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Editor
Cape Chronicle
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Dear Editor

The letter by Mrs Ann Harris that appeared in your 1April issue refers. Unfortunately, the SAJBD was not at the time provided with an opportunity to respond to the allegations it contained, and hence we would like to put the record straight on several key points Mrs Harris raises.

Regarding finances the SAJBD, like all communal organisations around the country, are confronted with severe budgetary constraints. This situation has progressively deteriorated to the point that we now have no choice but to engage in a process of assessing our core activities and the services we provide and restructuring where appropriate. All donor funds received must be treated with the highest level of care and must be put to optimum use. Country Communities was one of the areas on which we regrettably had to focus. The fact that the demographic profile of the Jewish community has greatly changed over the decades, with far fewer community members today living outside the main urban centres than in previous years, was also a factor. We are engaging in an extensive process of consultation and investigation to find the most appropriate solution to ensure the continuation of these services in a more cost efficient manner.

Regarding the question raised around transparency, and contrary to Mrs Harris' concerns that transparency is lacking, there has in fact been ongoing consultation with all stakeholders regarding the Country Communities. These include reports in the Jewish media, meetings with the trustees of country communities, regular communications with Jewish residents still residing in the rural areas and, for an extended period, meetings of the SAJBD itself. Mrs Harris attends our NEC meetings as an invited guest, and is therefore aware of the many discussions that have taken place in that forum.

To date we have not communicated a solution, not due to a lack of transparency, but because no such solution exists at this stage. As we continue to explore a viable options for Country Communities, there will be appropriate consultations with the relevant stakeholders As per Rabbi Moshe Silberhaft's accompanying letter, Rabbi Silberhaft has been and continues to be fully involved in all aspects of this process.

Regarding the relationship between the SAJBD and the African Jewish Congress (AJC), it must be clarified that the latter is not a constituent part of the SAJBD but an independent, organisation which is separately funded and has its own governing board. In order to assist in its establishment, the Board has since its inception, provided the AJC with administrative support as well as seconding Rabbi Silberhaft to act as Spiritual Leader to its member countries. However, this support for the AJC is unrelated to the SAJBD's role in Country Communities. When we were in a position to do so, we were happy to assist the AJC. While the restructure of Country Communities will be mindful of the needs of the AJC, with limited resources, our priority now must be to the needs of SA Jewry.

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Together with Rabbi Silberhaft, we are engaging continuously with the AJC leadership and all other stakeholders, including Mrs Harris. In February this year, our National President Mary Kluk attended and spoke at the AJC conference in Cape Town, giving a full briefing on the situation and remaining for the duration of the conference in order to engage with delegates and answer their questions. Through these engagements, we hope to contribute to a workable solution that enables this important organisation to continue the good work that it does in the future and to provide appropriate support.

In conclusion, I want to assure the readers and the community that the SAJBD is making every effort to balance a necessary process of cost-cutting and streamlining with ensuring that we fulfill our mandate and objectives on behalf of South African Jewry. Rather than ill-informed attacks in the media or in other forums, we ask those concerned to constructively engage with us to assist in this regard.

Regards

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National Chairman

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National Vice Chairman