

PUGWASH CONFERENCES ON SCIENCE AND WORLD AFFAIRS

From:
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Expert Opinion of Professor Sir Joseph Rotblat, In the Matter Of Mordechai Vanunu.

I offer this opinion instead of testifying in a court of law. I hereby declare that I am aware that for the purpose of instruction on criminal law concerning falsified testimony under oath at the court of law, this opinion when signed by me is valid as testimony given under oath at the court of law.

I am Professor Sir Joseph Rotblat, a nuclear physicist who worked on the United States' *Manhattan Project*, has acted as an adviser in nuclear matters for more than half a century, and who received the Nobel Peace Prize for my work.

I am now a very old man, and as such I claim the right to address the court perhaps somewhat more bluntly than is usual – not to affront Israel's judicial process at a difficult time, but as an expression of urgency. And, speaking foremost as a physicist, I see much in the continued plight of Mordechai Vanunu on which all physicists, including those in Israel, should urgently comment.

So I must ask the court: how can it be that during a legal proceeding in a democratic society – a petition to lift restrictions imposed on Mordechai Vanunu after his cruelly severe sentence had already been served – that not one physicist speaking on this man's behalf is being allowed to see the evidence of his further danger to Israel's security? I also caution the court that the Dimona physicists are not the only ones in the fraternity of science who grasp nuclear security issues. There are expert physicists in most countries of the world. There are also nuclear weapons projects in an ever-proliferating number of other countries, and these form a world

community to which Israel, in moral terms, belongs whether or not she admits this publicly. I would suggest that you would hardly find one physicist outside Israel who believes that Mordechai Vanunu, whether or not in 1986 he neglected to mention this or that detail, constitutes any further significant threat to anyone's security.

On the contrary, the court would find that to the majority everywhere the only serious danger Mordechai Vanunu poses to Israel is if – by undue and excessive punishment – a low-level technician should become elevated to the status of world hero that could in no other way have been attained. Again to speak respectfully, the court should also reflect whether the nuclear community has moved on from its primitive early stage, that I remember only too well, when governments imagined that esoteric knowledge might be sealed in vaults and used to terrorize and dominate those who would never achieve it – even that the existence of nuclear arms could be denied outright, and popular consciousness of them be repressed. Today that knowledge is everywhere, and the countries with the resources to disastrously pursue arms contests are under threat from another kind of terrorist. This kind of terrorist exploits the befuddling secrecy screens of paranoid “superpowers” to more easily acquire these devastating weapons by criminal means.

As a very old man, I also remember the world without nuclear weapons. I remember a sense of disbelief that the human species could be so unwise as to blunder, by hiding the truth from itself, deeper and deeper into this morass from which, if our worst fears are realized, we may only escape by annihilation. New generations have come along who exclude themselves, as non-experts, from trying to achieve a vision of the world arsenal's near unimaginable destructive power. Humanity's wrong-turning has thus become enshrined. The ideals for a return to sanity we early practitioners could still imagine – for example, Niels Bohr's early advocacy of the sharing of scientific knowledge – seem today almost entirely on the losing side to cynicism.

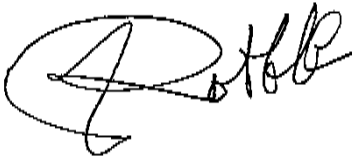
Therefore the court might think that I feel righteously vindicated in my lifetime's campaign for the special status of whistleblowers, by the continued punishment of Mordechai Vanunu. After all, day by day, a simple man's act of truth-telling has elevated him in the world press to the stature of “whistleblower of whistleblowers”. His defiant conviction and the feat of having remained sane through twelve years solitary confinement are growing upon the world's awareness. However, I feel small vindication. Instead, I regret to see a beleaguered Israeli

state – bearing upon its heart the traumatic scars of Europe’s recent history – continuing on the path of proliferation that I first warned David Ben Gurion against, thirty-nine years ago. Since then Israel’s ambiguous arms project has made it a world thermonuclear power. This in turn has become the secular god of a people’s imperative to survive. I believe that this morbid obsession with its security is putting enormous strain on Israel’s democratic institutions, which are otherwise close to exemplary in the region.

It distresses me to find myself – eight years after the Tel Aviv Conference – once again pleading to the Israeli courts on behalf of Mordechai Vanunu. On that occasion people from all over the world came together to ask for clemency for someone who in 1996 had already served what seemed a grossly excessive term for what appeared to most of the world no more than a crime of honesty, even one of redemptive virtue. After all, the most devastating of atom spies, Klaus Fuchs, was sentenced to fourteen years in prison, but served only nine. Little could any of us have imagined that Mordechai Vanunu would serve his entire terrible sentence.

So now is the time for moderate witnesses to come forward. The reality of Dimona was exposed so long ago by this man, yet Vanunu’s first words at his release were that he had no regrets for the monstrous price he had paid and that he casts no blame. His was a generational act for the world, not a malicious attempt to harm Israel. The only harm to Israel will be self-inflicted – if it does not honour its own laws. His act is one for which the world, and Israel too, has learned a lesson. Therefore my plea to the court, after this man’s long ordeal, need no longer be a plea for clemency. It is simply that, for Mordechai Vanunu, justice be upheld.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Rotblat', written in a cursive style.

Joseph Rotblat
14 June 2004