South African Jews celebrate first criminal conviction for online anti-Semitism

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South African Jews this week celebrated what they said was an unprecedented criminal conviction, handed down for anti-Semitic Twitter posts calling for action against Jews worse than the Holocaust.

On Friday, the Randburg Magistrates Court found Matome Letsoalo guilty of crimen injuria — a crime [defined as](https://www.saps.gov.za/faqdetail.php?fid=9) “unlawfully and intentionally impairing the dignity or privacy of another person” — for two tweets targeting the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD).

“This was the first-ever criminal verdict in an anti-Semitism case in South Africa,” the group said in a statement.

Sentencing is set for Friday.

In June 2018, Letsoalo had tweeted: “@SAJBD The #Holocaust Will be like a Picnic When we are done with all you Zionist Bastards. Fuck All of You,” together with images of Holocaust victims and a swastika.

In a second tweet, Letsoalo — a man in his 20s from Polokwane, in the north of the country — wrote that the SAJBD “Must get Decimated. We Can’t have Scandanavian Rats, Fake Jews, Zionist Bastards Running our Economy.”

The SAJBD pressed charges against him at the time, leading Twitter to suspend the account. This week, the Jewish umbrellla group hailed the court’s verdict as a vindication of its efforts.

“This outcome sends a strong message that threatening and hate-filled attacks on our community will not be tolerated and that the SAJBD will do everything necessary to bring those responsible to justice, no matter how long it takes,” the group’s chairwoman, Wendy Kahn, said.

“We are so delighted with the outcome of this case as it is the first time that we have gone the criminal route with an anti-Semitism case. This is an important precedent in terms of future anti-Semitism cases, including other matters that we have currently sitting in the courts,” she told The Times of Israel on Tuesday.

Kahn did not want to predict Letsoalo’s sentence, but stressed that the court clearly approached the matter with great seriousness. “Since this is a criminal case, it is led by a state prosecutor and not the SAJBD, and as such it was for him to address the magistrate on sentencing, which is a process that happened in chambers.”