



Morrison at UIA

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Bye bye Bibi?

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Inspired by Sharansky  
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# THE Australian Jewish News

Sydney edition 6506. \$3.80 (including GST)

Friday, May 7, 2021 - Iyar 25, 5781

## MOUNT MERON: AUSTRALIA MOURNS WITH ISRAEL

# 'WE ARE ALL HURTING'

EVAN ZLATKIS

THE Sydney Jewish community will come together tonight (Thursday) to honour those killed – and to pray for those injured – in Israel's deadliest ever civilian disaster.

At least 45 people, including over a dozen children and teenagers, died and more than 150 were hurt, at a mass gathering to celebrate Lag b'Omer at Mount Meron last Friday.

The deaths and injuries occurred when crowds of ultra-Orthodox worshippers were crushed together as a number of those in attendance lost their balance on a slippery exit passageway after the 100,000-strong celebration.

Israel on Sunday marked a national day of mourning over the crush, with world leaders including Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison sending their condolences to the Jewish state.

Rabbi Eliezer Gostetner of Sydney's Coogee Synagogue, a distant cousin of Rabbi Shragi Gostetner, a father of five, who visited Israel from Canada for the celebration and became a victim of the crush, told *The AJN* that "although Shragi was a distant relative to me, he was a very special human being, and his loss really makes the great sadness of the tragedy at Mount Meron hit home".

At 6pm tonight (Thursday), members of the community are invited to join an evening of unity at the Harry Triguboff Centre in Flood Street, Bondi, to pay their respects.

Guest speakers on the evening will include Executive Council of



A mourner at the funeral of Moshe Ben Shalom, one of the victims of the Lag b'Omer tragedy. Photo AP Photo/Oded Balilty

Australian Jewry co-CEO Alex Rychin, JNF NSW education shaliach Yigal Nisli, Israel Trade Commissioner Shai Zarbach, and Rabbis David Slavin and Chaim Levy.

Expressing disbelief at the events, Rychin said, "How is it that righteous men performing a mitzvah on a holy day at the tomb of a tzaddik met their end?"

"And not by the hand of some terrorist butcher but under the feet of our own, squeezed and stamped in panic."

"How could such a thing happen? Why did such a thing happen?"

Saying, "It is a time of great tragedy and a time for us to stand together in prayer for healing for the bereaved and the injured,"

Rabbi Slavin told *The AJN*, "The underlying message of Lag b'Omer is celebration of Jewish unity. In times of challenge, unity is always important and particularly with regard to Lag b'Omer."

Meanwhile, Australian Friends of Magen David Adom (MDA) noted that a number of the ambulances that assisted those injured in the tragedy were donated by the local Jewish community.

"The Australian Friends of Magen David Adom are devastated by the loss of life, but we are very proud of the professional preparation and response by Magen David Adom, Israel's national rescue and emergency medical and blood service," president of Australian Friends of MDA Tony Ziegler told *The AJN*.

"Our donors have funded multiple ambulances which were at the scene and used in the evacuation of the wounded. The Magen David Adom blood drive received over 2200 units of blood to replenish Magen David Adom's blood bank, including from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

"We thank and look forward to the continued support of our community."

In a letter to Netanyahu, Morrison sent his "deepest condolences and prayers to you and the people of Israel".

He added, "It is heartbreaking that such a loss of life and significant injury and distress should occur at Israel's resumed celebration of the festival of Lag b'Omer. Israel and Australia share a deep

and longstanding friendship – an international covenant of community has persisted for decades. We share the joys but we also share the heartaches. Israel is now hurting and we send our prayers to support you at this time."

In shules across Australia on Shabbat, rabbis reflected on the disaster. Caulfield Hebrew Congregation's Rabbi Ralph Genende later reflected to *The AJN* on "a time of elation becoming one of desperation ... Pain exacerbated by the reports that this was a disaster waiting to happen, that politics prevented proper crowd control, that disregard for rules, including COVID caution, contributed to the terror of this tragedy".

Expressing the solidarity of the Australian Jewish community, Zionist Federation of Australia president Jeremy Leibler said, "We are all hurting," while Colin Rubenstein, executive director of the Australia/Israel & Jewish Affairs Council said, "We are deeply shaken."

United Israel Appeal CEO Yair Miller lamented "the tragic and senseless loss of life", while JNF Australia president Ronit Fraid said, "The JNF family remains deeply shocked and saddened."

Union for Progressive Judaism co-presidents Brian Samuel and David Knoll stated the disaster "causes pain for the entire Jewish community worldwide".

An Evening of Unity is at 6pm on Thursday, at Harry Triguboff Centre, 36 Flood Street, Bondi. To find out how you can support Australian Friends of MDA, visit [magendavidadom.org.au](http://magendavidadom.org.au)

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