

**Debate in the Knesset on Nuclear Weapons and Mordechai Vanunu Proposal  
Tabled by Knesset Member Issam Makhoul, February 2, 2000**

*The following is the English version of the speech made today, February 2, 2000, by Knesset Member Issam Makhoul, in the historic debate in the Knesset on Israel's nuclear policy.*

Mr. Chairman, Honorable Knesset,

This is a historic day. For the first time since the establishment of the State of Israel, the Knesset is holding a debate on the issue of nuclear weapons in Israel, so this debate is being held 40 years late. This is also a sad day, because it reminds us, that the Knesset shirked its responsibility in an area that threatens us with the next holocaust, if we do not come to our senses, pause and stop in our tracks before the disaster. I hope that today's debate will symbolize the breaking of the wall of silence and the beginning of an intensive debate in the Knesset and among the public on this subject.

Allow me to welcome our guests, Dr. Ray Kidder, one of the leading nuclear scientists in the United States, a man who has won numerous awards, who worked for decades at the U.S. government's National Nuclear Laboratory of Lawrence-Livermore, California, and who came to Israel especially to be present at this debate; the members of the Israeli Committee for Mordechai Vanunu and for a Middle East Free of Atomic, Biological and Chemical Weapons; representatives of the World Committee of Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War; the representatives of the embassies of Egypt and Russia; and the many public figures, from the fields of academia, culture and the media, who are committed to breaking through the longstanding conspiracy of silence on the nuclear issue, who are here today for this debate.

Members of the Knesset, I will begin with a quotation from the joint manifesto of Albert Einstein and philosopher Bertrand Russell, of July 9, 1955: "We are speaking on this occasion, not as members of this or that nation, continent, or creed, but as human beings, members of the species Man, whose continued existence is in doubt... The problem... stark and dreadful, and inescapable [is]: Shall we put an end to the human race, or shall mankind renounce war?"

Shortly after Albert Einstein issued that call for the elimination of nuclear weapons, he was approached by Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion and asked to serve as the president of the State of Israel. Ben-Gurion was already involved in the efforts to develop nuclear weapons in Israel, but he did not disclose that fact to Einstein. The eminent scientist turned down the offer. Einstein, a rare combination of a scientific genius and a humanist, already then believed that no message of justice and peace for humanity was forthcoming from Israel. How right he was.

For the past 40 years, the policy of the Israeli governments on the nuclear issue has been characterized by fraud, lies and deceit. I strongly recommend to all Knesset Members to read the book "Vanunu and the Bomb", that was published last year by

the Israeli Committee for Mordechai Vanunu and for a Middle East Free of Atomic, Biological and Chemical Weapons. It is important for the Knesset Members to be exposed to alternative information on a subject concerning which the government, the media and academia have collaborated to brainwash and drug the public. In one of the chapters in the book, entitled "The Israeli Government Declares", by journalist Gideon Spiro, the writer recalls that the deceit began 39 years ago, when on this very podium, **on December 20, 1960, Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion announced the construction of "a research reactor in Dimona, that is designed entirely for peaceful purposes, and that when it is completed, it will be open to researchers from other countries."** When he made that statement, Ben-Gurion knew that the reactor was not built for "peaceful purposes" and that there was no intention to open it to "researchers from around the world." Rather, we were presented with an Israeli atomic bomb factory, the work of which would be concealed from the citizens of Israel and from the citizens of the world.

When the London weekly *The Sunday Times* published Mordechai Vanunu's revelations in October 1986, an alarming picture was revealed, showing that Israel already had more than 100 atomic bombs. Since then, the number of bombs, according to experts' estimates, is thought to have increased to the insane amount of 200-300.

That is what we must discuss today, Mr. Chairman. The problem is not the messenger Vanunu, but the policy of all Israeli governments, which has turned this small piece of land into a poisonous and poisoning nuclear waste bin, which could blow us all to heaven in a nuclear mushroom. The crime of manufacturing nuclear weapons in Israel was combined with another crime, the collaboration between Israel and the neo-Nazi apartheid regime in South Africa.

I do not have the time to enter into the historic debate about whether the establishment of the reactor was a strategic blessing for Israel. Is the doomsday weapon a deterrent that guarantees Israel's existence? I believe not. However, even those people who do believe that this is the case, cannot ignore the fact that what once appeared to them to be a blessing (a view which I do not share), is now a curse.

**Nuclear ambiguity is nothing but self-delusion, and has long ago ceased to be effective.** The entire world now knows that Israel has a huge stockpile of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons and that it serves as the cornerstone for the nuclear arms race in the Middle East. In Israel there is frequent mention of the "Iranian and Iraqi danger", while ignoring the fact that it was Israel that introduced nuclear weapons to the Middle East in the first place, and created the legitimacy for other states in the region to obtain nuclear weapons.

**One obvious proof that the ambiguity and deterrence which formed the basis for Israel's nuclear policy have become redundant, is Israel's acquisition of the German submarines that have recently arrived in this country and which, according to the media, will be equipped with nuclear missiles.** The purpose of these submarines is to cruise deep in the sea and constitute the "second strike" force, in the event that Israel is attacked with nuclear weapons. That means, that not only do the hundreds of nuclear bombs that Israel possesses not pose a defense - they actually caused the military establishment to fear a nuclear early strike, which escalates the spiral of the non-conventional arms race further and further, at the cost of billions of dollars.

**Today the so-called ambiguity applies only to the citizens of Israel.** They are unable to act as democratic critics of their government because the latter conceals from them the truth about an issue on which their lives depend. We have no

information about the people who have their fingers on the nuclear button, what is their chain of command, or what is our defense if a nuclear Barukh Goldstein should infiltrate the system, and equipped with a religious sanction from some rabbi, launch a nuclear Armageddon.

Mr. Chairman, the dangers to the citizens of Israel and to our neighbors exist not only in the event of a nuclear war. Even without a war, we face the constant danger of the eruption of the nuclear volcano that we have built on our own doorstep.

In the 40 years of the reactor's operation, a huge amount of nuclear waste has accumulated. This waste, if it leaks, could contaminate the land and water for centuries and millennia. I do not have to explain the significance of such a scenario in a country like ours, that needs every drop of water it can get. How is the waste stored? There are different methods, some safer, some less, none perfectly safe. It is all a matter of financial investment.

Since everything in this area is cloaked in secrecy, extra-parliamentary ecological monitoring groups cannot supervise the government's actions. "Trust Big Bother," the government tells us. But we know from our experience, and from experience that has accumulated worldwide, that we must not rely on the government, and in the absence of supervision by non-governmental and independent organizations, the danger of negligence lurks at our doorstep. The reactor is old, the safety measures are kept secret from us. A mini-Chernobyl disaster as the result of human error or material stress would make this country unfit for human habitation.

Last year a story appeared in the media, according to which Israel exports part of its nuclear waste to be buried in Mauritania, in Africa. I ask the Prime Minister: Is this true? Has Israel adopted the criminal colonialist practice of polluting the Third World, which European countries abandoned some years ago following the struggle of the green organizations?

I ask the Prime Minister: What is the condition of Israel's nuclear missile sites near Kfar Zechariah on the outskirts of Jerusalem, and near Yodfat in the Galilee? Are there additional sites? Of course, these sites must be shut down, but until common sense prevails, they must be available to monitoring by parliamentary and extra-parliamentary ecological organizations from Israel and abroad.

I ask the Prime Minister: How is it that plants in which the missiles are manufactured and atom bombs are made are located in the most densely populated areas in Israel, in the center and in Haifa? I ask the Prime Minister: Do you not understand that the Biological Institute in Nes Tsiona, which is where Israel manufactures its biological warfare, is set in a residential area, which is a crime against the residents of Israel and the neighboring countries?

And what about the risk of an earthquake? **The reactor in Dimona is located over the Syrian-African Rift. An earthquake similar to the one that occurred in Turkey last year would crack the reactor, and Israel would be covered with a radioactive dust.** If that happens, there would be nothing left but say goodbye, and die a terrible death.

I refer you to the article by Professors Barukh Kimmerling and Kalman Altman, who wrote: "The public is unaware of the dangers that they face from the enormous amounts of plutonium in the area and from the difficulty in storing the nuclear waste. The 'nuclear option' was intended to be a response to security threats, but perhaps it should be examined whether the medicine is not more deadly than the disease." (Ha'aretz, 5.11.99).

The international community has recognized that the nuclear issue is not an internal affair of any state, but has implications that reach beyond national and geographic borders and require international attention.

The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and other treaties relating to this issue are the sum total of worldwide human wisdom mobilized to defend us from nuclear holocaust.

Israel has chosen to remain outside the realm of human wisdom. That was a dangerous choice. The mentality of 'a nation unto its own' entails, in the context of the issue at hand, the syndrome of national suicide. Our lives and our security will not be guaranteed by the reactor in Dimona, nor by the hundreds of atomic bombs, nor by the millions of biological warfare germs that are produced at the Biological Institute in Nes Tsiona, nor by the chemical weapons that Israel is developing. Rather, our security would come from an inspired initiative to make the Middle East free of all weapons of mass destruction.

Israel is the party that started the race and it bears the responsibility for changing that course. I call on the government of Israel to open all doors and windows and air the information. A certain change in the right direction took place in November 1999, when parts of the transcripts of the trial of Mordechai Vanunu were released. Naturally, that is not enough. The Dimona reactor must be opened to international inspection; a moratorium must be declared on the production of all weapons of mass destruction - nuclear, biological and chemical; all information must be released about the amount of bombs that Israel possesses. Israel must announce, as a confidence-building measure, its willingness to begin unilateral nuclear disarmament, to be completed in the framework of a general Middle East treaty.

In fact, there is no need for nuclear weapons. Paul Nitze, who was the chief U.S. representative to the arms control negotiations on behalf of the Reagan administration, not exactly a dangerous Leftist, wrote in the New York Times: "The truth is that I see no reason not to unilaterally eliminate the nuclear weapons that we possess. Keeping them is a costly matter, which adds nothing to our security. I cannot think of any circumstances in which it would be wise for the U.S.A. to use nuclear weapons, even in retaliation for the use of such weapons against us. What would be our targets in such an event? It is impossible to think of a target that could be hit without the strike entailing the mass killing of innocent people... The very existence of nuclear weapons endangers our existence." (Published in *Ha'aretz*, 1.11.99).

We need to extend our hand to Egypt in its efforts to bring all countries in the Middle East into the Non-Proliferation Treaty. We must respond to the Syrian demand that the peace negotiations include the dismantling of weapons of mass destruction. The Dimona reactor must become a burial site, and that burial site should serve as a reminder to future generations of the foolishness of humankind on one hand, and also of its recognition of that foolishness before it was too late.

Mordechai Vanunu, who was kidnapped in Italy in an act of terrorism on the part of the State of Israel, and who was later tried in a secret and unfair trial, is a prisoner of conscience who sacrificed himself on the altar of the struggle for a nuclear-free world. A person who hands over to the free press information about the negligence and crimes of his government, as Mordechai Vanunu did when he exposed the information about what was being done behind the walls of the Dimona reactor, was neither a traitor nor a spy. Rather, he performed the role of a whistleblower and carried the democratic principle of the public's right to know. It was no accident that Mordechai Vanunu received the Right Livelihood Award and the Danish Peace Prize,

and that every year he is a candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize. The world recognizes people who work to save humanity from a nuclear holocaust.

From this podium I call on the government of Israel and on the President to listen to the voices coming from all corners of the globe, the voices of politicians, scientists, Nobel Peace Prize laureates, artists and authors, to release Mordechai Vanunu after 13 years in prison, more than 11 of which he spent in cruel solitary confinement. Even President Clinton has recently called for Vanunu's release. He has served two-thirds of his sentence and he is entitled to parole. It is time to end the vindictiveness.

With your permission, Members of the Knesset, I wish to appeal from this podium to Regional Cooperation Minister Shimon Peres. History, I believe, will judge you harshly for two things: your major role in establishing the Dimona reactor, and for the order that you gave, when you served as Prime Minister, to commit the act of terrorism of abducting Mordechai Vanunu, from London via Italy, in September 1986.

I doubt whether you would have been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, if the members of the Nobel committee had been aware of your immense contribution to the production of Israel's nuclear, biological and chemical weapons of mass destruction. Now, as you approach the last stretch of your political career, I ask you to right both wrongs: to begin the process of Israel's disarmament of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons as part of making our region free of weapons of mass destruction, and to release Mordechai Vanunu.

The International Court in The Hague has ruled that nuclear weapons are illegal. I propose to the government of Israel and to the Knesset to make an effort, however difficult, to join the ranks of the enlightened international community.

In summing up, I wish to quote again from the manifesto of Albert Einstein and Bertrand Russell, in which they called for the elimination of nuclear weapons: "We appeal, as human beings, to human beings: Remember your humanity and forget the rest. If you can do so, the way lies open to a new Paradise; if you cannot, there lies before you the risk of universal death."

The Auschwitz survivor, the author Yehiel Dinur, whose books were published under the name Ka. Tzetnik, called the outcome of nuclear weapons a nuclear Auschwitz. A few days ago, on January 27, the anniversary was celebrated of the liberation of Auschwitz by the Red Army. Note the historic irony and absurdity: Israel has become a haven for the creators of a new holocaust, the nuclear Auschwitz. Mordechai Vanunu learned the major lesson of the Holocaust, but the State of Israel has yet to learn.

If he were still alive today, Albert Einstein would have considered Mordechai Vanunu to be a man after his own heart, a culture hero, a courageous man of conscience with a humanist vision who sacrificed his freedom for the noble ideal of eliminating nuclear weapons and preventing a nuclear Auschwitz. He would certainly have joined the ranks of those who protest Vanunu's abduction and demand his release.