

Nuclear prisoner of conscience

...his conditions of detention constitute cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment regardless of the reasons for them....

Amnesty International Report
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Vanunu is a prisoner of conscience.... He is paying this inhuman price for doing no more than telling the world that Israel has a nuclear capability.... Israel has become the first Western democratic state to punish someone as a traitor for leaking information to a newspaper.

A Neil
Editor

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MORDECHAI VANUNU

SIX years ago on September 30, 1986, Mossad kidnapped Mordechai Vanunu in Rome after luring him there using the old tried and true "honey" trap.

For these past six years, after a brief, hurried and secret "trial", Vanunu has been languishing in solitary confinement, Israeli authorities treating his act of conscience as one of gross criminality.

After spilling the story of Israel's extensive nuclear capabilities and possible preparations for nuclear warfare in the Mid-East to the London *Sunday Times*, Mossad sent one of its alluring female agents to London to infatuate Vanunu. Well-trained in the technique, she convinced him to take an amorous vacation in Rome as the Israelis were apparently predisposed not to create a potentially explosive international incident with the British.

Whatever Israeli motives, in Rome Mossad agents drugged Vanunu and against international laws governing extradition, whisked him to prison in Israel.

It was only through a clever ploy — Vanunu wrote on the palm of his hand what had happened and on the way to a closed court hearing pressed his palm to the van window allowing journalists to piece together what had happened — that we even know today this part of the story.

Vanunu's overall story is a relatively straightforward one.

Born in 1954 in Morocco to a religious Jewish family that immigrated to Israel in 1963, Vanunu worked as a nuclear technician for nearly a decade until 1985 at Israel's famous Dimona nuclear reactor in the Negev.

During the first half of the 1980s, Vanunu did graduate and post-graduate study in philosophy. After quitting Dimona, Vanunu travelled in 1986 to the Far-East and underwent a transformation that resulted in his being baptised in Australia as an Anglican in July of that year.

Vanunu then went to England where during September and October of 1986 he provided sufficient hard evidence of Israel's extensive nuclear arsenal so that the London *Sunday Times* ran a major feature on the subject on October 5. The bold headline — *Revealed: The secrets of Israel's nuclear arsenal* — sent journalistic tidal waves around the globe, tremendously embarrassing the Israeli government.

Even before the London *Sunday Times* article ran Mossad implemented its honey trap against Vanunu and kidnapped him back to Israel. Under considerable pressure, half a year later, in January of 1987, the

From



Washington

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Italian government opened an official investigation into the kidnapping though it was later conveniently closed for lack of sufficient evidence.

Meanwhile, conducted in great secrecy, Israeli courts convicted Vanunu on March 24, 1987 of treason, espionage, and revealing state secrets and sentenced him to 18 years imprisonment. Since then Vanunu has been treated in a manner that can only be described as one designed to drain him of his spirit and sanity. He has spent over 2,000 days, some 52,632 hours, in solitary confinement.

Beyond the desire to irreparably harm Vanunu the other motivation of the Israeli government is to keep as much secret as possible. Even during Vanunu's already closed trial two policemen sat next to him at all times grabbing him and muffling him if he tried to say anything other than what the court wanted to hear.

Vanunu's cell measures 2 x 3 metres and he is kept in total isolation. He is permitted absolutely no physical, visual or verbal contact apart from the visits by his family and his lawyer. Up to three family members may visit him once every two weeks for 30 minutes, but even then he is divided from them by a metal screen. According to Vanunu's Israeli attorney, Avigdor Felman, no other prisoner in Israel has ever been held in solitary confinement for such lengthy periods of time. And according to Amnesty International "such treat-

ment is prohibited by international law, regardless of the reasons for its imposition".

As Mordechai's brother, Meir Vanunu, writes in a recent newsletter titled *The campaign to free Vanunu*: "while the USA shows great concern over nuclear proliferation by countries such as Pakistan, Iraq, and North Korea, with a \$500 million aid cut to Pakistan in 1991, it chooses to turn a blind eye to Israel's nuclear activities and to the whole Vanunu affair".

But in Europe the situation is otherwise. The European parliament has in recent years adopted three resolutions supporting Vanunu. The first resolution denounced the kidnapping from Rome as "a gross violation of the sovereignty of a member state of the European Community". Another resolution condemned the conditions under which Vanunu is held; and the third called on the president of Israel "to exercise his right to pardon or at the very least commute the sentence".

As the European parliament has pointed out, "those which have respect for human rights would not have been likely to treat a disclosure in a newspaper for motives of public interest as treason and espionage ... and certainly would not have imposed such a long term of imprisonment".

For more information, and to lend your support, contact The Campaign To Free Vanunu, at 6 Endsleigh Street, London WC1H 0DX or by phone or fax to 071 387-5096.