

HUG Speech - Aaron Kruss van der Heever

Good morning all

It truly is a privilege to be standing here before you all. The briefing I was tasked with, was to deliver a summation of Habonim today, and to where I foresee it heading. In order to do this, I'd like to first begin with a story, which will act in highlighting the one thing that underpins anyone's experience in the movement and in fact the Jewish people as a whole; connection and memory.

I arrived here on Saturday and was thrust into a series of conferences preceding a mazkirim seminar with Habonim Dror Olami. Despite a series of political disruptions and challenges, the world movement is alive and well. I joined delegates from Uruguay, Mexico, Belgium, The United States, Australia, the UK, Argentina and the Netherlands to discuss what it means to be part of something bigger, learn about each other's challenges and progress- and connect with people of similar age as myself, who do the same thing as me; for the most part in a completely different community, and with a different language and set of guidelines for Hadracha and Tochniot.

During this Seminar, we travelled up north to Kibbutz Degania, the first Kibbutz. To take in the rich culture and past of a place which laid foundations for so much progress in Eretz Yisrael was a true pleasure. Habonim has forever been and will forever be linked with the idea and history of chalutzim, and promoting our members to make aliyah to work the motherland and create a strong and virtuous society within it- a responsibility that many individuals standing here today took to heart.

It was there that I happened to serendipitously stumble upon my kvutzah speaking to a green thumb who was interested in the nations from which we hailed. He perked up after hearing that I was from South Africa. He introduced himself as Idan, the son of a Shaliach to Johannesburg from (Find out dates)- Uzzi. He was left in awe when I managed to recount his father's surname and trademark bushy chest and outrageous sideburns. I was then fortuitously able to provide him with a video clip of our very own Stephen Pincus on national television during his time as mazkir, where he featured showing off what Habonim in those days looked like. In this place, was my pleasure to further a connection by using memory.

This iconic TV excerpt has become a bit of a running callback in the Johannesburg ken. It was screened as an icebreaker in one of our Friday night bogrim meetings, and became an instant hit based on just how little has changed since those times- bar haircuts and facial hair, the revival of which I consider myself a chalutz of sort!

These Friday night meetings are a key facet of life in Habonim today. A space for our bogrim to socialise, connect, debate and laugh at the end of a long week enables us to cultivate a learned, motivated, and cohesive bogrim body in a time of personal life distractions and constant reordering of Habonim's place in one's priority stack. Game shows, skits, current affairs, quizzes, shlichsville imitations and lots more- these have been the highlight of my week since I was granted passage to them as a shomrim channich half a decade ago. Any Shabbat would feel incomplete without them, and I am overjoyed that I am able to tie Habonim into my fulfilment at every level- socially, educationally and spiritually.

Throughout my Habonim career, these meetings have been the only weekly scheduled programming. I still get hopeful questions or queries from ex-chaverim on the status of the weekly Sunday Channich meetups. And while these are no more, it should be the job of any chaver to accept the natural order of things changing, fading or growing post their time in leadership or the movement altogether. I can be assured the Hadracha skills gained by madrichim, as well as the things learnt and connections made by these channichim of years passed have had a positive ripple effect on the very fabric of Habonim itself.

In the aforementioned clip, Stephen sums up Habonim's operational framework as follows. He reminds the audience that we are the builders, and that we have a responsibility to build. *Livnot v' Libanot*. By developing young people's characters, by working and building a better society in which to live and by working on the building of the Jewish state and people. This mission statement is one that I identify strongly with when looking back at the trajectory of my term until now.

Development of character is done by creating positive, authentic relationships with our channies, and then strengthening these with the help of our foolproof educational style as carried out by our expertly trained and enthusiastic madrichim. For madrichim, we have an April Hadracha seminar, as well as ongoing hadracha development throughout the year to ensure that Habonim Southern Africa is the pedigree of informal education in this country, and arguably the entire planet.

Currently, I would say our next priority would be the Building of the Jewish State and people. Habo today strives to create conscientious individuals, as influenced by progressive interpretations and applications of Jewish values- while also ensuring that our members get to grapple with and comprehend our constitutionally and culturally mandated understanding of Zionism in addition to their own feelings and connections with the state, its people and history itself. Our 3 week shorashim trip for Sayarim Channichim, our continuous stream of Shnat hachshara participants and our contributions to our local Jewish spaces and communities go a long way to vouch for just how centrally these values are placed in Habonim today.

Stephen aptly describes how we achieve his mission statement by stating that "We do this by creating an educationally and socially stimulating environment." I am overjoyed that we are a mere 33 days from Machaneh Hashiva Habayita- Homecoming. Our chance to take full ownership of such an environment. I will not rest until I ensure that as many Jewish children as I can reach get a chance to come to connect with one another and create lifelong memories on the dawn of the 60th anniversary on our heaven-on-earth Onrus campsite. I mean, after all, are you not all here due to having this very privilege? Teenagers and pre-teens today are a very complicated and nuanced demographic, which require the utmost nurturing in order to Fastrack the developmental shunting caused by the pandemic. Our bogrim body has the opportunity to, from the ground up, instil Habonim values, culture and traditions into an entirely new generation.

This is no doubt a challenge, but one that I relish. One that Alex, Hannah, Brad, Sasha, Daniel and Brynn relish as well! The onus falls on us to be the bearers of the torch. To

inspire a relatively unknown youthful- phenomenon into understanding the gravity of going through a youth movement, and taking the time out to open up to learning about themselves and others.

I thank all of you who took the time to inspire and take interest in me over the last 2 days, as well as those who still plan on today. It is incredibly motivating to know that we have this worldwide network of people who have stood where I stand, had the thoughts that I have thought, and combated the faceless and formless challenges of their time. I think as a web of mostly left-leaning people in a world where we are increasingly battling the shifting status quo, we have a responsibility to create *shot-fu-yot* and help one another and our local movement which ties us all together. We cannot ever face a reality where all these memories are for nothing, and there no longer exists a space for those to come to make more.

Just like when I was on degania, 6598 KM from our Johannesburg bayit and 7632 Kilometers from my childhood home in Cape Town, we are able to create connections through memory. Nothing will better encapsulate Habonim Dror Today than the idea that to get anywhere, we need to be constantly oscillating between looking forward and backwards.

In the spirit of the fading **Southern African** spirit and legacy of Habonim which I have been very happy to observe be expertly honoured and recounted by many chaverim over the last 3 days, I would like to end with an addition to the usual Habonim address conclusion.

A Luta Continua- The struggle continues.

Chazak Ve'ematz
Aleh Ve'Hagshem