

2 April 2019

Editor  
Cape Chronicle  
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Dear Editor

I refer to the letter by Mrs Ann Harris, President of the African Jewish Congress (AJC) that appeared in your 1 April 2019 issue. As the long-serving Spiritual Leader to and CEO of the AJC, I would like to take this opportunity to provide my own perspective and hopefully clear up any misconceptions that might have arisen from Mrs Harris' letter.

As a necessary prelude to this, I wish to stress the enormous debt of gratitude that Southern African Jewry, as well as the innumerable other South Africans, owes to Mrs Harris for everything she has done and continues to do in furthering the well-being of our community and of our country as a whole. Whether together with her esteemed husband, the late Chief Rabbi Cyril Harris z"tl, or in the years following his untimely passing she has, in an entirely voluntary capacity, rendered multiple services to our Jewish community and to the greater society, including in her capacity as AJC President.

In terms of the relationship between the SAJBD and the AJC, it should always be borne in mind that the Board facilitated the establishment of the AJC back in 1993, and up until now has provided it with vital administrative, pastoral and other support to ensure its continued smooth functioning. However, in view of the financial challenges that the SAJBD must now deal with, after the end of this year, it will regretfully no longer be possible for this assistance to be continued on the same basis as previously, hence the need to put in place a new system through which the AJC will be able to continue the vital work it does. The fact that the SAJBD must now deal with pressing budgetary constraints is a sad but inevitable result of the difficult economic climate in which the country as a whole and almost every other Jewish organisation currently find themselves.

I can state categorically that there is no intention on the part of the SAJBD to wash its hands of either the AJC or the South African country communities. The Board has given all parties the firm assurance that in the course of the restructuring process it has undertaken, every effort will be made to put systems in place to ensure the continuation of the services these bodies have always provided. I am now an integral part of this process, and can confirm that we are exploring all available options in achieving these aims. (This was communicated explicitly by the National Chairman of the SAJBD in a recent copy of the SA Jewish Report). Since things are still at a relatively early stage of discussion, I cannot provide any specifics at this stage, but can state that by August 2019 a plan will be in place as to how the AJC and Country Communities Department of the SAJBD will be carried on going forward.

I do understand, and to some extent share, the frustration that Mrs Harris is feeling regarding the current uncertain position of the AJC and its future, and that she too is under pressure from her own constituents to provide answers in this regard. Part of the problem, I believe, relates to what she feels is a lack of *regular* communication and dialogue between the Board and the AJC. This in turn is, I believe, due less to any failure to consult or communicate on the part of the Board's leadership than to the very different way in which the past generation and the new one address and attend to matters. Communications today are conducted very

differently than in years gone past, and we will be looking into this in order to find ways to improve the situation and thereby ensure that all stakeholders feel they are on board in terms of what is being done.

I would like to conclude by saying that the SAJBD and I are working very hard to ensure that all Jews in Southern African countries, as well as Jews in the smaller communities in South Africa, are looked after as they have been in the past. In order to help us in achieving these goals, I request that everyone who has the same mission work with us to get the best possible result. Anyone is more than welcome to contact me to discuss this further and if anyone has any ideas or suggestions I am very happy to talk with them.

Regards

*Moshe*

**RABBI MOSHE SILBERHAFT**  
**"THE TRAVELLING RABBI"**

Rabbi to Country Communities - S A Jewish Board of Deputies  
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