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Israel: End arbitrary restrictions on Vanunu

As the Israeli Supreme Court today begins a hearing into the ongoing restrictions imposed on nuclear whistleblower Mordechai Vanunu following his release from prison over six years ago, Amnesty International reiterated its position that the restrictions are arbitrary and must be lifted.

The Supreme Court, sitting as the High Court of Justice, is due to review a petition submitted by lawyers on behalf of Mordechai Vanunu asking the Israeli authorities to annul the restrictions, which include a bar on him exiting Israel and communicating with foreigners. This is the fifth time that he has made such a request to the Supreme Court; all previous petitions have been unsuccessful.

A former technician at Israel's nuclear plant near the southern town of Dimona, Mordechai Vanunu revealed details of the country's nuclear arsenal to UK newspaper *The Sunday Times* in 1986. He was abducted by Mossad agents in Italy on 30 September 1986 and secretly taken to Israel where he was tried and sentenced to a prison term of 18 years on charges of treason and aggravated espionage. He spent the first 11 years of his sentence in solitary confinement.

Since his release from prison in April 2004, Mordechai Vanunu has been subject to police supervision under the terms of a draconian military order which has been renewed every six months. According to the order, he is banned from leaving the country, visiting foreign embassies and, more broadly, communicating with any foreigners, including foreign journalists; he must also inform the authorities if he wishes to change his address. Amnesty International considers that the restrictions are arbitrary and contrary to international law, particularly the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which Israel has ratified. It has repeatedly called on the Israeli authorities to allow him to leave the country if he wishes, and to exercise his rights to freedom of movement, association and expression while in Israel.

The restrictions have meant that Mordechai Vanunu has been unable to move to the USA to live with his adopted family, placing a huge strain on his mental and physical health. They are not parole restrictions since he served his full 18-year term.

Israeli officials claim that restricting Mordechai Vanunu's freedom is necessary to prevent him from divulging further secrets about Israel's nuclear programme. He has, however, repeatedly stated that he revealed all he knew about Israel's nuclear arsenal in 1986 and that he has no further information. He and his lawyers have also pointed out that the information he had at the time of his imprisonment more than 20 years ago has now long been in the public domain and is out of date.

Earlier this month, the Berlin-based International League for Human Rights announced that it would be awarding Mordechai Vanunu its 2010 Carl von Ossietzky medal. If the current restrictions remain in place he will not be able to collect the medal at the award ceremony scheduled to take place in Berlin on 12 December 2010.

On 30 April 2007, Mordechai Vanunu was convicted of breaching the restrictions imposed on him by speaking to foreigners and sentenced to six months in prison, reduced on appeal to three. He was arrested

and re-imprisoned on 23 May 2010, and held in solitary confinement in a special unit for dangerous prisoners in Ayalon Prison, despite not posing any credible threat to others. During this period of imprisonment Amnesty International considered Mordechai Vanunu to be a prisoner of conscience and consequently called for his immediate and unconditional release. He was released from prison on 8 August 2010 after 11 weeks in solitary confinement, but the restrictions on him remain in place.