

CALL TO ACTION

2012 WILL BE THE YEAR TO ADDRESS THE CHALLENGES FACING SOUTH AFRICA

BY WENDY KAHN

JANUARY ARRIVES AND WE GREET THE new calendar year with anticipation. Fresh new school uniforms, pristine schoolbooks wrapped in colourful paper, eager little faces arriving to meet their new teachers, ready for the excitement that 2012 brings with it.

In our work environments, there is also a freshness that a new year brings. Re-energised and reinvigorated by some time away from the stresses of life, we arrive armed with a renewed willingness to contribute in a meaningful way to our organisations and businesses.

But, many in our country do not return to well-equipped and functioning schools, and of course many South Africans do not have jobs waiting for them, what with a disturbing unemployment rate of 25%. The new year arrives with anxiety and apprehension for these learners and job seekers. It's difficult for these South Africans to share this optimism and renewed energy.

At the SAJBD conference in August last year, deputy president Kgalema Motlanthe said, "I believe that the SAJBD is well positioned to help us answer some of these challenges, because of the skills, knowledge and influence your members wield as significant role-players in the SA economy. Education remains central to our developmental agenda, and the goal of building a prosperous, stable and cohesive society. With this in mind, we have linked education and skills training as the core part of our Core Growth Path in enabling employment and job creation."

The deputy president's call to action will become central to our activities in the coming year. We believe there are already so many worthwhile projects being run by our community members in the pivotal areas of education and job creation. We call on individuals and communal organisations to share with us the projects, initiatives and drives that they have been involved with



Deputy president Kgalema Motlanthe

“We can play our part in making the caring society a reality. Let's rise to the challenge in 2012!”

that have made a difference in these areas to our country's development. It doesn't matter how big or how small, how humble or how grandiose the initiatives, please let us know how you have impacted on education or job creation in our country. In this way, we will be able to compile a comprehensive response to this appeal. You can email sajbod@beyachad.co.za.

In another critical area of need in our country, the SAJBD was approached recently to present on an interfaith panel at the SAHARA Conference on HIV/Aids, which was held in Port Elizabeth on World Aids day (1 December 2011), to share how our community is responding to this pandemic. While we know that extensive work is being done by individuals in our community as well as by our Jewish NGOs, we were still

heartened to learn of the amazing work of so many Jewish South Africans to alleviate the suffering caused by this disease.

Contributions by some Jewish NGOs include the Afrika Tikun's programmes for home-based care and support for child- and granny-headed households, CHIVA's programmes for bringing British and Irish doctors to SA to train local healthcare professionals in administering ARVs, Operation Abraham's programme to train South Africans in adult circumcision procedures, and the varied work of the Union of Jewish Women, including soup kitchens which provide food that is essential for patients receiving treatment at the hospitals. The initiatives I mention are just a few of the many worthwhile projects operating in a community committed to confronting the social issues caused by HIV/Aids.

The late former Chief Rabbi Harris, of blessed memory, said in his book, *For Heaven's Sake*: "In the South Africa of today we are under a definite moral obligation to contribute our Jewish talents and expertise for the benefit of the population at large... Espousing the honourable viewpoint to replace despair with hope, we can play our part in making the caring society a reality." Let's rise to the challenge in 2012! **IL**