

ANTISEMITISM IN SOUTH AFRICA, 2019

1. OVERVIEW

The number of antisemitic incidents in South Africa dropped to a fifteen-year low in 2019. A total of 36 incidents of abuse and harassment considered to be wholly or in part motivated by antisemitism were logged by the SA Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) and Community Security Organisation. This was a more than 40% drop from the 62 incidents logged in 2018, and close to a 50% drop from the annual average of 66 incidents recorded since 2006. The decline can in part be attributed to the relative quiet on the Israeli-Palestinian front, notwithstanding the flare-up that occurred late in the year between Israel and Palestinian Islamic Jihad in Gaza.

These figures are consistent with the relatively low rates of antisemitism in South Africa that have been recorded since comprehensive records began to be maintained in the mid-1990s. Only in 2009 and 2014, the years when major conflicts took place between Israel and Hamas in Gaza, has the annual total of incidents exceeded the one-hundred mark. When these two unusually high years are removed from the equation, the average annual total over the remaining period drops to the mid-50s, but even then the 2019 figure is by comparison notably lower than normal.

2. ANTISEMITIC INCIDENTS

Incidents recorded took the following forms:

- Assault **1**
- Abusive behaviour **7**
- Offensive communications **18**
- Graffiti **5**
- Other **4**

“*Abusive behaviour*” includes direct (face-to-face) verbal abuse and/or threats, telephonic messages and insulting gestures, “*Offensive communications*” encompasses a broad range of written messages sent to a Jewish recipient, whether an individual or an institution (including comments posted on Jewish-run social media sites) and ‘Other’ includes the more difficult to categorize but significant cases where antisemitic sentiments were propagated by those holding public office or other recognised leadership positions.

The single case of assault recorded occurred in early January in the coastal town of Scottburgh in KwaZulu-Natal Province, where a community member was verbally abused and then physically attacked by three local men after they learned he was Jewish. His (non-Jewish) friend came to his assistance, and in the ensuing fight one of the attackers was hospitalised. The community member suffered a badly cut lip.

The great majority of incidents either took the form of face-to-face verbal abusive and/or insulting gestures or offensive communications, mainly via the social media. Whereas the previous year, there was an identifiable component of anti-Israel sentiment in about 50% of the reported cases, this was true only in a quarter of cases in 2019. However, it is unlikely

that this lower figure indicates any lessening of extreme anti-Israel attitudes, which continued to feature prominently in the social media.

On occasion, antisemitic statements were made from political platforms:

- In April, the radical Black nationalist Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) Party for the second year running issued an Easter message redolent with Christ-killer undertones. Referring to Palestine as “the birth and death place of Jesus Christ” (thereby intimating that Jesus was a Palestinian), it urged solidarity with the people of modern-day Palestine, who represented “the suffering, permanently crucified, disfigured, and humiliated naked body of Christ hanging on the summit for all shame”.
- During a Johannesburg City Council meeting on 24 May Abubakr Thapelo Amad, sole representative of the Al Jama-eh party, asked when commenting on water shortages in certain areas, said, “What measures have the MMC placed to mitigate the problem or is he telling us that the DA City of Johannesburg is trying to set up the same trend as the Western Cape of water scarcity to benefit the few Jewish communities?” This echoed (unsubstantiated) claims made the previous year by representatives of the African National Congress in the Western Cape that the ruling Democratic Alliance in the province had orchestrated the city’s water crisis to benefit the “Jewish mafia”.
- In June one of the country’s largest trade unions, the National Union of Metalworkers of SA, and the smaller SA Cabin Crew Association released a joint statement, claiming that the Rothschilds were “interfering” in SOEs for “selfish and greedy purposes.” The statement alleged that the wealthy family intended to collapse South African Airways (SAA) so it could be privatized”.
- Gauteng MEC for Human Settlements and Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs Lebogang Maile, in response to a tweet claiming that Mayor Herman Mashaba was “reclaiming the city that the ANC gave to Nigeria”, tweeted, “His actually giving them to Jews ask him who are the new owners of these buildings?” The Democratic Alliance reported Maile (who persistently denied any wrongdoing) to the province’s integrity commissioner for hate speech directed at the Jewish community. According to the *SA Jewish Report*, a list of 22 companies recently awarded tenders to work on land and properties in the inner city showed that none of their directors were Jewish.

3. SAJBD RESPONSES

Wherever perpetrators of antisemitic acts could be identified and located, the SAJBD took action deemed by it to be appropriate to the nature of the offence, the circumstances and the attitude of the offending party. Wherever possible, a process of conciliation was followed with the aims of achieving a suitable apology combined with an educational process (usually a tolerance awareness programme run under the auspices of the SA Holocaust Foundation).

In more serious cases of antisemitic behaviour in which the offending party refuses to admit fault or apologise, the SAJBD will take stronger action, including laying criminal charges or through laying complaints with the Equality Court or the SA Human Rights Commission (SAHRC).

In August, the SAJBD's long-running hate speech case against Bongani Masuku, International Relations Secretary/Spokesperson for the powerful Congress of South African Trade Unions, was heard by the Constitutional Court, the country's highest judicial forum. The case generated much interest in legal circles as it will impact significantly on how South African law interprets questions relating to prohibited hate speech. It is based on various threatening, inflammatory and derogatory statements made by Masuku against the South African Jewish community and its leadership for their support of Israel in the early months of 2009. The court had yet to release its judgement as of the end of January 2020.

During the year, a case of *crimen injuria* against Matome Letsoalo for a series of threatening and highly abusive twitter posts in June 2018 reached the Randburg Magistrates Court and a date for trial was set for the end of January 2020. This followed an extended search to locate Letsoalo and serve the papers on him. Letsoalo's tweets included the statement "The #Holocaust Will be like a Picnic When we are done with all you Zionist Bastards. Fuck All of You" alongside images of Holocaust victims and of protestors burning an Israel flag.

4. SELECT INCIDENTS

January

3/1, Scottburgh (KZN): A community member verbally abused and then physically attacked by three local men he had been speaking with in the Scottburgh Drums and Roses after the latter, on finding out they were Jewish, reportedly "started swearing and cursing the Jews". A heated altercation ensued, leading to the three men physically attacking him, whereupon his non-Jewish friend came to his assistance. One of the attackers was hospitalised in the fight that followed, and the community member suffered a badly cut lip.

Message sent to SAJBD Associate Director David Saks, who had defended comedian Daniel Friedman against accusations that he had made fun of farm murder victims: "David Saks ...as you speak against us HITLER MUST BE AWAIKING TO FINISH HIS JOB PF AUSHWITS [SIC] ... YOUR KABAL [sic] RELIGION IS THE CAUSE OF YOUR TWISTED MIND...."

Graffiti reading 'JEWS!!' written on wall of building close to SAJBD offices in Cape Town.

9/1: Tweet sent to SAJBD in response to announcement of International Holocaust Remembrance Day: "I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan".

28/1: A white male in his 20s drove past King David Linksfield School, swearing and screaming antisemitic comments.

February

2/2: Graffiti: Swastika alongside shape of a heart with the word 'Hitler' inside daubed on road outside Pretoria shul (Orthodox).

2/2: Graffiti on electrical box near Sydenham shul: "Hitler was here".

13/2: Durban: Anonymous hate mail received by Prof Salim Karim attacking him and his organisation Caprisa because of its association with the Victor Daitz Foundation, a Jewish-established and run body that helps fund HIV/AIDS research.

13/2: A community member received a whatsapp message, with Nazi-themed attachments, including a youtube showing Hitler addressing a rally and the words 'Der Sieg Wird Unser sein...Juden...' The perpetrator thought to possibly be her former domestic worker.

April

Multiple offensive Facebook messages sent to community member by a former acquaintance. Allegations about the corrupt, anti-human nature of Jews and their religion and to the Khazar theory that Ashkenazi Jews are imposters a common theme.

May

A Rabbi and his wife reported that Home Affairs officials made insulting comments to them on their religious practices after they arrived at Oliver Tambo airport and were initially not allowed to go through because of a problem with the status of one of their children. The officials concerned belittled the concerns they expressed about obtaining kosher food in the event of their having to stay at the airport over Shabbat, including saying that if they "accepted the Lord Jesus Christ" their problem would go away.

21/5: Graffiti on path in Bantry Bay showing images of a swastika and Magen David.

A visiting Catholic priest made numerous antisemitic comments in the course of addressing the St Davids Inanda School assembly. Jews were described as "vengeful, loveless and arrogant", and that accordingly the path to redemption was to be everything opposite to what the Jews were. He further said that Jews were raping the country, felt 'entitled', were not the chosen race and caused wars and poverty.

June

Jewish learners received a direct message replying to her post on the 'miracle of the Six Day War' from Alyssar Sabra. She was told inter alia that 'her' people were 'slaughtering innocent people' and that "You guys are the world's most hated race for a reason".

National Union of Metalworkers of SA and the SA Cabin Crew Association releases joint statement claiming that the Rothschilds were "*interfering*" in SOEs for "*selfish and greedy purposes*". The statement alleged that the wealthy family intended to collapse South African Airways (SAA) so it could be privatized".

July

Following the screening of a documentary relating to apartheid at a Wits Engineering School lecture, a Muslim student reportedly commented that if Hitler had succeeded in wiping out the Jews there would be no apartheid state of Israel. He was subsequently disciplined by the university following representations by the SA Union of Jewish Students.

August

4/8: During a football match at the U17 Corinthians-Olympia cup game, held at the Italian club, a Jewish player called “a F.... Jew” by an Olympia player. When confronted by him and asked what he’d said, the perpetrator repeated “F.....Jew boy , F.... Jew.”

Jordan Pieters, a coloured woman in Cape Town whose father reportedly Israeli, posted a series of insulting instagram messages about the ‘racism’ of the white Jewish community, including an image of her making an obscene gesture towards the the SA Jewish Museum.

November

15/11: Man in Muslim garb drove past the CSO protector by Torah Academy Boys High School and screamed "child killer" as well as “Allahu Akbar, death to Israel”.