

Outgoing Chairpersons' Report. (ABRIDGED)

Despite an increasingly repressive political climate and a largely unresponsive Jewish community, JSJ has continued to be a Jewish voice against oppression and injustice in South Africa. It has brought issues to the community that would not ordinarily have been heard. We fervently believe that as Jews we have an absolute obligation to speak out. It is often far easier to remain silent, particularly when we are subject to criticism from our community and the government.

In his acceptance speech for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1986 Elie Wiesel mentioned that the world did not know about the Holocaust and remained silent. "And that is why I swore never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation. We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented. When human lives are endangered, when human dignity is in jeopardy, national borders and sensitivities become irrelevant. Wherever men or women are persecuted because of their race, religion or political views, that place must - at that moment - become the centre of the universe."

Wiesel says in the same speech - and I am sure we would all agree - that "Apartheid is as abhorrent as anti-semitism."

With the banning of the 17 organisations earlier this year, the role that unaffected organisations such as JSJ have to play becomes more and more crucial in finding ways to a peaceful future.

Some of the highlights of JSJ work since the last AGM were:

1. A Pesach meeting addressed by Rabbi Ralph Gunend
2. Soon after the May elections we held a meeting entitled, "Is there a future for Jews in South Africa?" This was by far our most successful meeting to date where we attracted almost a thousand people. The speakers were Rabbi Furman, Dr Stephen Cohen from the Board of Deputies and Anton Harber, co-editor of the Weekly Mail;
3. In July Rabbi Selwyn Franklyn addressed JSJ on "Building a new South Africa."
4. In August an incredibly successful report back from Dakar was organised by JSJ. Prof. Braam Viljoen, Prof. Jacques Kriel and Johnny Matheson, a journalist, addressed us. They demonstrated that by communicating and discussing issues so much can be achieved.
5. Towards the end of 1987 we held a public meeting on anti-semitism, addressed by Dr Beyers Naudé, Rabbi Selwyn Franklyn and Mr Ronnie Mink from King David High School. Again this was most successful with Beyers Naudé receiving a standing ovation. The meeting addressed real fears in the Jewish community and attempted to answer them.
6. A Freedom Seder was held this year at which members of other communities were invited and participated. It was a wonderful learning experience both for our visitors and ourselves.
7. In April JSJ hosted a meeting on "The Role of Business in South Africa", which gave us some interesting insights into the importance and role of business in a changing society.