



Durban Launches Mandela Book Road Show

The landmark publication *Jewish Memories of Mandela*, presented last month at the National Conference of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD), was launched to the public on 20 September at the Circle Café. The event was a joint function of the Council of KwaZulu-Natal Jewry (CKNJ) and the Durban Holocaust Centre.

David Simpson, President of the CKNJ, called the hard-backed, fully illustrated publication a “magnificent coffee table book”. It covers Mandela’s history, early activism, Treason Trial, armed struggle, Rivonia Trial, prison years, release, presidency and his role in healing the nation. There is also a dedicated chapter on Mandela and Israel. It is the first project to chronicle the extent to which Jewish men and women were involved in the life and career of Nelson Mandela.

“It was an honour to have [author] David Saks with us to explain the motivations behind the writing of the book,” explained Mary Kluk, newly elected National Chairman of the SAJBD. “Knowing what goes into the process, understanding the thoughts behind it, makes it so much more meaningful than just a collection of historical documents.”

In his address, Saks explained: “It is crucial that this not be seen as an exercise in collective Jewish bragging,” Saks noted. “The way I see it, it is a bit like a public school taking pride in those old boys who went on to achieve fame and fortune in later life. It is legitimate for them to do so; no-one would accuse them of suggesting that every one of their pupils went on to similar accomplishments.”

The project intends to promote Mandela’s legacy, to honour those Jews who played such significant roles in his story, and to serve as an inspiration to Jews both in South Africa and abroad.

“We aim to encourage the greater Jewish community to identify more strongly with South Africa today by showing how much Jewish individuals (and after 1990, organisations as well) have been and continue to be involved in its transformation,” said Saks. “This hopefully will help to counter feelings of negativity and incorrect perceptions that as whites, Jews have no real stake or future in the country.”

Mandela himself is quoted in the book on the importance of learning from the past: “While we can all agree that the past should not be permitted to become a burden, it would be extremely short-sighted to dismiss it. Your own example of the Holocaust teaches that one must learn from the past, not ignore it.”

It is therefore extremely significant that the launch took place at the Durban Holocaust Centre. “Both Mandela himself and the members of the Jewish community so beautifully portrayed in this book are role models as activists in the fight against human rights abuses. This resonates so much with what we are trying to do with the Durban Holocaust Centre,” said Kluk, who also pioneered the Durban Holocaust Centre.

Jewish Memories of Mandela is published under the joint auspices of the SAJBD and the Umoja Foundation and is available at the Durban Holocaust Centre Gift Shop for R400. For more information contact Michelle Meikle on 031 3681766.

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