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Israel: Drop latest charges against whistle-blower Mordechai Vanunu

The Israeli authorities should drop the charges handed down two days ago to nuclear whistle-blower Mordechai Vanunu, as well as lifting all of the restrictions still imposed on him, Amnesty International said today. This latest development is illustrative of the pattern of persecution he has faced since he was released from prison 12 years ago after serving an 18-year sentence for disclosing information on Israel's secret nuclear capacity in 1986.

On 8 May 2016, the Jerusalem Magistrate's Court charged Mordechai Vanunu with breaching the ongoing severe and arbitrary restrictions against his rights to freedoms of movement and expression. The charges apparently relate to a meeting he had with two US nationals three years ago; an interview he gave to Israeli broadcaster Channel 2 in September 2015, for which he was already punished that same month; and moving his residence *within* the same building without informing the police.

If Mordechai Vanunu is convicted and imprisoned under these charges, Amnesty International would consider him a prisoner of conscience held solely for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression and would call for his immediate and unconditional release.

The Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* quoted the response of his lawyer, Avigdor Feldman, to this latest move by the Israeli state as "a record low... in its persecution and abuse of Mordechai Vanunu... I'm ashamed, and whoever filed this indictment should be even more ashamed." Feldman said that the charges are being made in preparation for Vanunu's latest attempt to challenge his international travel ban, which expired recently but was extended by a temporary court order.

Since his release from prison in 2004, Vanunu and his lawyers have fought without success to end the cruel and unnecessary restrictions which prevent him from leaving Israel, communicating with foreigners – including journalists – without the prior agreement of the authorities, entering or approaching foreign embassies and participating in internet chats, and which require that he notify the police if he moves residence.

In September 2015, Vanunu was put under one week's house arrest and banned from using the internet and communicating with journalists as a punishment for the interview he gave to Israeli Channel 2. According to Israeli newspaper *The Times of Israel*, Channel 2 said the broadcast was pre-approved by the military censor but the police asked to see the full unedited interview. Apparently, the Israeli authorities objected to something Vanunu said during the making of the interview but which was not broadcast. In the interview, Vanunu talked about his motivation to divulge information about Israel's nuclear armoury, his subsequent abduction by Mossad (Israeli secret services) from Italy in 1986 and his marriage in May 2015 to his long-term partner, Norwegian professor of theology Kristin Joachimsen, and his desire to go and live with her in Norway.

The Israeli government's contention that Vanunu's freedom must be so severely curtailed because he poses a threat to national security becomes more and more ludicrous as each year passes. It is widely acknowledged that any information he disclosed to journalists about Israel's nuclear weapons programme is already in the public domain and is in any case 30 years out of date. There is no evidence to suggest he has committed any criminal offence.

The ongoing restrictions against him are arbitrary and contrary to Israel's obligations under international law, particularly the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which prohibits arbitrary interference in the rights to freedom of movement, freedom of expression and freedom of association and protects individuals from being punished again for the same offence. The restrictions are not part of any parole conditions imposed since he served his full sentence.

Background

Mordechai Vanunu worked as a technician at Israel's nuclear plant near the southern town of Dimona. After revealing details of the country's nuclear arsenal to *The Sunday Times* he was abducted by Mossad agents in Italy on 30 September 1986 and secretly taken to Israel where he was tried and sentenced to 18 years' imprisonment. According to nuclear physicist Frank Barnaby, who [interviewed](#) Vanunu in September 1986 in his role as a consultant to the UK newspaper *The Sunday Times* prior to its publication of Vanunu's revelations, he was motivated by a belief that the Israeli and international public had a right to know about Israel's nuclear weapons programme; and that "he seemed to be acting ideologically".

He was held in prolonged secret detention, in violation of the prohibition of arbitrary arrest or detention contained in Article 9 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. There are also serious concerns about the secrecy of his trial and the severe nature of the charges on which he was convicted, as well as the 11 years he spent in solitary confinement between 1986 and 2004, which amounted to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.

In 2014, Israel's Supreme Court denied a petition from his lawyers to lift his travel ban so he could participate in an Amnesty International event on whistle-blowers, in the UK and attend an event at the UK parliament to which he was invited by 54 members of parliament

In May 2010 Mordechai Vanunu was imprisoned for three months after being convicted of breaching the restrictions on him by speaking to foreigners and attempting to attend Christmas Mass in Bethlehem. Amnesty International considered him to be a prisoner of conscience.

Public Document

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