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Hundreds of Israelis, angry with police violence at home, protest the George Floyd killing in Tel Aviv

BY SAM SOKOL JUNE 2, 2020 5:38 PM



Chaya Lev addresses the crowd at a protest in Tel Aviv against the killing of George Floyd, June 2, 2020. (Sam Sokol)

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TEL AVIV (JTA) – As Kielahitl Barton stood across from the former American downtown beach, a large crowd around her chanted slogans calling for racial

“Why am I here? I’m black as hell and my skin color is the first thing that pe

A Jewish immigrant from the New York City borough of Queens, Barton wa streets of Tel Aviv on Tuesday evening to protest the killing of George Floyd

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teenager shot by an off-duty police officer last year.



Hundreds showed up to the protest outside the former American embassy in Tel Aviv, June 2, 2020. (Sam Sokol)

They also called for justice for Iyad Halak, 32, an autistic Palestinian man who was shot and killed by Israeli Border Police on Saturday morning. Defense Minister Benny Gantz has apologized for the shooting and one of the officers involved was placed under house arrest. A second was released from police custody and placed under restrictive conditions.

Many of the African-American immigrants who spoke at the rally described a sense of helplessness in the face of violence, but also of a resolve to push for change. Barton said she was scared for her siblings back in New York, all of whom had joined the protests there, which in some areas had turned violent.

Her sentiment was repeated by others with family in the U.S.

“I want you to pay attention to how f****ing long this list of names is that we are about to read,” organizer Gavriel Chichester, an African-American Jewish man originally from Washington, D.C., told the demonstrators through a megaphone. “Imagine moving across the world, making aliyah to Israel and being worried halfway across the world that your family members are gonna die at home and you can’t go f****ing see them.”

“Black lives,” he screamed, almost crying.

“Matter,” the crowd chanted back.

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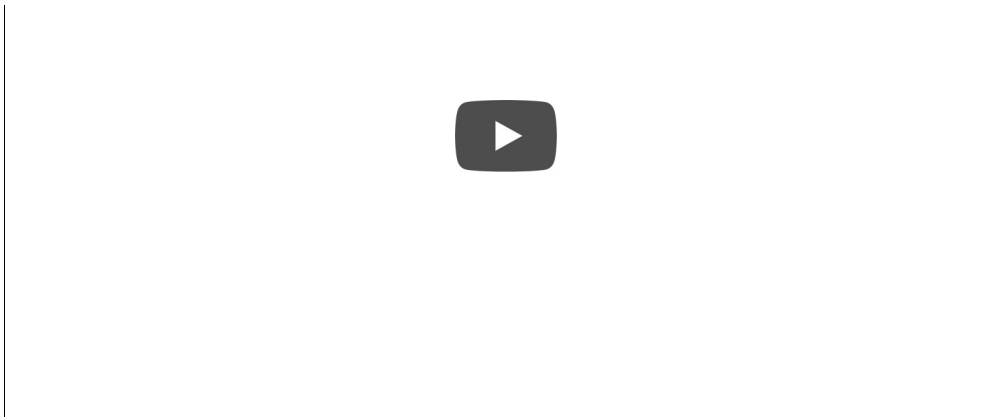
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Floyd's death while in police custody in Minneapolis hit many black Israelis hard. Last summer, tens of thousands here took to the streets to protest Tekah's death. His killing came six months after Yehuda Biadga, 24, a mentally ill Ethiopian Israeli, was shot and killed by police who say he charged an officer while brandishing a knife. His death led to demonstrations throughout Tel Aviv.

In May 2015, similar protests erupted following the beating of an Ethiopian-Israeli soldier by two police officers that was filmed and widely distributed. Those protests devolved into riots in which police officers fired stun grenades, water cannons and tear gas to disperse the demonstrators, who threw rocks and glass bottles at police and also vandalized some storefronts.

More than 144,000 Jews of Ethiopian descent live in Israel. The Ethiopian community has long complained of racial discrimination, especially at the hands of law enforcement. Ethiopian soldiers are sent to military prison at a disproportionately higher rate than other groups and are arrested in civilian life at a higher rate than the general population.



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Israeli protesters compare police violence against African Americans to the killing of Ethiopian Jews, June 2, 2020. (Sam Sokol)

“We see this daily in Israel,” said protester Masagnu Amsalo, an Ethiopian Jew. “We couldn’t sleep when we saw this police racism. It’s here and in the U.S. Yesterday it happened in the United States and tomorrow it’ll be here in Israel.”

Chaya Lev, an African-American Jewish woman originally from Los Angeles, echoed her fellow protester.

“I felt so powerless and couldn’t sleep for three days,” Lev said. “I’m just here to get justice for this senselessness.”

“You can not like me, just don’t shoot me,” she added.

 **Sam Sokol**
@SamuelSokol

African-American Israelis, Ethiopian Israelis and allies protesting against police violence in Israel and the US outside the US Embassy annex in TLV



109 12:49 PM - Jun 2, 2020

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Floyd’s death, the latest in a series of killings of unarmed black men by American police, has sparked nationwide protests over what many see as deep-rooted institutional racism in the United States.

In Tel Aviv, many of the protesters, while not black themselves, said they felt morally obligated to come out and make a statement. They spread word of the grassroots rally via social media.

Benji Lovitt, an American-Israeli comedian, said he felt it was his “civic resp the U.S.

“I grew up as a Jew in America spending so much time following the news in back at America and worrying about the future of that country.”

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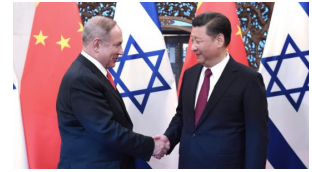
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