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Opinion

ISRAEL'S NUCLEAR WEAPONS MUST BE ON THE TABLE

by Joe Parko

Special to The American Reporter

Atlanta, Ga.

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JERUSALEM -- Ever since Mordechai Vanunu, the Israeli nuclear technician, confirmed the existence of Israel's nuclear weapons program with his photographs of the secret underground bomb facility published in the *London Sunday Times* in 1986, the world has known Israel has been making nuclear bombs but has pretended they do not exist.

Vanunu was released from prison in April 2004 but was prohibited from leaving Israel. The Israeli government continues to keep him in Israel against his will. Criminal action is pending against him for speaking to journalists and foreigners.

'If we want to stop the arms race in the Middle East, Israel must open its nuclear weapons program to inspection.... .'

I talked with Mordechai Vanunu last year in Jerusalem.

"I worked from 1976 to 1985 at the Israeli secret underground nuclear weapons production facility at the Dimona nuclear plant in the Negev desert," Vanunu said in the interview.

"During my time there, I was involved in processing plutonium for 10 nuclear bombs per year," Vanunu said.

"I realized my country had already processed enough plutonium for 200 nuclear weapons. I became really afraid when we started processing Lithium 6 which is only used for the hydrogen bomb," Vanunu recalled.

"I felt I had to prevent a nuclear holocaust in the Middle East, so I took 60 pictures of the underground nuclear weapons processing plant some 75 meters under the Dimona plant," Vanunu told me.

"I resigned my post and left Israel in 1986. I first went to Australia and then made a connection with The Times in London. After a group of nuclear scientists verified my photos as proving Israeli nuclear weapons production, my story was published in England," Vanunu said.

"A few months later, I was kidnapped by the Israelis in Rome and sent secretly by ship to Israel where I was subjected to a closed military trial without counsel. I was sentenced to 18 years in prison. I spent 12 years in solitary confinement," Vanunu said.

"I think my whistleblowing on Israel's secret nuclear weapons program helped to bring down South Africa's apartheid government. When the world's governments learned Israel was helping South Africa to develop nuclear weapons, this was the end of apartheid. Mandela's first act was to shut down South Africa's nuclear weapons program and to send the nuclear materials to the U.S.," Vanunu said.

"Now, I am trapped inside Israel and I'm being threatened with more prison time for speaking to people like you. I want to leave Israel and come to America, where I can live as a free human being," Vanunu said.

At his recent meeting with the Israeli Prime Minister, U.S. President Bush called for worldwide isolation of Iran until it gives up its nuclear ambitions.

When it comes to the issue of nuclear weapons in the Middle East, there is an elephant in the room nobody wants to

acknowledge, and that elephant is Israel's large nuclear bomb arsenal.

First, the U.S. allegedly went after non-existent nuclear weapons in Iraq and now Bush is consumed with the possibility Iran might develop nuclear weapons in the future. But the fact is, Israel has had a secret nuclear weapons program for over 30 years that has produced well over 200 nuclear bombs.

If we truly want to stop the nuclear arms race in the Middle East, Israel must be required to open its nuclear weapons program to inspection.

Israel is not a member of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and refuses to officially confirm or deny having a nuclear arsenal, or to having developed nuclear weapons, or even to having a nuclear weapons program.

If we want Iran to renounce nuclear weapons, we must also get Israel to stop building bombs in secret and begin dismantling its large nuclear arsenal. Our goal must be a nuclear-free Middle East and this must include Israel.

Joe Parko is a special contributor to Atlanta Progressive News. This article was produced as part of the Middle East Peace Education Program of the American Friends Service Committee. Reach him at parkoj@bellsouth.net

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