

ANTISEMITISM IN SOUTH AFRICA, 2016

1) SUMMARY AND OVERVIEW

Levels of antisemitism in South Africa, as measured by hostile incidents targeting members of the Jewish community or Jewish institutions, were virtually unchanged in 2017 in comparison to the previous year. A total of 44 incidents regarded as antisemitic were logged by the SA Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) and Community Security Organisation in 2017, the Jewish community's two main civil rights and security bodies. This was just one more than the previous year. Since the beginning of the century, annual antisemitic incidents in the country have averaged between 40 and 60, exceeding a hundred only in 2009 and 2014 as a result of the conflicts in Gaza that took place in those years.

Antisemitism in South Africa almost always takes the form of face-to-face verbal or written abuse, with serious acts of violence or vandalism being fortunately rare. Incidents recorded can be broken down into verbal threats and intimidation (7), non-threatening verbal abuse (15), hate mail – all mediums (16) and graffiti/offensive slogans (6). No incidents involving violence or vandalism were recorded in 2017. Nearly all of the incidents were recorded as taking place in Johannesburg and Cape Town, where about 90% of the country's estimated 70 000 Jews are today concentrated. More rare instances of antisemitic behaviour were recorded in the smaller Jewish population centres of Durban and Pretoria.

2) COURT CASES

a) **Bongani Masuku**

A significant advance in the fight against antisemitism was made when the Johannesburg High Court, acting as an Equality Court, upheld an earlier ruling by the SA Human Rights Commission finding Bongani Masuku, International Relations spokesperson for the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu), guilty of antisemitic hate speech. The case had its origins in a complaint lodged with the SAHRC by the SAJBD in April 2009. The complaint related to various statements made by Masuku against Jews who supported Israel. In his judgment, Justice Moshidi declared the impugned statements by Masuku to be 'hurtful; harmful; incite harm and propagate hatred; and amount to hate speech as envisaged in section 10 of the Equality Act 4 of 2000".

Masuku and Cosatu were ordered to tender an unconditional apology to the Jewish community within 30 days of the order. Cosatu has since appealed against the decision. The matter will be heard in the first half of 2018.

Offending statements by Masuku included:

- “As we struggle to liberate Palestine from the racists, fascists and Zionists who belong to the era of their friend Hitler, we must not apologise. Every Zionist must be made to drink the bitter medicine they are feeding our brethren and sisters in Palestine. We must target them, expose them and do all that is needed to subject them to perpetual suffering until they withdraw from the land of others and stop their savage attacks on human dignity”

- “The following things are going to apply : any South African family, i want to repeat it so it is clear for anyone, any South African family who sends his son or daughter to be part of the IDF must not blame us when something happens to them with immediate effect” (5.3.2009 PSC rally at Wits University)

“Cosatu is with you, we will do everything to make sure [that] anyone who does not support equality and dignity, who does not support the rights of other people must face the consequences even if it means that we will do something that may necessarily cause what is regarded as harm”

b) Andile Mngxitama

When former Leader of the opposition Democratic Alliance Helen Zille controversially tweeted that colonialism yielded many practical benefits as well, leader of the radical Black First Land First faction Andile Mngxitama tweeted in response, “For those claiming the legacy of the holocaust is ONLY negative think about the lampshades and Jewish soap” and “I concur with @helenzille that the aroma of the burning flesh from the furnaces of the holocaust may wet [sic] the appetite of the S.A. cannibals”. The SAJBD responded by laying charges of hate speech against Mngxitama in the Johannesburg Equality Court. It is still not certain when and where the matter will be heard.

3) NOTEWORTHY INCIDENTS

4/9: The Deputy Principal of Vista high school in Cape Town, on the arrival of pupils from the Jewish day school Herzlia who were involved in an outreach project with Vista, displayed anti-Zionist posters on the window of his classroom, a gesture clearly aimed at the visitors. They were later taken down and an apology received from the school, which stressed that the staff member (who is Muslim), with one another, had acted at their own behest. The Department of Education instituted disciplinary proceedings, and found the perpetrator guilty on two out of three charges of misconduct (namely insubordination and inappropriately making the school a platform for his political views, but not for inciting hatred on the basis of religion and/or ethnicity). Prior to the hearing, he had been portrayed within the local Muslim community as a hero who was being victimised for speaking out on behalf of Palestine.

18/5: During an inter-school play competition in Johannesburg, where King David Victory Park School were performing ‘The Boy with the Striped Pyjamas’, Edenvale High learners reportedly made antisemitic remarks and ‘Heil Hitler’ salutes. The perpetrator sincerely apologised and the Board went on to work with the school in running a tolerance education programme through the JHB Holocaust & Genocide Centre.

6-9/2: During “Israel Apartheid Week” (IAW) at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, members of the Palestine Solidarity Committee threatened SA Union of Jewish Students (SAUJS) members with violence, pushed and jostled them, attempted to remove the SAUJS board, tore up posters, cut the power cord to the PA system used for its speakers, tore down the SAUJS banner and invaded the space on the Great Hall piazza allocated for SAUJS displays. One PSC member caught on camera impersonating a Nazi imitating the Hitler moustache, goose-stepping and making stiff-arm salutes. Another told

SAUJS students that people wanted to kill Jews because “they don’t behave when they are in other people’s countries”.

IAW events at the University of Cape Town included SAUJS posters being destroyed and a non-Jewish student wearing a Magen David verbally abused by BDS activists, who repeatedly shouted, "You are a Jew. You are with those Zionists because you are a Jew."

Examples of verbal abuse included: Community member accosted by a Muslim male who said, “Leave the Palestine” and similar anti-Israel comments. He responded "Leave the Israel", and soon after the Muslim male called out "death to all Jews" (Sandton); community member leaving the Outside La Lucia Virgin Active Gym when a black male verbally attacked him, directing such comments as that Jews were “bad news”, Christ killers and “oppressors of innocent people” (Umhlanga) and "You f***ing Jewish bastards" shouted from passing vehicle at community members walking home after shul, dressed as obvious shul-goers (Cape Town).

4) SOCIAL MEDIA AND ONLINE ANTISEMITISM

While antisemitism as measured by direct acts targeting Jews remains low in South Africa, a strong undercurrent of anti-Jewish sentiment is evident in the social media and online comments platforms.

Mounting opposition to the nine-year rule of President Jacob Zuma from both within and without the ruling African National Congress contributed to an unstable political climate and created fertile ground for conspiracy theories. It was, for example, commonly alleged that South African Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa (who replaced Jacob Zuma as President at the beginning of 2018) was the tool of Jewish business interests. Edward Zuma, a son of the then President, made references to “Jewish-based entities” allegedly working in the interests of rival political factions working against the ruling establishment.

While antisemitism emanating from extreme right white supremacist sources is no longer a major source of antisemitic activity, numerous websites and social media platforms regularly attribute the demise of white minority rule in South Africa to the secret machinations of Jewish capitalists and/or communist, intent on gaining control of the country and destroying the white race through promoting race-mixing. Much of the antisemitic material disseminated is sourced from like-minded groups in the United States and elsewhere.

In the Western Cape, the only province controlled by the opposition Democratic Alliance (DA), it is regularly asserted on online platforms that the party is “Zionist-controlled” and secretly acts in the interests of the Jewish community. In 2018, such allegations began to openly surface in the National and Cape Provincial Parliament.