Former South African chief justice: We should resume ‘healthy relations’ with Israel

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<https://www.jpost.com/christianworld/article-719464>

Healthy diplomatic relations between South Africa and Israel should resume in the not-too-distant future, according to former South African chief justice Mogoeng Mogoeng.

“I am confident that with the prayers that are going on – there is a team that holds [prayers for the peace of Jerusalem](https://www.jpost.com/international/article-718425) every Saturday back home – at one point, and I believe not far from today, that will become a practical reality,” Mogoeng told *The Jerusalem Post* during his first visit to Israel on Tuesday.

“I really can’t speak for the government...All I can say is this: The minute the overwhelming majority come to terms with the heartbeat of God regarding the relationship between our country and Israel, the easier it will be for their voice to be heard when it says, ‘Let’s have a healthy relationship between our country and Israel.’”

South Africa’s ANC government, traditionally [a strong supporter of the Palestinian cause](https://www.jpost.com/bds-threat/article-713140), recalled its ambassador in 2018 following violence along the Israel-Gaza border and announced a year later that it had officially downgraded its embassy in Israel to a liaison office.

Mogoeng, a devout Christian who served as chief justice from 2011 to 2021, is in Israel with his wife, Mmaphefo, and a 90-member delegation from South Africa as part of the annual Feast of the Tabernacles.

On Wednesday, the [International Christian Embassy Jerusalem](https://www.jpost.com/christianworld/article-719322) – which organizes the annual gathering of Christians from around the world – presented him its Nechemia Award “for his courageous biblical stand with Israel, which has contributed greatly to the just and moral cause of the Jewish nation and people.”

In response to receiving the award, Mogoeng said, “I’m overwhelmed. It’s a great honor. What better present can you ever get than to be recognized for your little contribution and to be appreciated by fellow Christians and in the Holy Land.”

More than 2,000 Christians are participating in the [week-long festivities for the Feast of the Tabernacles](https://www.jpost.com/christianworld/article-719040), which culminate in a colorful march through the streets of Jerusalem on Thursday afternoon.

A forced apology

Asked about the [apology he was forced to make](https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/south-africa-chief-justice-appeals-demand-to-apologize-for-comments-on-israel-661978) on February 3 by South Africa’s Judicial Conduct Committee after telling a webinar organized by*the Post* in 2020 that South Africa had deprived itself of “a wonderful opportunity of being a game-changer in the Israeli-Palestinian situation,” Mogoeng said the country’s highest court had vindicated him in mid-February.

The Constitutional Court rejected an application by the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) to recuse him from a hate speech case concerning Bongani Masuku, Cosatu’s former international relations secretary. (The court later ordered Masuku to apologize to the Jewish community for antisemitic comments he made 13 years ago.)

“Look at what the highest court in the land had to say about that Jerusalem Post saga,” Mogoeng said, taking out a copy of its ruling: “It’s an untenable stretch to characterize Mogoeng CJ’s comments as expressing ‘unconditional support for the State of Israel’ when the context quite evidently shows that Mogoeng CJ was communicating his biblical love for all, including Israel and Palestine, and his opinion on South Africa’s painful past and unique perspective which enables it to advocate for peace in the global context.”

In other words, Mogoeng said, “I was made to apologize for what the highest court in the land says I shouldn’t have been ordered to apologize for.... So I thank God, who came through for me and announced through a court whose decision cannot be appealed, that I had [done] nothing wrong. I did nothing wrong.”

Mogoeng said he had been deeply impressed by his first visit to Israel this week.

“It makes the Bible more real than I ever thought it could be,” he said. “To visit the sites and the Holy Land itself has been an amazing experience...It’s an amazing experience to see how the different nationalities converge here, the different ethnic groups, and even the different religions. The coexistence is amazing.”

Although he steered away from politics in the interview, Mogoeng said regarding his own religious beliefs and Israel, “I believe in Genesis 12, verses 1 to 4. I believe that my love for Israel and my love for the Jews, without excluding my love for others, my refusal to curse the Jews, and my refusal to curse Israel, cause me to be blessed. I also believe that any nation that adopts that stance, that chooses to love Israel, to bless Israel and not to curse Israel, will receive the blessings of Abraham. That’s my belief.”