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Mordechai Vanunu still in restricted freedom

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On 26 July 2004, Israel's High Court of Justice rejected the request made by Mordechai Vanunu that it should lift the restrictions that were placed on him on 21 April when he was released from prison.

WHY 18 YEARS IN PRISON ?



In the mid-1980s Vanunu was working as a technician at the Dimona nuclear research center and discovered that the center was really being used to build nuclear weapons. This caused him to reflect. His conscience disapproved of Israel building such arms, at a time when it was officially declared that Israel would not be the first state to introduce such weapons of mass destruction into the Middle East (this remains the official claim, but nobody believes it). In 1986, following his conscience, Vanunu resolved to pass on to the London "Sunday Times" the evidence that Dimona was being used for undeclared military purposes. He was in London when the "Sunday Times" published the revealing article. The Israeli secret services first succeeded in getting him out of Britain, then they kidnapped him, they drugged him and they carried him to Israel in a cargo boat. There they tried him, behind closed doors, before a military tribunal which accused him of treason and condemned him to 18 years in prison.

WHY ONGOING RESTRICTIONS NOW ?

Mordechai Vanunu has served those 18 years, including 12 of them in isolation. Now he should be free to go where he wishes. But apparently that is insufficient, since the Israeli government has subjected him to severe restrictions. Living in St George's Cathedral in Jerusalem (he converted to Christianity in 1986), he is really a prisoner within the borders of Israel, under a kind of house arrest. He is forbidden to meet foreigners, to move within 300 meters of a foreign embassy, to travel abroad, and even to renounce Israeli citizenship - which he has asked to do. "Israel is not my country... My country is elsewhere. Israel has not respected me for 18 years. Israel convicted me 18 years ago as a traitor and spy... I don't want to live in Israel any more. I want to be free to leave." He emphasises that he revealed back in 1986 all that he knew about Israel's nuclear program, and that after 18 years in prison there is no risk of his holding the tiniest secret to disclose. These restrictions seem to be more motivated by vindictiveness than by any real security concern; in any case, they have already caused more harm to Israel than to Vanunu himself.

IS ISRAEL A DEMOCRACY ?

Vanunu followed his conscience and denounced the dangers of nuclear arms - it cost him 18 years in prison. He has continued to do so: despite the ban, he succeeded in giving an interview to the Arab newspaper "Al Hayat" (published in London) in which he denounced the dangers posed by the Dimona reactor to millions of people, if only through the risks of an earthquake (a high risk in that region) which would release worse radioactivity than Chernobyl. The prevailing winds mean that Jordan would suffer worst, and of course the nearest parts of Israel (iodine pills have recently been distributed to Israelis). Vanunu deplored also the fact that when the IAEA director Mohammad ElBaradei visited Israel recently he could not inspect the Dimona center as he had done to centers in Iraq and Iran. Vanunu continues to work for a Middle East without weapons of mass destruction, and for a world free of all these weapons. Everybody who shares this goal must support his right to leave Israel.

When the Jerusalem High Court announced its decision, Vanunu declared: "We have kept on saying that Israel is not a true democracy, and now we see that this is true at the level of the High Court. The whole world can now see that Israel is a two-faced state. But we will find a way of surviving and continuing to claim the right to live in freedom." In the view of his lawyer Dan Yakir, it is clear that the restrictions imposed on Vanunu violate fundamental human rights. The right to emigrate and to change nationality was for many years denied to Jews in the Soviet Union. Today, Israel imposes the status of "refuznik" on one of its citizens because he contested an aspect of state policy. Is that logical? And is it logical that a State based on the condemnation of the Holocaust should be dependent for its survival on threatening a nuclear holocaust which would kill millions of people, including many Israelis? This is the absurdity which Vanunu is denouncing, as do numerous other Israelis. As do we.

FREEING VANUNU IS AN ACTION FOR PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Vanunu and his lawyers could now appeal to the Supreme Court, composed of three judges; but such appeals are usually rejected. Yet there is another opportunity to change the Israeli government's policy towards him: on 21 October, six months after his release from prison, the restrictions imposed on him will be reexamined. Eight days later, on 29-31 October, the Rally for International Disarmament, Nuclear, Chemical and Biological (RID-NBC) will take place in Saintes (FRANCE). Vanunu has been invited to speak to members of the French, European and international movement for the elimination of all weapons of mass destruction, and to the world's media. His forced absence would make a very bad impression and would certainly harm the democratic image that Israel likes to project. On the other hand, his presence could only be beneficial to the cause of peace in the Middle East, which we all know is a powder-keg. It is worth noting that when Mohammed ElBaradei visited Israel, the PM Ariel Sharon did not rule out reconsideration of Israel's weapons of mass destruction. He even envisaged - at a time when Iran is on the point of ending Israel's nuclear monopoly in the region - the Middle East becoming a "nuclear-weapon-free zone", in exchange for guarantees of sure and lasting peace for Israel. WHY NOT? AND WHY NOT NOW?

To do justice to a courageous man and to let him live where he wishes, to contribute to peace in the Middle East, to begin the nuclear, biological and chemical disarmament which the world so needs (including Palestine and Israel), we call on you to sign and circulate the international petition for the freedom of Mordechai Vanunu to leave Israel.

Saintes, 26 July 2004

ACDN France (Action of Citizens for Nuclear Disarmament),
member of the French network "Out of the Nuclear Age",
member of the international network "Abolition 2000"

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Please write to help Mordechai Vanunu leaving Israel.

SURNAME :First name.....

Nationality :

Title, office or profession :

Postal address :

To the Prime Minister of Israel, Ariel Sharon,

To the Minister of Justice Yosef Lapid and the Public Prosecutor Menachem Mazuz :

Mordechai Vanunu has served his sentence in full and has not been charged with any new crime.

Please permit him to leave Israel immediately.

Signature : or E-mail :

Return to : ACDN, 31 Rue du Cormier, 17100 - Saintes (France) or to : helpvanunu@acdn.net