged Hitler's intentions to enslave all 'inferior races' once they had outlived their usefulness. He was promptly arrested and interned in Germany for proclaiming Ukrainian independence. His two brothers were sent to Auschwitz where they are believed to have been murdered by Polish inmates, likely in retribution for massacres of ethnic Poles by Bandera's forces.

Bandera was only released towards the end of the war when the Germans thought he could be enlisted to lead a rear-guard anti-Soviet partisan campaign to reverse the march of the Red Army. For Bandera and his followers, Ukrainian nationalism and the Ukrainian independence movement meant an ethnically pure Ukraine which made the Jews and Poles living within its territories fit for extermination. The other great hero of the Ukrainian national story was Bogdan Chmelnytsky who led a Cossack rebellion in the 17th century and achieved Ukrainian independence for a period.

His crimes against the Jews are one of the most traumatic episodes in Jewish history. It is not only the number of Jews massacred, which would be in the hundreds of thousands, but the sadism, torture, bloodlust that accompanied it.

In my book on Zionism, I extract some of the historical accounts of what Chmelnytsky's Cossacks did to our people and I've received several requests to remove it from the book as it is so graphic and painful to read. I accept that it is, but I believe this is a side of Ukrainian and Jewish history that needs to be told and it gives you an idea of what we're dealing with.

There is a city in Ukraine named after Chmelnytsky, banknotes carry the images of him and Bandera, an enormous statue of Chmelnytsky on horseback adorns the centre of Kyiv. If we want to talk about toppling

statues of dubious historical figures, Chemnitski should be the first to fall and I'd gladly give it the first shove. A main street in Kyiv, Moscow boulevard was renamed Bandera Boulevard a few years ago and the former President Yushenko bestowed the highest posthumous honour upon Bandera.

The fact that these two men slaughtered Jewish civilians hardly diminished their greatness. At best, it was justified as an act of necessity to achieve political transformation, at worst it is celebrated.

This makes it all the more extraordinary that today the symbol of Ukrainian national pride, the figurehead of its independence, is a Jew. The words seem so ridiculous to me I struggle to utter them but it's true.

And this I believe speaks to a new reality in Ukraine. A new attitude towards our people. Yes vestiges of that dark ultra-nationalism remain but they don't dominate.

A few years ago, I had lunch with the Israeli writer Tuvia Teneboim. Tuvia does gonzo journalism where he goes undercover usually posing as a German reporter to investigate real attitudes towards Israel and the Jews. He has uncovered some shocking things but he told me over that lunch that try as he might, in all his travels through Ukraine, he couldn't find a single instance of antisemitism, no one said anything remotely antisemitic no matter how much he prodded them to do so.

I believe this is a victory of Zionism. You see, many of the early Zionist writers came of age in Ukraine, particularly Odessa, notably Lillienblum and Leon Pinsker.

Pinsker believed that without a state, the Jews lived everywhere but were never seen to be in the right place. He spoke of the Jews being as a ghost-like apparition of a living corpse. Who were we as a people? Where did we belong? Could we be

converted, assimilated? Could we be part of national movements or were we a stubborn impediment? These questions vexed all other peoples and contributed to their hatred of us.

The historian Simon Sebag Montefiore wrote that Hitler hated the Jews because we were too much of a race, while Stalin was annoyed by the Jews because we weren't enough of one. When people struggle to place something, to understand the nature of something they are frequently driven to rage by it.

Pinsker believed that once we attained our own state, it would answer this question of who we are and where we come from, and we would be accepted as equals.

In the West, with its Amnesty reports and BDS lies this hasn't fully happened yet, but in Ukraine where people have no appetite for such nonsense, I believe we're seeing a new respect for our people, an acceptance, even an admiration.

We're seeing the proof of Pinsker's thesis on auto-emancipation and a reconciliation, a comradeship between Jewish and Ukrainian national identity and pride.

I've spoken about the Jewish experience in Ukraine and how that has shaped our view of this tragic war. The Jews of Ukraine are caught up in this war like everyone else there. At the heart of this war we find a sovereign, independent nation that has fought for its independence for 700 years, now being slowly decapitated. Cities lie in ruins, millions are now refugees, tens of thousands are dead because of a vast and needless crime.

*Text of speech delivered at a United Israel Appeal event on March 15*

# JAL CORPS 2022 COHORT

In 2021 the ECAJ launched its flagship Jewish Advocacy and Leadership Corps bringing together 42 outstanding young professionals with diverse backgrounds from Jewish communities across the country. 2021 was an eventful and challenging year that provided various opportunities for JAL Corps members. They took part in briefings by international and national senior officials, participated in meetings with federal MPs discussing the importance of the adoption of the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism, received one on one mentorship from senior communal leaders and published op-eds.

This year we are excited to welcome 28 new members of the 2022 cohort, 14 men and 14 women including members from NSW, VIC, QLD and welcoming New Zealand to the program. With borders opening we have an ambitious program including not only state based face-to-face sessions and a national conference for the end of the year, but also leading a mission to Israel of Australian influencers from different fields. The new and existing members of JAL Corps will also take part in other ECAJ led initiatives, such as a Creative task force to establish relationships within the Indigenous and Arts and Culture communities, enhancing cooperation with individuals and groups to combat BDS and antisemitism.

We have the pleasure of introducing the Jewish Advocacy and Leadership Corps of 2022!

NEW  
SOUTH  
WALES



**REBECCA DI VEROLI**

Born and raised in Sydney, Rebecca considers herself to be a proud Jewish woman, mother and Zionist. Rebecca is a preschool teacher at Emanuel Woollahra, where she shares her passion for Judaism and educating future generations. With a sound knowledge of the history of the Jewish people and Israel, she feels confident in engaging in discussions to combat antisemitism and to advocate for the Jewish people and Israel. She seeks to further deepen her knowledge and put this into action to make a difference and be a voice for the Jewish people.



**CATHERINE FISHER**

Catherine is passionate about fostering a vibrant and inclusive Jewish community. She serves as a board member of North Shore Temple Emanuel since 2020 and was marketing co-chair for Limmud Oz and NZ Online 2020. She is currently a Policy Officer with the NSW Department of Education, holds a PhD in history from ANU and recently published her first book 'Sound Citizens: Australian Women Broadcasters Claim Their Voice, 1923-1956!' (ANU Press, 2021).



**ALISSA FOSTER**

Alissa is an active and engaged young adult leader and a strong and respected advocate for the Australian Jewish Community. She is the great-granddaughter of four Holocaust survivors, a legacy which shapes her passion for advocacy. She is completing a Bachelor of Media and a Bachelor of Arts (Politics and International Relations). In addition, Alissa serves as the Vice President of AUJS and the Engagement Officer for Youth HEAR as well as working at the BJE as the Youth Engagement Officer.



**ROBERT GREGORY**

After graduating from Bond University in Queensland with a Bachelor of Laws (Hons), Robert returned to his birth city, Sydney, working in various roles, most recently in legal education. Robert also studied at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem while spending a year in Israel. He is passionate about Zionism, Australian politics, and international affairs, as well as advocating on behalf of the Australian Jewish community and helping to foster an understanding of the challenges Israel faces. Robert serves on the Public Affairs committee of the NSW JBD.



**JEMMA LOPIS**

Jemma has always had a passion for people, heritage and language and a particular interest in Hebrew and Jewish Studies as well as the development and promotion of Sephardi & Mizrahi Jewish educational programs. She holds a BA in Hebrew and MTeach in Hebrew and Judaic Studies from USyd. She spent a semester at the Hebrew University, and her visits to Israel expanded her knowledge and understanding of pertinent issues of foreign policy and leadership. Jemma teaches Hebrew at Emanuel School and previously served as Executive Director and Head of Jewish Studies at the BPJE. As part of The Observership Program, she was on the Board of B'nai B'rith Retirement Village.



**DAVID SANDLER**

David moved to Australia from London in 2012. After holding senior roles at Rabobank and Macquarie Bank, David now leads the treasury team at Bank of America in Sydney, as the Treasurer for all the Australian entities. His engagement in the Jewish community included serving as the inaugural president of Community Kashrut following the 2014/15 Kashrut Commission of Inquiry. Through The Observership Program he completed training with The Australian Institute of Company Directors and joined the Board and sub-committees at The Montefiore. David also sits on the board of one of the Jewish day schools in Sydney.



**SHAYNA SLOTAR**

Shayna has been involved in the Jewish community for over 12 years both in Perth & Sydney. She has used her experience in the event management and logistics world to help out organisations like UIA Young Leadership, J connect and Maccabi. Currently the chair of Maccabi mixed netball, Shayna strives to connect young adults in the community through sport. Shayna was recently awarded as winner of the Australian Changemaker awards 2021 and continues to volunteer as part of the changemakers to recognise other young adult volunteers in the community.



**BEN TEEGER**

Ben is currently working as an in-house lawyer and company secretary at Samsung Electronics but will be joining Rheem as General Counsel later this month. He was previously an IP, media and tech solicitor at Ashurst. During his studies Ben worked as the Student Liaison Officer for the Australian Friends of the Hebrew University and observed on the board of the NSW JBD as part of The Observership Program. He has a keen interest in history, genealogy and international relations and has written theses on Holocaust denial focusing on Australian and American legal perspectives. He is a graduate of the Generation to Generation course of the Sydney Jewish Museum and was the Treasurer of AUJS (UNSW).



**ANTHONY TOCKAR**

Anthony is a data scientist and a director of Verge Labs and holds an MS in Analytics from Northwestern University. His research on data privacy hit the headlines in San Francisco, after which he returned to Sydney and co-founded the Minerva Collective, a data for good charity, as well as several data and AI meetup groups. A sought-after public speaker and thought leader in AI and machine learning, Anthony cares deeply about using his expertise to help people. He is a passionate karate champion and a senior instructor at North Bondi Dojo, as well as a member of the UIA NSW Executive. Anthony is a past participant of The Observership Program.



**JODI VELIK**

An Operations Consultant and Transformation Analyst at Accenture, Jodi recently completed degrees in Commerce and Information Systems at UNSW. Jodi has always been a passionate participant in a wide range of Jewish Community organisations and a committed volunteer in the disability space. She is also involved in various international leadership courses and has a deep appreciation for the importance of building a strong, vibrant generation of future leaders in Australia.



**OLEG VORNIK**

Oleg was born in Russia, moved to NZ as a teen, then to Sydney in his early 20s. Historically on the fringes of the Jewish community, Oleg has a strong sense of Jewish identity and is constantly looking for ways to get more involved. He is currently the CEO of DroneShield, an ASX publicly listed technology business with a defence and government focus, having grown the business from a concept to a global leader in its sector in 120 countries. His early career in banking included roles with ABN AMRO, Deutsche Bank, Brookfield and Royal Bank of Canada. Oleg is also a past participant of The Observership Program.

## NEW ZEALAND



### **Yael GEZENTSVEY**

Venezuelan born, Eastern European, Jewish and a Kiwi arts practitioner from Wellington NZ, Yael is also a business entrepreneur, actor, writer, voice-over artist, producer, publicist and mother of two. She is passionate about storytelling, people and authenticity, and looks to explore identity and the Jewish collective memory through her work. Yael is an active volunteer in the Wellington Jewish Community and on the Wellington Council of Jewish Women.

## QUEENSLAND



**ALEXANDER KAZOVSKY**

Alexander is a driven and motivated young legal and finance professional with an affinity for social enterprise and community development. After working in international aid and foreign development, he is currently a contracts manager at Accenture's Public Service practice. He has a strong interest in the power of technology and its ability to improve people's lives, and aspires to start a social impact investment fund, alleviating disadvantages and promoting greater economic participation. Alex strongly believes it is imperative for the young professionals of our generation to continue to develop their knowledge and understanding of not only of Jewry, but themselves as the young leaders of today's society.



**JILLIAN MOLLOY**

Growing up in Brisbane, Jillian truly had very little idea that there was any kind of established Jewish community there. While studying at ANU in Canberra, she worked closely with AUJS. Throughout her time in student politics, Jillian was a vocal advocate for Jewish issues and a keen advocate for the State of Israel. In 2017 she took part in AIJAC's Rambam program, which made her want to work hard to advocate for Israel and the Jewish people. Since relocating back to Brisbane, Jillian has become more involved in Jewish life, working with the QJBD to help assist the community's political relationships. Jillian is currently working with the Queensland Government and studying for a Master of Security and Strategic Studies at Macquarie University. This has given her the ability to navigate government processes, conduct effective advocacy, and establish key networks. Jill also has qualifications from the Australian Institute of Company Directors and has undertaken studies in Modern Hebrew.

## VICTORIA



**DAVID CYNGLER**

David is a Project Manager and Business Analyst at a City Council in Melbourne working on all stages of the project lifecycle from feasibility studies to implementation. He holds an MA in Project Management from Monash University. David has an interest in bringing the Jewish community back together and connecting people of different groups that are not necessarily like-minded. He is currently working on a project with Maccabi Australia in Melbourne to reconnect Jewish people aged 18-35 through sport and other activities.



**JOSHUA DANIELS**

Born in Toronto, Canada, Joshua moved to Melbourne when he was 15, integrating himself into the Jewish community through the King David School, Maccabi, and volunteering as a leader with Netzer Australia. Joshua studied paramedicine at Monash University and currently works at The King David School in Sport/Physical Education. He engages with kids in a variety of sports and educates them not only on technique, skills and teamwork, but also through informal education and summer camps.



**GABRIELLA DAVIS**

Gabriella is a Melbourne Jewish educator. She recently graduated with a Bachelor of Arts and Education (Hon) from Monash University, with a focus on Music and Jewish Studies and is working as an Integration Aide at Mount Scopus. Previously Gabriella has worked for B'nai B'rith and NCJWA and has served in various leadership positions in AUJS, including Leadership & Development Officer, Vice President and Board Director. She was also a Board Member at the World Union of Jewish Students. Gabriella is particularly passionate about fostering Jewish and Zionist identities and developing strong female leadership amongst Jewish youth.



**JOSH FELDMAN**

A passionate member of the Jewish community, Josh is involved in various communal organisations relating to Israel advocacy, antisemitism and informal Jewish education. Josh is currently studying for his BA in International Relations and History from Monash University. He spent his gap year in Israel with Bnei Akiva, was part of Australia's delegation to the 38th World Zionist Congress and is also the member of the leadership team at the New Zionist Congress. He is a self-diagnosed Twitter addict and writes about Israel and world Jewry related issues in leading Israeli, Australian and American news outlets.



**DANIEL FREEMAN**

Daniel is an experienced Software Technical Leader inspired by purposeful organisations where he can make outsized contributions adding maximum value. He currently leads a project for Automated Incident Detection with VicRoads after developing the Sentinel Event adverse patient safety system for the Victorian Department of Health. Appreciating all things creative, Daniel studied TV and film acting, wrote and performed comedy and is also training in improvised theatre. Daniel was also involved in organising a youth mental health event with BBYA.



**RABBI YAAKOV GLASMAN**

Rabbi Yaakov Glasman completed his Rabbinic ordination in 2001 at the Rabbinical College of America and earned his master's degree in Hebrew Letters in 2003 in Florida, USA. He served as Rabbi of the North Eastern Jewish Centre from 2005 until 2011 when he was appointed senior Rabbi of the St Kilda Hebrew Congregation, the Synagogue's first Australian born Rabbi since its inception in 1871. Yaakov served as President of the Rabbinical Council of Victoria from 2009 until 2012 and is currently the President of the Rabbinical Association of Australasia. Yaakov has a keen interest in interfaith dialogue and presents to a wide variety of audiences on a range of religious, social and communal issues. He was acknowledged for his work in interfaith dialogue and to various Rabbinic bodies by being appointed a Member of the Order of Australia during the Queen's Birthday honours in 2021. In 2018, he became the first religious leader to speak at TEDx Melbourne and is currently studying for his master's degree in Counselling at Monash University.



**SAM GINSBERG**

Sam is a Jewish Community Advocate with a passion for the Melbourne Jewish Community and Holocaust Remembrance. He currently works in the disability services sector and has been actively involved in the community for the last three years. Sam held various roles in AUJS including President of AUJS Victoria in 2020. He has participated in diverse international programs and conferences including WUJS Congress and the AJC Conference in 2019 and has also been a madrich on Birthright.



**DORIT JAFFE**

Dorit was born and raised in Israel and moved to Australia in 2002. She has held different positions in organisations in the Brisbane and Melbourne Jewish Communities. An experienced marketing and engagement coordinator, she worked with the UIA, the NCJWA and was involved in fundraising campaigns, facilitating stewardship for donors, building relationships, researching, and creating marketing collateral. Dorit has also worked with the Head of Psychiatry at Tel Hashomer-Sheba Hospital when she was back in Israel from 2012 to 2018. Dorit holds an MA in International Relations from Griffith University and is currently the Development Manager at Hadassah Australia and Project Rozana.



**DANIELLE JONES-RESNIK**

Danielle is a 6th generation Australian whose family has been involved with the Jewish community since the 1850's. She has volunteered with LimmudOz, Shir Madness Jewish Music Festival and the NCJWA. She holds a degree in Psychology with a focus on Women and Indigenous people. Danielle is a proud disability and feminist activist, involved in education and advocacy both within the Jewish and wider community. As a person with lived experience of disability, Danielle is very passionate about inclusion and accessibility for people with disabilities.



**SHIFRA JOSEPH**

Shifra is a career public servant specialising in international trade negotiations, oversight, mediation, and compliance. She did not grow up in a Jewish neighbourhood or go to a Jewish school and being the only Jewish person that many Australians have met, she was often asked "What do Jews do exactly?", "Why did you kill Jesus?", and "What's a Bar Mitzvah?". In 2015, she co-founded the not-for-profit "Ask Me Anything" schools' program, holding workshops with diverse groups of brave presenters at schools and adult events around Canberra.



**SASHA KLIGER**

Sasha is an ASX50 senior marketing leader with a track record in delivering growth and brand leadership. She currently works for The a2 Milk Company. Sasha is an active and proud member of the community, and passionate about ensuring Jewish continuity. She served on the Young AICC and Emerging Marketers Victoria committees, in the mentoring programs. Sasha is a passionate advocate for the benefits of Israeli gap year programs and participated in the inaugural Yesod program through Jewish Care VIC, completing the AICD's Governance Foundations for not-for-profit directors' course.



**EDWARD LICHTIG**

Edward is a Geographical Sciences and International Relations student at Monash University. With an avid interest in international affairs and a passion for youth empowerment and advocacy, he aims to create a platform for youth voices at the highest levels of business, corporations and government. Edward worked as an adviser in both Australia and the Middle East and is currently working for numerous organisations in Youth Education, Diplomacy and Politics in Australia and the ASEAN region. He also completed two short-term mobility programs in Paris, France, and one long-term program in Israel. Edward is currently the Victorian Political Affairs Director of AUJS.



**MONIQUE MEYER**

Monique is a legal professional who has dedicated her career to advocate for vulnerable members of our community and safeguard their right to justice by ensuring they receive effectual, strategic and robust legal advice and assistance. She also acts as a barrister specialising in taxation and works as a principal solicitor leading large litigation units and prosecutorial work. Monique is a devoted mother and wife and acutely aware of the importance of Jewish continuity and the need to strengthen bonds. She presently she sits on The King David Parent's Association and care committee.



**HOWARD SACHS**

Howard is a highly motivated entrepreneurial thinker with a passion for technology and causes that make impactful improvements to society. He is involved in numerous Jewish organisations, such as the JCCV board, the Victorian Jewish Schools Project, and is an AJF Launchpad Leadership and a Bright Young Minds Alumnus. Howard has also initiated an ongoing charity tin drive for the Perth and Melbourne Jewish Communities (Menorah Charity Fund). He holds a Master of Business Leadership and a BSc in Engineering and currently works as an Automation and Engineering Manager at Siemens LTD.

# ANTISEMITISM REPORT 2021

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During the twelve-month period, from 1 October 2020 to 30 September 2021, there were 447 antisemitic incidents logged across Australia by volunteer Community Security Groups (CSGs), official Jewish state roof bodies, and the ECAJ. The total figure consists of 272 attacks (physical assault, verbal abuse/harassment, vandalism, graffiti) and 175 threats (by email, telephone, postal mail, poster/stickers).

In the previous 12-month period, ending 30 September 2020, these same bodies logged 331 incidents. Accordingly, there was an increase of 35% in the overall number of reported antisemitic incidents in Australia compared to the previous year.

Overall, from 2020 to 2021, there were substantial increases in the number of reported incidents in four categories: abuse/harassment (up 14% from 128 in 2020 to 147 in 2021), graffiti (up 152% from 42 to 106), and stickers/posters (up 157% from 28 to 72) and a smaller increase in vandalism (up 10% from 10 to 11). Physical assaults remained

at the same number. There were minimal decreases in the number of incidents of postal and telephone threats, and a larger decrease in the number of email threats.

The average number of reported antisemitic incidents each year from 2013 to 2020 was 280. As such, the number of reported incidents in 2021 is above that average by 167 incidents.

There were two major events which appear to have contributed to the increase in antisemitic incidents over the last 12 months: the Israel-Hamas conflict and some Covid-related events. For example, a total of 88 incidents was logged for the month of May alone, when the hostilities between Israel and Hamas occurred, compared to between 22 and 46 incidents for each of the other 11 months of the year.

The Israel-Hamas war in May 2021 elicited several forms of incidents. There was deliberate targeting of Jewish community facilities, especially synagogues, Jewish schools,

and Jewish businesses, but there was also the deliberate targeting of private Jewish homes. Much of this targeting took the form of anti-Israel graffiti on synagogues, schools, and on the front fences of the homes of Jewish families. Other graffiti, not on Jewish community or residential property, was placed strategically so as to be likely to be seen by local Jews, by being placed next to or opposite Jewish schools, kosher shops, and the like. In addition, placards and banners at anti-Israel protests had images equating the Jewish Star of David with the Nazi swastika, and other forms of Holocaust distortion.

Hizb ut'Tahrir, an extremist Muslim group, organised an anti-Israel protest in Lakemba, Sydney, in May 2021, where several speakers chanted slogans vilifying and calling for violence against Jews. These included: "Khaybar, Khaybar, oh Jews! The army of Muhammad will return!", "Destroy the Jews!", "Oh Allah, give us the necks of the Jews!", "Oh Allah, give us the necks of those evildoers!",



and “Oh Allah, help us purify the Al-Aqsa Mosque from their filth!”.

The anti-Zionist campaign, organisations and proponents continue to cross the line into antisemitism in their discourse and activities against Israel. There has also been a concerted effort by some of them to campaign against, and disrupt support for, the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Working Definition of Antisemitism, in an effort to divert attention away from critical analysis of the racist nature of aspects of their own discourse, and to give an open license to virtually all forms of speech and acts ostensibly directed against Israel.

COVID-related antisemitism took two forms.

Firstly, the actions of a tiny minority of Jews breaching COVID-19 regulations in Melbourne - the engagement party in August and the attendees at a synagogue over Rosh Hashanah in September - and the concomitant media coverage of these two events, contributed to the increase in antisemitic incidents. The incidents were referred to in hate phone calls, emails, letters to synagogues and other Jewish organisations. This was despite the fact that the Jewish community overwhelmingly complied with the regulations (although many non-Jews were reported to have openly flouted them), and that the Jewish

leadership nationally and in Victoria publicly condemned the breaches. In a contrasting example, when the Jewish community in Sydney was granted certain exemptions to the regulations so as to permit limited outdoor observance of Yom Kippur, under very strict conditions which were adhered to meticulously, resentment and hate were still expressed against the Jewish community, although in this instance they were mostly manifested as online discourse rather than in incidents. This shows that it does not take much to trigger antisemitism, and that this can occur regardless of how Jews conduct themselves.

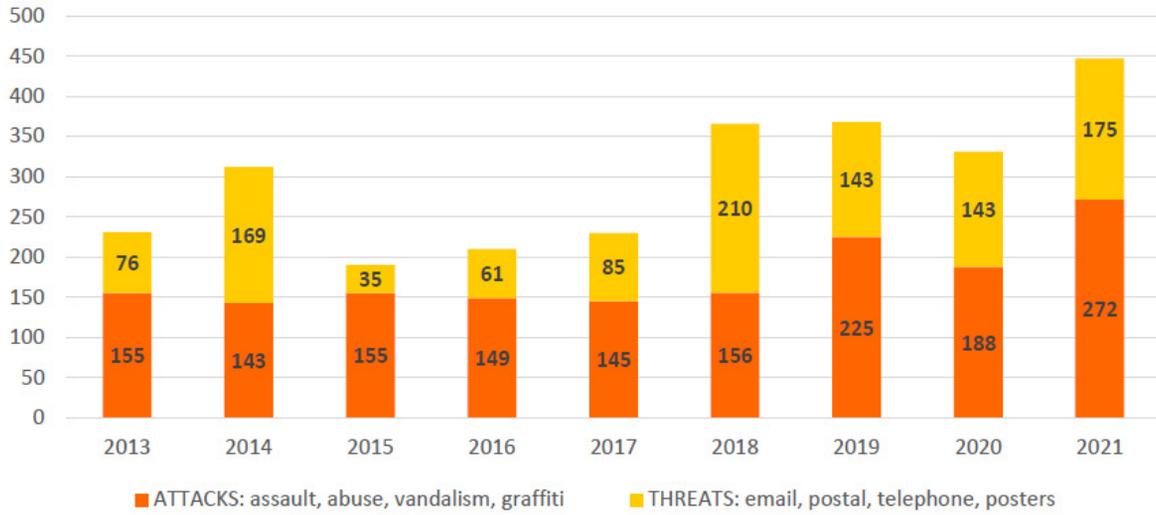
Secondly, those opposed to COVID-19 government health measures, such as vaccinations and lockdowns, shifted from ranting online and sharing conspiracy theories (including blaming “the Jews” for the pandemic), to becoming much more active in organising and attending rallies and street protests. What was once said online is now showing up in antisemitic incidents of graffiti and stickers, and in placards at protests. Antisemitic tropes and conspiracy theories are frequently expressed from elements within the anti-vaxxer, anti-lockdown camp across the political spectrum.

National Socialist Network (NSN), the main neo-Nazi group in Australia, remains a source of concern, as the ECAJ has reported for some years, and the threat level from

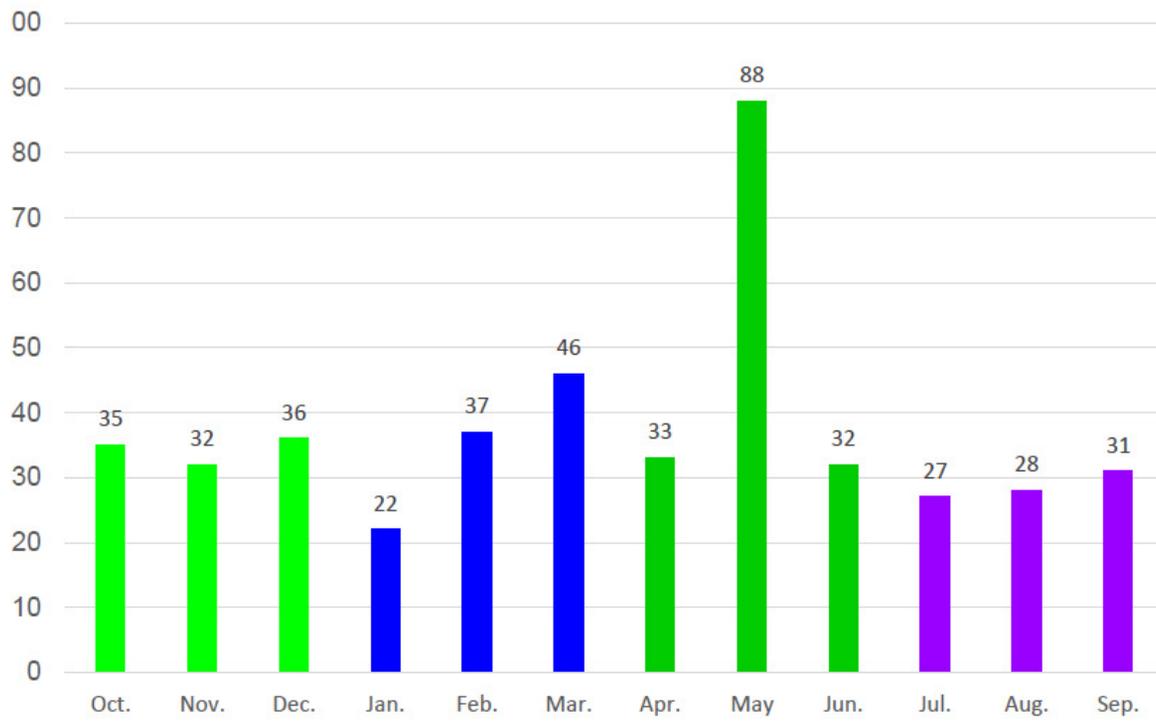
this source is rising rapidly. It is active in recruiting, group bonding activities, and sharing propaganda. Its leadership and other prominent members have been vocal online in vilifying Jews, citing the ‘Protocols of the Elders of Zion’ (an entirely fabricated document from the early 20th century), espousing support for Hitler, and the like. Like Antipodean Resistance before it, NSN’s longterm goal is one of developing a vanguard with which to eventually take power, within the next ten years, and institute a regime of National Socialism in Australia.

As Australians continue to live in uncertain times, with a pandemic, political movements, undermining of democratic values and social cohesion, and a rise in antisemitic incidents and discourse, it is even more important now for political leaders, the media, law enforcement agencies, academics, faith leaders, and others in positions of power or influence, to act to counter antisemitism in all its forms, and from all its various sources.

### Antisemitic Incidents in Australia Attacks and Threats



### Antisemitic Incidents in Australia 2021 by Month: Oct. 2020 - Sep. 2021



## HAMAS LISTED AS TERRORIST ORGANISATION IN ITS ENTIRETY

Further to the listing of Hizballah in November 2021, the Federal Government announced on 4 March 2022 it had listed Hamas in its entirety as a terrorist organization under the Criminal Code. This follows previous listing of Hamas's paramilitary wing, the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, which had been listed since 2003.

The ECAJ has warmly commended the Federal Government and the Minister for Home Affairs, Karen Andrews. The ECAJ co-CEO Peter Wertheim said, "Hamas political leaders have overseen and participated directly in terrorist operations and activities. They have admitted in a variety of contexts that Hamas's military wing is subordinate to the political leadership, and that assistance from the Iranian regime, aimed at expanding Hamas's terrorist capacities, extends to the whole organisation. There was thus no justification for limiting the proscription of Hamas to its so-called "military wing", as was formerly the case".

In August 2021, the ECAJ has made a submission in response to the Review by the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security (PJCS) of the relisting of Hamas' Izz al-Din al

Qassam Brigades as a terrorist organisation under the Criminal Code and in October 2021 Peter Wertheim participated in the inquiry into the listing of Hamas, conducted by the Committee. Following the hearing, Senator James Patterson, the Committee Chair, and Committee members recommended that the whole of Hamas be proscribed.

"It is especially heartening that the Committee's recommendation and the ensuing decision by the Minister were guided solely by the evidence, as highlighted in the written and oral submissions over the years made by the ECAJ," Wertheim said. "Extending the listing to Hamas in its entirety was overdue, but very welcome."

The ECAJ submission emphasised that the intentional use of violence against civilians to achieve political, religious and ideological objectives is embedded in the worldview, doctrine and modus operandi of Hamas as a whole. This ideology is translated into terrorist action, including suicide bombings, incendiary arson attacks and indiscriminate rocket attacks against Israeli cities. The declared aim is not only to bring to an end Israel as a political entity but also to drive Jews out of the entire country. Hamas political leaders

have overseen and participated directly in terrorist operations and activities. They have admitted in a variety of contexts that Hamas's military wing is subordinate to the political leadership, and that assistance from the Iranian regime, aimed at expanding Hamas's terrorist capacities, extends to the whole organisation. There is thus no justification for limiting the proscription of Hamas to its so-called "military wing".

The ECAJ also welcomed the Federal government's decision to list Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, Hurras al-Din and the National Socialist Order (formerly Atomwaffen Division) as terrorist organisations, announced together with the decision regarding Hamas.

"Violent extremist acts and ideologies, whether religiously, racially or ideologically motivated, are abhorrent to Australia's national values and way of life", Wertheim said. "We commend the government for its vigilance and decisive action in responding to rapid changes to Australia's security landscape."



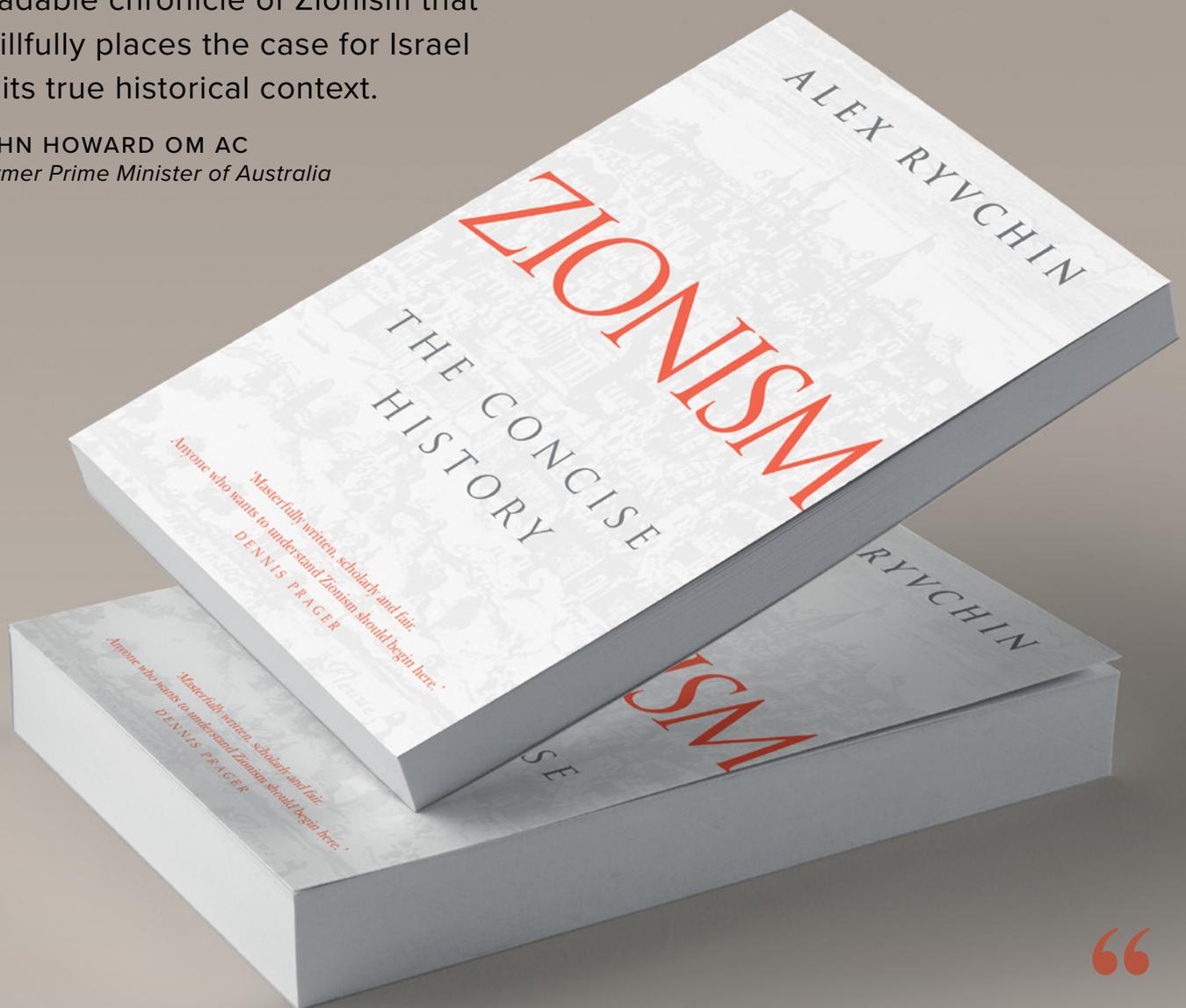
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# FOR THE LOVE OF ZION

WORDS AMBASSADOR AMIR MAIMON

My paternal family is one of many Yemenite Jews who lived in Yemen for centuries. They lived in the Northern part of the country leading a fairly calm life and were mainly in good relations with their neighbors. They were artisans in various trades, jewelers, tailors, carpenters, builders, teachers and Torah scribes. In 1909 they decided to leave everything behind and with only modest belongings embark on a journey to return to the Holy Land. When I asked my father what made them choose to leave their birth place and immigrate to Israel, he replied “it was for the Love of Zion”.

For decades they yearned to return to the Land of Israel, they prayed for it and engraved their longings in poems and scripts. Not a day went by without them wishing to return to a land that was largely unknown to them, but they knew, that there lie their deep and undeniable roots.

When I started writing the book about my family’s history, I quickly realized that it was leading me on a journey

into the incredible story and history of the Yemenite settlement in Rishon Lezion, my hometown. Located between Tel Aviv and Ashdod, today it is the fourth largest city in Israel, but back then, in the early 1900s, it was only a small village or Moshava, as we call it in Hebrew.

My grandparents’ voyage to Zion commenced in the town of Haidan in Northern Yemen. They embarked by foot, through the desert over 100 kilometers, to Midi Port and arrived by boat to Jaffa during the Jewish Holiday of Succoth. They were immediately taken to Rishon Lezion, where veteran Jewish settlers were looking for laborers to work in the fields and vineyards. Their new home was a simple barrack and although it was meant to be just a temporary arrangement, it was only 14 years later, in 1923, when they moved into a permanent house. It was also a very modest dwelling, only two rooms, a cooking area and toilets in the garden.

Their first years were extremely difficult, not only financially, but also socially. They were not always treated

well by the early immigrants for whom they worked and fought hard to integrate. They lived on the most basic resources, my father shared a room with his 6 siblings, but they thought nothing of it. Their love for the land of Israel, Eretz Israel, the fact that they lived so close to Jerusalem, and when they were praying in the morning, they are literally looking at Jerusalem, was more than enough for them.

This small neighborhood where my grandparents and several other families of Yemenite origin made their home, was named “Shivat Zion” meaning the Return to Zion in Hebrew. The first building built in that neighborhood was the synagogue, which will mark its’ 100th anniversary this year. Once inaugurated, five Torah scrolls which my family brought with them from Yemen, were sacredly placed in the Holy Ark (Aron Hakodesh) of the synagogue.

As I mentioned, my grandparents had seven boys and since they were very religious people, they chose biblical

names for their sons, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David (my late father), Solomon, Avshalom and Josef. They had only basic means, but raised their children with an abundance of love. When you are surrounded by so much love, you can happily live with the absence of so many other things. In January 1948, Jacob, my uncle, was killed while defending his home town of Rishon Lezion. This was the beginning of Israel's war of independence. Despite this ultimate sacrifice, my grandparents and their sons, never gave up and continued doing their utmost to bring about the establishment of the State of Israel. They all joined the armed forces and took up combat positions. One was among the soldiers of the first navy seals unit, others joined the paratroopers, my father was an officer and years later retired at the rank of Major-General, the first ever Major-General of Yemenite origin.

Of the 21 homes in this small neighborhood, 5 have lost sons in the deadly battles for Israel's independence. 5 families who not for a moment, after making this ultimate sacrifice, thought about leaving Israel, going back to Yemen or perhaps search for a more comfortable place. The children of these families grew up to be some of the most well-known names of the Israeli society. Avraham Tabib was a member of the First Knesset, the Israeli Parliament. Another was the singer Shoshana Damari, also known

as First Lady of Hebrew Music, a cultural icon and laureate of the Israel Prize for her contribution to Israeli music. The famous author and poet Mordechai Tabib and many other prominent politicians, public figures and of course senior military officials, like my father, who served in the IDF for many years.

The story of my family, my roots and my upbringing had a profound impact on shaping the person I am today and played a major role in instilling the love for my country. As it happens from time to time, some children chose to follow in their parents' footsteps and I am one example of that. My father was and still is, my role model. My wish was always to be like him, even today. As a child, I didn't get to spend much time with my father. As an officer, he was mostly stationed on the front and we didn't get to see him very often. He never saw me play basketball, and I was a pretty good player and he never took me to the cinema, although I very much loved films (something I have inherited from my mother). But whenever he could, he made sure to take me out and tour the country, to see our land. This is how I got know and experience the beauty of our country, Eretz Israel. He was so tired when he came home on the Fridays, but he always found time to take us around and tell us a story about the history and meaning of the various places we'd visit together.

When I was 14 years old, I decided

that as my father, I want to join the military academy. My mother refused, saying it's enough having one full-time soldier at home. But then she heard that my cousin, who she considered to be a genius, didn't pass the exams, she came to me with a big smile and said, Amir, you should go and try out, your cousin didn't pass! So I did, and surprisingly, much to her disappointment, I was accepted and left home for the military academy's boarding school. By doing so, I committed myself to 10 years of military service and embarked on a path that was not the easiest choice for a youngster. Life at the academy meant tough discipline, strict routine, including military exercises, with little time off. The academic studies took place in the Gymnasia Herzliya, the first Hebrew high school that was founded in 1905 in Tel Aviv and were also very demanding.

At 18 I began my compulsory military service and as all academy graduates, I too became an officer. I started as a commander in the paratroopers' special forces and held several positions, starting as a platoon commander and later on, served as a company commander during which I took part in the Litani Operation in 1978. I participated in many military operations behind enemy lines, including the First Lebanon War, leading a paratrooper battalion. In the following years I filled various non-combat positions and completed my Bachelor degree in General History.



*The ECAJ acknowledges and thanks these organisations for their generous support of our work*



In 1989 I started contemplating my decision to pursue a military career and thought it might be time to explore other avenues. Was I destined to follow in my father's footsteps or could I embark on a new path and fulfill a dream to become a lawyer. I went through the enrollment process and was accepted to Tel Aviv University, but my plans took an unexpected turn, when soon after I came across an ad by the Israeli Foreign Office calling for candidates to apply for their Cadet Course and become young diplomats. Now in Israel, when you are 30 years old,

after a long military service, filling numerous commending positions, and participating in many combat operations, you don't consider yourself young. You feel quite old and naturally someone who has already seen and knows everything. As the old Israeli joke goes, some young Israeli men can commit suicide by jumping from their ego to their IQ. Eventually I decided to give it a shot, and being humble as I am, I will avoid mentioning that I was one of 14 people chosen from over several thousands applicants, to join the Cadet Course and work for Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

This was a new beginning for me and as hard as it is to imagine, after serving in my last position as a Lieutenant-Colonel, I very willingly started a new career as a "private". From being responsible for the lives of hundreds of soldiers and budgets of millions, I found myself in a position where in order to send an unclassified fax, I needed the supervision of a senior diplomat. What a dream job, no need to think! I was fortunate that the military had asked me not to retire and instead stay on active duty, while being seconded to the Foreign Service. That was a very good outcome for me as the income

was much higher than for any other cadet. A win win situation.

After several months, I was called in for a meeting with the Director-General, Mr. Merchav. He frankly said it was not easy to figure out what to do with someone of my experience and military background, but eventually he found the perfect role for me, Deputy Head of Mission at the newly reopened Embassy in Ethiopia. As the political and security situation in the country has become very unstable, the State of Israel has decided to aid thousands of Ethiopian Jews who wished to immigrate to Israel. The ministry was looking for a commander to lead the preparations for this covert operation, later known as Operation Solomon. It was not an easy decision, but I knew then and there that I cannot refuse. I have just recently married and promised my wife Tal, to travel together to Paris, Rome or Bangkok and instead I am taking her to Addis Ababa... When she

heard that the mission was to bring home our brothers and sisters from Ethiopia, she immediately agreed. In December 1990, on the 8th candle of Hannukah, we arrived in Addis Ababa and I commenced my first posting. My main responsibility was to manage and tend to the great number of Ethiopian Jews, who arrived to the Embassy compound with one wish, take us to Israel. During Operation Solomon we airlifted almost 15,000 Ethiopian Jews in Israeli planes from Addis Ababa to Tel Aviv.

In one's life, there are some unique moments that will never be forgotten. One specific moment for me is of particular relevance in light of recent global developments and the Israeli aid efforts in Ukraine. I clearly remember it, the day was Friday, May the 24th and the time was 10am. I was standing at the Addis Ababa International Airport, that back then had only one runway, and in the distance, two unmarked Boeing

707 were approaching for landing. It is impossible to describe exactly how I felt. Being an Israeli, I always had so many questions. About my country, my religion, and myself, but when I saw those two planes slowly descending, I only had answers. Because I knew, that there is only one country in the world, that will not spare any effort and do its utmost in order to bring its people home, to Israel.

After my mission in Ethiopia, I was posted to several other countries, The UK, Canada, Turkey and also served in Washington DC. My last posting before coming to Australia was in Lithuania, where I served as the first resident Ambassador from 2015 to 2019. The story of my years in Lithuania and the experience of serving in a country with over 200 different burial sites and killing pits, where Jews were brutally murdered by the Nazis and their collaborators, is probably a story for another time.



*Shivat Zion Synagogue*

# ON AMNESTY'S CAR-CRASH INTERVIEW IN ISRAEL

WORDS SHANY MOR

When the two most senior Amnesty officials presented their new report in Israel they struggled to answer the most basic questions. Their responses, writes Shany Mor, were 'a mix of exasperation, ignorance, self-contradiction, and conspiratorial magical thinking'.

Most of the meta-event around the Amnesty apartheid report followed a grimly predictable script. The outlandish claims, the colourful pdf's, the outraged responses, the too-smart-for-you response that the outraged responses were only drawing attention to the report — and the relative indifference of nearly everyone who is not involved in the western 'debate' about Israel and its conflict with the Palestinians (including most Israelis and Palestinians).

But in one corner of the media there was a very minor event that didn't quite go according to script. This was a short interview that the Times of Israel's diplomatic correspondent Lazar Berman conducted with the two most

senior Amnesty officials presenting the report. Berman asked Agnes Callamard, the organisation's Secretary General, and Philip Luther, its Middle East and North Africa Research and Advocacy Director, a few entirely reasonable questions about the report and its context, none of which should have been surprising for them, and yet they struggled to provide answers even to the simplest ones.

Their responses to simple questions were, for the most part, a mix of exasperation, ignorance, self-contradiction, and conspiratorial magical thinking. Luther in particular was almost comically unprepared for the most obvious of questions, and he seemed genuinely resentful at being asked them.

The most obvious question, of course, is why the obsessive and disproportionate focus on Israel in the human rights community. There are a few coherent, even if not terribly persuasive ways, to deal with the question. One would be to argue that all of the

attention of Amnesty, HRW, the UNHRC and others is completely justified because Israel truly is a unique evil on the global scene and much worse than all other countries combined. Another would be to deny completely that there is a disproportionate focus on Israel. And a third would be to acknowledge it, maybe claim that it is a problem of other organisations, but argue that in this specific case it is not what is happening.

What is incoherent is trying to do all three, which is precisely what Luther does. He wants to 'push back' on the idea that there is a large focus on Israel. Two sentences later, he tacks in the other direction: 'I'm not sure what the problem is.' And later again 'I don't think there evidence for that.' When confronted with the specific example of the UNHRC, which year after year passes more resolutions against Israel than all other countries combined, Luther is flatfooted. He avoids the question, isn't sure about the facts. He seems unaware of the 'permanent item' dedicated to Israel on the



Commission’s agenda, when no such item exists for any other country.

No one expects an Amnesty director to sound like AIPAC speaker. But it is not expecting too much for someone whose entire professional life is dedicated to the topic of human rights in the Middle East to have an opinion of some kind on the matter.

And it’s jarring that people who believe so fervently in human rights don’t see something amiss in this. Let’s imagine a village with 193 families in it, and the local police assigns one of its only cops to follow only one family’s car and constantly measure its speed, and the tax department goes over every receipt of this same family looking for irregularities, and a grand jury sits permanently to investigate any possible crimes of this same family, and the local paper has a reporter permanently assigned to sniff out

any infidelities or disputes inside the family. You don’t need to be an expert with 20 years experience (as Luther reminds us in the interview he has) in the field of human rights to understand what is wrong with this situation.

When Berman comes back to the UN issue one last time, Luther gives perhaps the most astonishing response. He says Israel has actually managed to ‘shut down scrutiny using the power of its relationships’ and charges that the UN is actually a locus of inaction because Israel ‘has influence over powerful allies who then manage to stop it, stop the scrutiny.’

And that of course is the appeal of anti-Israel activism in the West: the sincerely held belief that by engaging in it you are somehow standing up to dark powerful forces at home. There’s a word for this pathology.

Besides the conspiratorial tone (there will be more of that in the interview), it’s an odd claim to make when elsewhere Luther argues that Amnesty can’t investigate other countries for the crime of apartheid precisely because they, unlike Israel, are actually able to stop scrutiny of their actions.

That’s not even the furthest extreme of Luther’s conspiratorial claims. Later in the interview he claims that what makes it hard to see the apartheid in Israel is the ‘smokescreen’ created by Israel’s ‘democratic system’ and ‘judicial institutions.’ These, according to Luther, ‘make it challenging to disentangle’ the picture of the apartheid he and others claim to have found. What he refers to as ‘the Israeli state’ is ‘a driver of complexity and a driver of resources unnecessarily spent on investigations by anybody.’

These passages were rightfully mocked online, but it’s worth

pausing over what he is saying and the psychological process he is describing. He knows Israel—ahem, ‘the Israeli state’—is guilty of not just committing a grievous crime but of being a grievous crime. But what he observes are a complex set of practices and institutions that don’t quite appear to be the unvarnished evil he knows is there, and to him this is not cause to revisit his assumptions, but actually further proof of just how nefarious the ‘Israeli state’ is.

In activist circles this is known as ‘washing,’ the belief that when Israel appears to be doing something good or at least not purely evil, that this is nothing more than a deliberate feint designed to fool the weak-willed, and that the deliberate feint which the righteous have identified is actually proof of just how awful the Israelis actually are. So there is pink-washing, green-washing, yellow-washing, aid-washing, vaccine-washing, sport-washing, and so on.

Throughout the interview, Berman keeps asking why Amnesty chose to investigate Israel, and why it did so now. The democratic ‘smokescreen’ isn’t the only reason, even according to Luther. But whenever Berman asks for others, there is no coherent answer coming. Luther assures Berman that in the next year Amnesty will be examining other countries for possible apartheid, but he refuses to divulge which. Luther doesn’t want to talk about China, because he’s not a China expert. His field is MENA (Middle East and North Africa).

So Berman asks him about countries in the Middle East, and uses Amnesty’s definition of

apartheid (‘systematic attempt to dominate’). When he gets to Syria, Luther answers with a terse ‘all right,’ whereas on Turkey he just says ‘maybe we’ll get there. I don’t know,’ adding that Berman is ‘hung up on the idea’ that Amnesty is selectively choosing to investigate one nation and not another and that ‘this is somehow so important.’

Well, yes, I suppose Berman and others are hung up on the idea. And if we’re already in a conversation about racism and bigotry, it seems like a pretty reasonable idea to be hung up on. It also seems like the kind of thing a human rights activist would care about or have an opinion about. In fact, it seems like the kind of thing a human rights activist would absolutely hate being accused of and do as much as possible to refute. Or maybe just it’s a hang up. Alright.

Anyway, as Luther is keen to point out, it is not the case that Amnesty has only accused Israel of apartheid. It also issued a report in 2017 accusing Myanmar of committing the crime of apartheid.

This is perhaps the biggest red herring in the entire interview. A comparison of the Myanmar report and the Israel report only serves to make Berman’s questions even more urgent and Luther’s answers even more inadequate.

The Myanmar report deals with specific policies of institutionalised discrimination and forcible population transfers in Rakhine State (one of 21 regions in the country) affecting a minority that comprises roughly 1 per cent of Myanmar’s total population. The Israel report casts the entire existence of Israel as a tainted enterprise. The very basis of Israeli

society is a putative crime.

The Burmese government could conceivably implement each of Amnesty’s policy recommendations tomorrow and Myanmar would continue to exist. The recommendations proposed for Israel would end the existence of a Jewish state and leave its six million Jews vulnerable to mass murder and expulsion.

Another big difference: The claims against Myanmar will not be used to mobilise violence against ethnic Burmese around the world.

And another: The Myanmar report is a response to an actual event happening. A massive campaign of state-sponsored violence got underway in 2016 and took a particularly violent turn in 2017. No surprise that a major human rights organisation issues a damning report in 2017.

On Israel, there is no major event, no watershed, no legal or diplomatic change of any kind that would precipitate such a radical conclusion.

Israel conquered the West Bank and Gaza in 1967 and ruled over both directly until the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in 1994. The complicated patchwork of self-rule and shared control in the West Bank is the result of the OSLO II agreement in 1995.

The only major change since then was the 2005 withdrawal of Israeli soldiers and settlers from the 20 per cent of the Gaza Strip that had not been handed over in 1994. There has been no legal change since then.

So why now? Luther says, 'I cannot tell you the strategic reasons in terms of the focus [on Israeli apartheid]. I can just give you in generic terms.'

It wouldn't be such a riddle if it were just one report. But Amnesty's report joins at least two other major human rights organisations' glossy tomes which in the past year have made the same conclusion with the same fanfare.

The fact that so many self-styled human rights organisations all arrived at the same conclusion at the same time despite there being

no legal change and no landmark event on the ground is proof that anti-Israel activism is a social activity more than a political one. It is a profession of faith and of membership in the community of the good rather than an effort to change policy or even to make an authentically political action.

Luther doesn't shy away from the charge that Amnesty's report was sparked by the reports of other human rights organisations. He presents it as responding to 'a growing debate' and elsewhere refers to this as 'external factors... that [are] part of the strategic

landscape.' Again, one needn't be an expert in human rights, bigotry, or due process to understand just how shoddy such reasoning is or how it might lead an investigator of any kind to only seek bias confirming findings.

In this case, the 'strategic landscape' was calling for a renewed public avowal of the central tenets of faith in its larger ecclesiastical community as to who is evil, who is outside the community of the good, who it is that stands in the way of the message of light, whose powerful networks seek to divert



the righteous from the path of truth.

Pressed one last time to say something, anything at all, about the seeming obsession with Israel of Amnesty and the rest of the human rights community, Luther interrupts the journalist interviewing him with a rhetorical question that is supposed to definitively end the debate: 'How many other countries have a fifty-year occupation?'

But all this does is reveal even further just how unserious his grasp of the Arab-Israeli conflict is. An occupation is not the cause of a conflict; it is usually the outcome of one, and it lasts as long as the conflict is unresolved. To discuss the occupation without mentioning (1) how it came about and (2) why it persists is manifestly unserious.

In this case, it came about (1) because a coalition of Arab armies was defeated in a war whose openly stated and broadly celebrated goal was to destroy the Jewish state and murder and expel its people.

It lasted because (2) following defeat there was a near total refusal to reach any peace agreement which would end the occupation.

Wherever there has been a willingness to come to terms with Israel, occupied territories have been recovered. But to acknowledge any of this is verboten for Amnesty and the broader human rights community, where there is no conflict at all, only a racist and irredeemably evil Israel.

'Occupation' as Amnesty uses isn't a legal or territorial description, but an assignment of moral culpability to the Jewish state. This is why it was so important to Amnesty to redefine occupation in 2005 in a

way that the term had never been used before so that it could still be applied to the Gaza Strip.

The point is that Israel can leave a piece of territory, but the mark of Cain stays with it. This is true regardless of which of three methods Israel might use to try to end the occupation.

If it endeavours to reach a final status peace deal with the Palestinians, but the Palestinians reject this three times in the same decade and pursue suicidal terror instead, that is Israel's fault.

If it just leaves a piece of territory entirely without even getting a peace deal, that is an 'open-air prison' and Amnesty and other humanitarians will invent wholecloth a new definition of occupation suited just for that.

If it carries partial withdrawals in accordance with an international agreement establishing an interim phase which is then frozen because the Palestinian side refuses to reach a final status deal, then the complicated overlapping power-sharing arrangements get refashioned as 'fragmentation' and 'parallel legal systems' which form the basis of the apartheid calumny.

And that's the point of redefining apartheid especially for Israel too (something all three reports, which claim to be based on 'international law' but none of which use the actual legal definition of apartheid, and each of which invents another unique one): even if Israel were to effect a full and unconditional withdrawal from every bit of disputed territory, it will still be tainted.

There is, however, one very effective way to end the occupation, and it still boggles the mind that it isn't the top of the agenda for all the activists and intellectuals who claim to believe that ending the occupation is their first and foremost priority.

That way is called making peace.

Nothing in the Amnesty report and nothing in this absolute car crash of an interview suggest that its authors or the intellectual community they represent assign any importance at all to that.

They are welcome in Ramallah to sit with the Palestinian president (as Callamard did the very next day after this interview) and present their report precisely because no one imagines for a second that they might criticise the PA's human rights violations, its delayed and cancelled elections, its pay-for-slay sponsorship of terrorist families, its antisemitic incitement, or the Holocaust denial of the president himself.

Their recommendations include no criticism for the refusal to make peace with Israel and no call for any affirmative action that might lead in that direction.

On the contrary, they insist the Palestinians waste one more generation on demonisation of an enemy they can't defeat rather than pursue a reconciliation for the benefit of all. They will fly home. The people they presume to help will stay right where they are.

*Article was also published in Fathom*

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# ECAJ DIGITAL IMPACT

In response to a *changing* media landscape, the ECAJ has significantly expanded its digital media capabilities. This enables us to communicate *faster* and *more efficiently* to combat misinformation, incitement and hate targeting the Jewish people, our communities and the Jewish State.



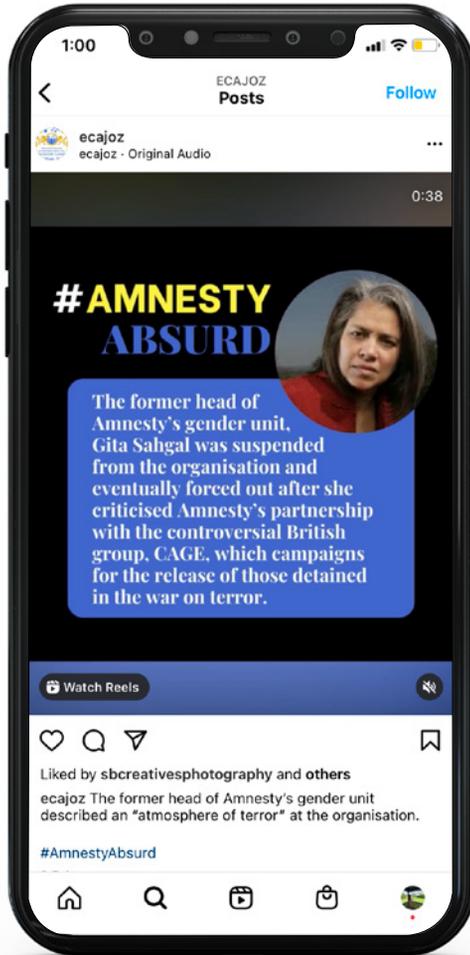
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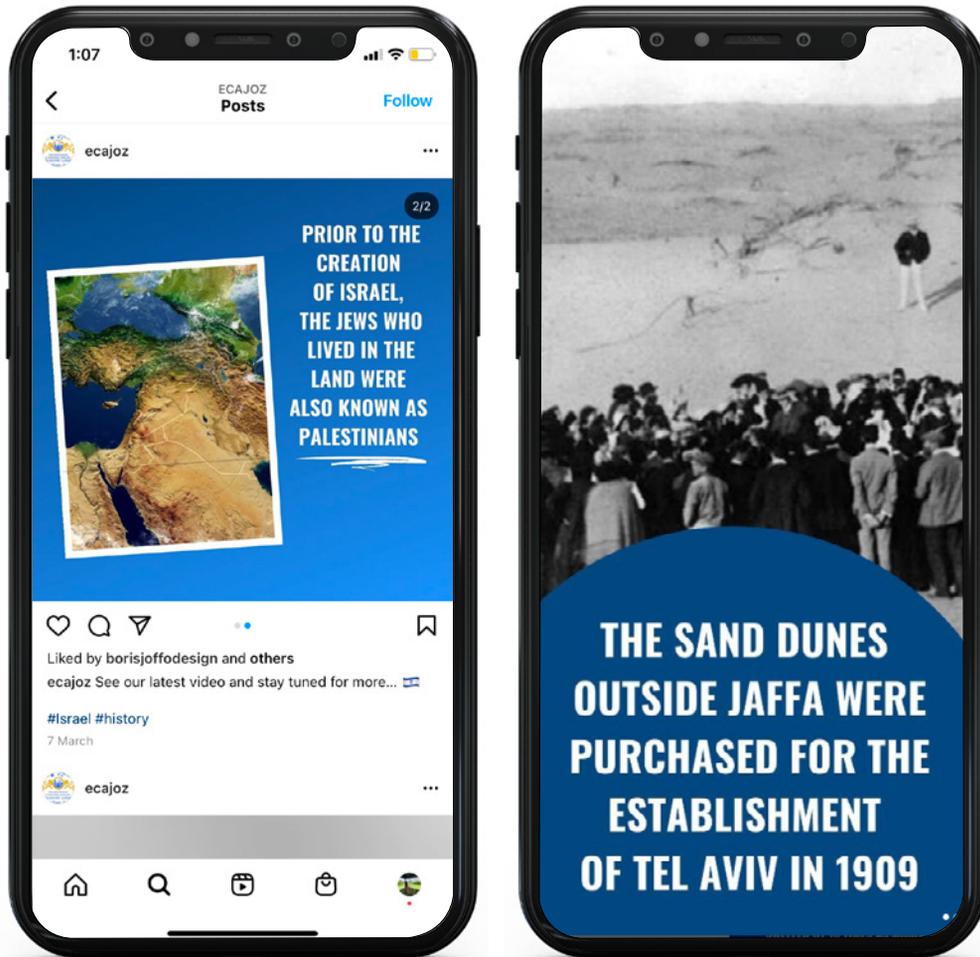
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