

Letters to the Editor

A common goal in Congo

In response to "Israeli doctors in Congo to aid burn victims get slammed for occupation," July 18, and "Israeli medical delegation in Congo takes heat while trying to soothe burns," July 19

These articles are erroneous in their suggestion that collaboration between the Medecins Sans Frontieres/Doctors Without Borders team and Israeli burn specialists from the Sheba Medical Center was difficult due to anti-Israel sentiment on the part of MSF staff. No such sentiment was expressed by any member of my team, at any time during or after the treatment.

The reality is that, while treating burn victims from the recent fuel tanker explosion in eastern Congo, the MSF and Israeli teams on the ground collaborated extremely well and appreciated each other's contribution in helping the patients. Both medical teams shared the common goal of providing the best possible treatment to those most in need.

MSF has been working in the Democratic Republic of Congo since 1981 and we will continue to provide quality medical care to our thousands of patients in the country. Our work is based on humanitarian principles and is guided by medical ethics and impartiality. MSF is not anti-Israel – indeed we pride ourselves on being a neutral organization.

Grace Tang
Head of Mission
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Between freedom of expression and academic freedom

In response to "Profs against free speech," August 2

"Freedom of expression" and "academic freedom" are two different concepts. Every person is entitled to express his or her opinion, as long as they do not incite to break the law. While we may find someone's opinions acceptable or detestable, they are no more than the views of the person expressing them.

Academic freedom is inherently different. It is the freedom given to a university researcher to conduct research as well as to publish it, without any political intervention on the part of the government or university authori-

ties; it is also the freedom to voice opinions based on research. Academic freedom is the lifeblood of academia. Without this freedom there is no academia worthy of the name.

The freedom possessed by an academic to voice a political or moral opinion, which does not stem from a scientific study, is freedom of expression and not academic freedom – just as the freedom to express an opinion, on the part of any person who is not an academic, is freedom of expression.

Emmanuel Sharon
Mevasseret Zion

Not drying up, getting polluted

In response to "Water, hypocrisy and politics," August 1

Israel is not drying up at all, nor since the establishment of the state has there been a situation where the heads of the water economy had at their disposal such a large variety of resources in a range of quality levels – allowing for proper handling of a series of drought years.

The campaign slogan should not be "Israel is drying up," but "Israel is getting polluted." Growing sections of the coastal aquifer and within the Arava are dropping out of the production system due to salinity and contamination – no less challenging a problem than the quantitative shortage.

A plan to restore the southern coastal aquifer between the edge of the Gaza Strip and Ashdod was recently approved, and parts of it have already been implemented. The fight against contamination and the increased salinity of natural water resources requires, beyond monetary resources, interministerial cooperation given that the Water Authority does not control a wide variety of sources of human pollution. For example generated by criminal industries, absorption pits, farms, pirate garbage dumps, irrigated agricultural plots and seepage from urban areas and roads.

The successful efforts to restore the natural water resources, while simultaneously replacing fresh water with treated sewerage and developing desalination facilities to treat sea water, will allow for proper and calm management of the water economy. This can be accomplished without frightening the public with draconian fines and empty slogans.

Regarding the water conservation campaign, the general public has cooperated with the call to

save, except for the kibbutzim and moshavim where, for some reason, "agricultural" water continues to be used for non-agricultural purposes. Many citizens are also using gray water, whether through primitive means or expensive systems.

Israeli agriculture has done wonders by international standards through the use of treated sewerage water, and in reducing the amount of water used per unit of area and per ton of produce – a large part of it through the use of treated sewerage. However, it must be made clear that the savings potential of [lessening] domestic use in Israel is relatively small quantitatively, because water consumption here is efficient and very sparing in comparison to other countries – both on the systemic level and the level of individual use.

Therefore, pressure should not be exerted on the public beyond establishing reasonable rate brackets: If you use less than 60 percent of the household allocation, you will be charged a discounted rate; between 60 and 80 percent, you pay cost price; and above 80 percent, you pay a higher rate of three or four times the cost price.

David Elkan
Karmeit Yosef

Young Brits see themselves here

In response to "A Zionist snapshot of UK Jews," August 6

Anshel Pfeffer complains that "the JPR [Jewish Policy Research] report does not include a breakdown according to age groups." It does. The survey states that 20% of respondents had already lived in Israel and 22% thought it likely that they would live in Israel in the future – a figure that rises to one third in terms of all 18-39 year olds (my emphasis). This is an astonishing statistic: One third of the younger sector of British Jewry thinks it likely they will live in Israel at some point. They don't seem to be as worried about the political situation as Anshel Pfeffer.

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