

# Israel: Mordechai Vanunu to be placed under supervision but not arrest

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Israel's Prime Minister Ariel Sharon has decided that Mordechai Vanunu, the imprisoned opponent of the country's nuclear programme, will be placed under state supervision after he completes an 18-year prison term in April.

Vanunu was convicted of treason after he provided the British *Sunday Times* newspaper with details about the Dimona nuclear "research centre" in the Negev Desert, near Beersheba in 1986.

During his work at the facility, Vanunu learned that it harboured a secret underground plutonium separation plant, which was part of Israel's nuclear bomb programme. In 1985, before leaving Dimona aged 31, he took numerous photographs inside the factory and then made his way to Sydney, Australia, where he converted to Christianity.

The *Sunday Times* learned of his story and flew him to England. On October 5, 1986, its article confirmed that Israel had a major nuclear weapons capability with leading independent experts concluding from Vanunu's photographs that Israel had between 100 and 200 nuclear warheads.

Even before the story was published, Mossad had lured Vanunu to Italy using a female agent, where he was kidnapped and sent to Israel.

He was convicted in a closed trial and denied parole or probation. He served the first eleven and a half years of his sentence in solitary confinement, denied any contact except with his guards, a lawyer, a priest, and the occasional visits of family members.

When he was released into the general prison population on March 12, 1998, he was still denied any contact with Palestinian inmates and denied access to a telephone. His mail is censored.

This persecution is set to continue. The Israeli press revealed that agents from the national general security

service went to Vanunu's prison and questioned him for three hours about his future plans. He has made clear that he wishes to leave Israel after his release on April 21.

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon convened a special meeting of top security and legal advisers to discuss how to continue to silence Vanunu, after he completes his sentence. The meeting rejected detention without trial, but issued a statement insisting that "proper supervisory measures" would be applied on the spurious basis of preventing him from "committing additional security crimes."

According to sources in Israel's security services, upon his release the former atomic reactor technician is to be prevented from travelling abroad. His movements will be monitored and his telephone tapped.

The Israeli government is facing a serious problem in putting restrictions on Vanunu since there is no legal cause to put him in "administrative detention" once he left jail. Nevertheless, such a move could be imposed—and justified in Israel's Supreme Court—if Vanunu continues his political struggle.

The Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI) has sent a protest letter to Attorney General Menahem Mazuz, calling for the scheduled release of Vanunu without restrictions being imposed on him. ACRI officials pointed out that Vanunu has already spread his information around the world so there is no need to fear he may leak classified information following his release.

According to the daily *Haaretz*, "Mordechai Vanunu denies that he knows additional secrets about Israel's nuclear capability. Vanunu, in conversations with his brothers Meir and Asher at Ashkelon's Shikma Prison, denied that he has the ability, or intention, to disclose additional nuclear secrets".

The paper added, “Vanunu told his brothers he has been cut off from his former place of work at the Dimona nuclear reactor for 20 years and that he does not have any information beyond what was published in the British *Sunday Times*”.

The newspaper *Yedioth Aharonoth* ran a report in which a former Shikma inmate said that he heard Vanunu express intentions to disclose classified information as soon as he is released. The former inmate also said that he heard Vanunu express satisfaction following Palestinian terror attacks against Israelis.

Meir Vanunu, told *Haaretz* that “he suspects security officials are behind a systematic effort to circulate reports to denigrate his brother, and to prepare the Israeli public for the possibility that post-prison restrictions will be slapped on him.”

Last week, Peter Hounam, a British journalist who worked on the original *Sunday Times* Vanunu article, told *Haaretz*, “Mordechai always refused to divulge the names of people with whom he worked in the Dimona reactor, and he refrained from revealing details about security arrangements there. He claimed that such details weren’t needed for our report, and that such disclosure could put those people at risk.”

Vanunu has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. His release can easily open up an international debate on the illegal weapons developed by Israel at such facilities as the Biological Institute in Nes Ziona city near Tel Aviv, which the government is determined to prevent.



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