

The Link

*Published by Americans for
Middle East Understanding, Inc.*

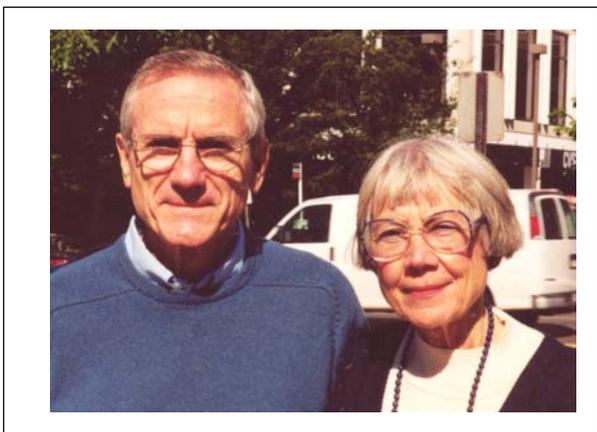
Volume 37, Issue 2

Link Archives: www.ameu.org

April-May 2004

September 1986,
a nuclear technician
gives the Sunday Times of London
firsthand evidence, including
60 photographs, of the exact site where
weapons of mass destruction can be found in
the Middle East. His name is

Mordechai Vanunu



By **Mary Eloff**, in collaboration with her
husband **Nick**, the U.S. couple, pictured
left, who adopted Mordechai Vanunu.

AMEU's Board of Directors

Jane Adas

Hugh D. Auchincloss, Jr.
Atwater, Bradley & Partners, Inc.

Edward Dillon

Henry G. Fischer (*Vice President*)
*Curator Emeritus, Dept. of Egyptian Art,
Metropolitan Museum of Art*

John Goelet

Richard Hobson, Jr.
Vice President, Olayan America Corp.

Kendall Landis

Robert L. Norberg (*Vice
President*)

Hon. Edward L. Peck
Former U.S. Ambassador

Lachlan Reed
President, Lachlan International

Talcott W. Seelye
Former U.S. Ambassador to Syria

Donald L. Snook

Jack B. Sunderland (*President*)

James M. Wall

Mark R. Wellman (*Treasurer*)
Financial Consultant

AMEU National Council

Hon. James E. Akins, Isabelle
Bacon, William R. Chandler, David
S. Dodge, Paul Findley, Dr.
Cornelius B. Houk, Cynthia
Infantino O. Kelly Ingram,
Moorhead Kennedy, Ann Kerr,
John J. McCloy II, David Nes, C.
Herbert Oliver, Marie Petersen, Dr.
John C. Trever, Don W. Wagner,
Miriam Ward, RSM

Executive Director

John F. Mahoney

AMEU (ISSN 0024-4007) grants permission to reproduce material from The Link in part or in whole. AMEU must be credited and one copy forwarded to our office at 475 Riverside Drive, Room 245, New York, New York 10115-0245. Tel. 212-870-2053; Fax 212-870-2050; E-mail: AMEU@ameu.org; Website: www.ameu.org.

About This Issue

We have known for years where those weapons of mass destruction are to be found in the Middle East. We've just been looking in the wrong place.

They're in Dimona, at Israel's Nuclear Reactor Center, where Mordechai Vanunu worked for nine years as a nuclear technician and where, in 1986, he took 60 photographs that he later gave — seeking no payment in return — to the London Sunday Times.

Although it is by no means certain, April 21 of this year is the anticipated date of Dr. Vanunu's release from Israel's Ashkelon Prison, a prison where he has spent the past 18 years, 11½ of which have been in solitary confinement. (It should be noted, this is the longest stretch of time in recent history that any prisoner has spent in isolation.)

Waiting for him at the gate will be a couple from St. Paul, Minnesota, Mary and Nick Eloff. Nick is a retired lawyer and Mary taught Spanish before raising six children. In 1997, they adopted Mordechai Vanunu. The road from their St. Paul home to their son's prison has been one of intense discovery for these septuagenarians, as Mary relates in this issue.

Listed on page 14 are our most current books; our entire catalog of over 100 books, many now hard to find, is available on our website: www.ameu.org.

Pages 15 and 16 list all our videos and CD selections. Because of increased demand we have stocked up on four of these videos:

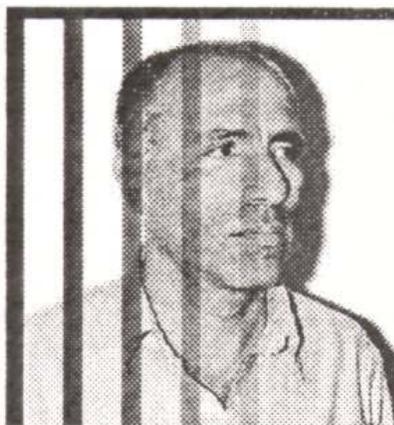
Dispatches: The Killing Zone documents the killing in Gaza of children and volunteer workers, including the American Rachel Corrie (Rachel's mother, Cindy, wrote our December 2003 *Link* issue, accessible on our website.)

Palestine Is Still The Issue, narrated by the award-winning Australian journalist and filmmaker John Pilger, has been shown widely in England and Europe, but barely has been seen in the United States.

Beyond the Mirage: The Face of Occupation, by an American filmmaker, addresses the questions Americans most frequently asked about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

People and the Land: The Story of a People Under Occupation is the 1997 documentary that was initially shown on some PBS stations until pressure was brought on others not to show it. (The filmmaker, Tom Hayes, documents this pressure in his 1997 *Link* article, vol. 30, #5, which is also accessible on our website.)

**John F. Mahoney
Executive Director**



Dr. Mordechai Vanunu

It all began with a magazine.

One day, in 1995, I was reading an article written by a Sam Day in "The Progressive" magazine. Sam was identified as coordinator of the U.S. Campaign to Free Mordechai Vanunu, and the story was about a prisoner being held in solitary confinement in an Israeli prison.

That seemed to be nothing out of the ordinary. I had visited Hispanic prisoners in the federal prison in Stillwater, and occasionally a prisoner would spend time in the "hole". But as I read the Vanunu story I became horrified because this man, this human being, had been in solitary in a 6 X 9' cell for nine years, and his sentence ensured that he would be in that cell for another nine years. Even when he was allowed to exercise outdoors, he was limited to a walking area which was surrounded by a plastic barrier so that he could not see beyond it. I wondered if I was reading correctly – was this happening now in 1995 or did this happen in the dark ages? And what heinous crime had the man committed?

He had blown the whistle on Israel's secret nuclear weapons program in Dimona. He was not a spy. He acted, not for personal gain, nor out of malice, nor on behalf of any government, but out of the urgings of his conscience. He thought that in a democratic country such as Israel, people have the right to know what their government was doing, especially regarding a matter as important as nuclear weapons. He believed that all nuclear weapons had to be dismantled and that Israel was no exception. I agreed with his sentiments wholeheartedly. I had been arrested several times at a munitions plant and at the Strategic Air Command base in Omaha in hopes of raising public awareness about the futility of weapons. Mordechai immediately became my hero.

The Progressive article went on to say that Mordechai Vanunu was from a Moroccan Orthodox Jewish family that had emigrated to Israel when he was young, and that he had taken a job as a technician at the Dimona nuclear research center while attending Ben-Gurion University. After a time, he came to realize that Israel was secretly building nuclear weapons at Dimona. Before he left his job, he took clandestine photos of the facility. Travels took him to Australia, where he eventually developed the film and shared his story with a social concerns group at an Anglican Church, where he later was baptized. The London Sunday Times learned of his story and asked him to travel to London, where his information was confirmed by nuclear experts.

Just days before the story was published on October 5, 1986, Mordechai was lured to Rome by an American, female Mossad agent; there he was drugged and smuggled aboard a cargo vessel back to Israel. It was weeks before Israel admitted to having him in custody. He was charged with espionage and treason, tried in secret, convicted and sentenced to 18 years in prison.

How could such a hero be condemned as a traitor, and suffer such vicious torture? Nothing could be worse than isolation from all that is human. I recalled that when my babies were born, they immediately became part of the web of humanity. They knew almost immediately the love and support of grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins and neighbors. Relationships bring us into being and it is relationships that give purpose at every moment of our existence. Relationships provide security and make us able to trust. Now this man, this hero, this human being was being shut away, his humanity denied. I grieved for him and for those who had chosen to deny his connection with them. How would this man ever trust again?

But there was a note of hope at the end of the article. It suggested that people could write to Mordechai in care of Ashkelon Prison in Ashkelon, Israel – no numbers, no zip codes – and that anyone wishing to join the campaign to free him, could contact Sam Day in Madison, Wisconsin. So we did both – contacted Sam and wrote our first letter to Mordechai in 1995.

Imagine the thrill it was for us to receive an answer from Mordechai in about three months time. Imagine also what it was like to receive a letter that was full of holes cut out in seemingly harmless sentences. We alternated between anger and sadness. But a correspondence had begun. We treasured that letter and reread it many times.

After we had joined the campaign, Sam urged us to help with efforts to collect signatures on a petition to President Clinton to ask him to use his good offices to urge the Israeli government to free Mordechai on humanitarian grounds. We brought petitions to churches, peace gatherings and to assemblies of Pax Christi, Minnesota – a chapter of an international Catholic peace organization. We sent over 1,000 names to the President but our efforts proved fruitless. We received not as much as an acknowledgement of our petitions.

Sam visited St. Paul, where we live, in the winter of 1996, and stayed with us. As we drove him to various places, where he spoke so movingly about Mordechai's cruel imprisonment and the current and impending disaster of nuclear weapons, we became more involved in the

Campaign. Sam had been the editor of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists and spoke with authority.

That fall, on September 30, the anniversary of Mordechai's kidnapping, six of us held a vigil outside the Government Center in Minneapolis. Our good friend, John Landgraf, who had been corresponding with Mordechai, built a 6' high cage and stood inside it while the rest of us passed out flyers. No one had heard of Mordechai, with the exception of an attorney who angrily said, "Why are you doing this? I know more about Vanunu than all of you!" So we learned that some individuals knew about Mordechai, but they did not believe as we did that he should be released.

Eventually, out of frustration and a good deal of naivete, we decided in 1996 to ask Mordechai if he was willing to have us adopt him. First, we consulted with Sam, who in turn approached the British Campaign to Free Vanunu and for a Nuclear Free Middle East with the idea. The response was initially negative because members of that campaign felt that the adoption might jeopardize the possibility of an early release. Sam was very much in accord with our hopes that the adoption could lead to Israel's release of Mordechai into our custody in the U.S., or at the very least, to imprisonment in the U.S. Finally, after several months of discussion with the British campaign, Sam gave us the go-ahead.

After three months, since his letters were always delayed for at least that long, Mordechai responded affirmatively that he was eager to be adopted. As we did, he saw the adoption as an avenue to citizenship in the U.S. and freedom from imprisonment in Israel. He gave a written consent statement to his brother, Asher, who, in turn, mailed it to us. We were so optimistic that Mordechai would soon be with us, if not in St. Paul, somewhere in the U.S.

In addition to the consent, we needed a copy of his birth certificate. After three months, we finally heard from Mordechai, informing us that, having been born in Marrakesh, Morocco, there were no such records.

In addition to a birth certificate, we also needed his presence at the hearing in order to continue with the proceeding. So in presenting our petition for filing on February 19, 1997, we asked the court to waive these requirements. We had not the slightest notion how the court would respond to our request. After two months, there was no reply from the court clerk.

Finally in April, 1997, we decided to write a personal

letter directly to the court, suggesting that if the court was inclined to deny our petition that it do so without prejudice so that we could find a judge who accepted Amnesty International's condemnation of Mordechai's imprisonment as "cruel and inhuman" treatment, and who would use his equitable powers to grant our petition to adopt.

Much to our utter amazement, on May 15, 1997, we received notice from the court ordering the clerk to file our petition of record and to schedule our petition for a hearing. We were amazed because the adoption of an adult is uncommon, even in Minnesota where the law permits it.

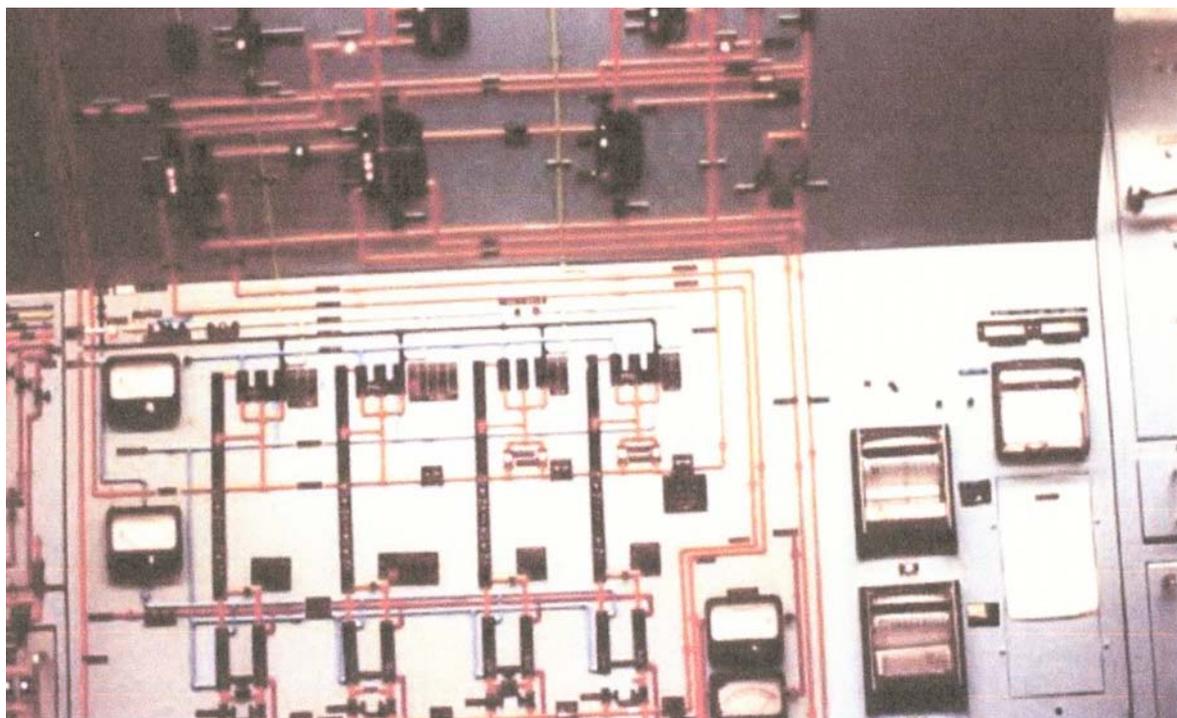
On October 24, we received notice of a court hearing with Judge John Connolly. John Landgraf was so elated about the possibility that he waited outside the courtroom to learn the outcome. Initially, to our discouragement, we were told that the petition could not be accepted because the reason cited for adoption was that Mordechai was suffering cruel and inhuman treatment. The judge decided that that reason was political! However, he said that if we removed those words he would waive the requirements and consider the petition. We waited nervously in the reception area with our friend, while the petition was amended. When we were called back into the courtroom, the judge quickly approved and said simply, "He is your son."

We decided to tell our biological children of the granting of the petition when we would all be together for the celebration of our granddaughter Natalie's birthday the following Sunday. They, like we, could hardly believe that a brother, distant and imprisoned, had been added to the family. It took many letters, to and from Mordechai, for the realization to sink in. We were very pleased when our son, Paul, related his experience at a dinner party. One of the guests had said that Mordechai Vanunu should be shot and Paul had replied, "Hey, that's my brother you're talking about."

Somewhat later we were disappointed to discover that under immigration law, Mordechai, because he was over 16 years of age, would not attain the citizenship of his adoptive parents. What we also did not know at the time was whether the Israeli authorities would give full faith and credit to an adoption decree of a U.S. court. When we wrote a letter to the Israeli Embassy in Washington, D.C., asking them whether their government would honor our decree, they referred our request to their Consulate in Chicago. After many weeks we received a call from the Consulate, stating that they would look into the matter. We never again heard from the Consulate nor the Embassy.



Front page of The London Sunday Times, October 5, 1986. Andrew Neil, then editor of the paper, said that this was the most important scoop that the paper ever carried while he was editor.



A nuclear control panel, one of 60 photos taken by Mordechai Vanunu. The Times had them all verified by nuclear experts.

We felt that we had the right to visit Mordechai since we now fell into one of three permitted categories of visitors — immediate family, clergy, and his attorney. His parents no longer regarded him as their son because he had converted to Christianity while in Australia. Sam encouraged us to try to visit him. Although we had written to tell him that we were coming, we had no way of knowing if we would get to see Mordechai when we set off for Israel in February of 1998.

We arrived at Ben Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv late at night with no small amount of apprehension and anxiety. Clearing passport control there was a new and singularly unique process. Why did you come to Israel? Who do you know? Where will you stay? What is your religion? Do you have relatives or friends here? Where do they live? Do you speak Hebrew? Yiddish? Each question seemed to be accompanied with suspicious glances from our interrogator. We finally were finished and continued on our way, exhausted.

A member of the Israeli Committee to Free Vanunu and for a Middle East Free From Weapons of Mass Destruction, Rayna Moss, had made arrangements for us to stay at a hostel near her home in Jaffa, and arranged for Aki Orr, another member of the committee, to drive us from Jaffa to Ashkelon. The next morning, Aki, a physicist and anti-nuclear activist, arrived with a beautiful bouquet of daffodils to take with us for our first trip to the prison. There we met Anglican Bishop Edmond Browning and his wife, Patty.

Sam had known that the Bishop would be in Israel attending a conference organized by Sabeel (a Palestinian liberation theology center) and had contacted him after learning we were going to make the trip to the prison. Bishop Browning had spoken about Mordechai's unjust imprisonment on numerous occasions, and felt that he, as a priest, should be allowed to see Mordechai.

As the five of us approached the gate, we were forcefully told to remain behind a red line painted on the pavement. Aki told the armed guard, in Hebrew, that we wished to see Mordechai Vanunu, and the guard told us to wait — again, behind the red line. After a half-hour wait, the warden, Commander Itzak Gabai, approached us with a pleasant smile, which was a real relief after the threatening warning of the guard. I gave him the daffodils, and we begged for a visit. In a very kind manner, the commander said that he would let us know in a couple of days. After a couple of days he said that he wouldn't know for a few more days. The powers that be hadn't decided. Remaining hopeful, we traveled down to Bethle-

hem to attend the Sabeel Conference, and waited.

On Sunday evening, alone in a cold hotel room (the heating system was broken), we received the long awaited phone call giving permission to visit Mordechai the following day. We were jumping around in celebration with no one to share our joy and no champagne to break open. Soon after, Mordechai's brother Meir called to ask us to wait until Tuesday for the visit since that was the day for him and another brother, Asher, to visit. We were stymied. We wanted to please the brother but we were fearful that, having forfeited the promised Monday visit, we would not be able to visit at all. With a heavy heart, we told Meir that we would wait until Tuesday, which was February 17.

Asher offered to pick us up at the central bus station in Jerusalem so that we could make the drive to Ashkelon together and become acquainted. Our trip to the prison was pleasant and informative. Asher talked about their personal efforts, the family's struggle with Mordechai's imprisonment and the severe consequences to him personally. Because the media had branded Mordechai a traitor, Asher, a talented teacher aspiring to administrative work, changed his last name — a high price for "association." At that time he and his wife Hava had no children so he was able to visit Mordechai fortnightly as authorized by the court.

In the course of our conversation, Asher told us that the family wanted no publicity about the visit. "But," I stammered, "Sam told us that we must try to get media coverage." It would be helpful for Mordechai. He maintained the position that the family wanted no attention but we urged him to reconsider. The parents, he explained, most likely did not know about the adoption since, as Orthodox Jews, they neither read the paper nor listened to the radio and TV.

As we approached Ashkelon, we noticed that the high prison gun tower was visible from the highway. The prison is situated at the edge of the city in an industrial zone. It's a high security prison with enormous cement walls topped with barbed wire, and appeared to be about two city blocks in length.

When Asher parked the car across from the prison, we could see Meir standing outside the entrance waiting for us. After a very brief greeting, we were ushered into a visiting space — a long, narrow, sterile room. All was cement — we were seated on a cement bench with a translator there to record our conversation. Asher and Meir stood to one side of us. We waited a short while and then

a guard brought in an old man. The old man was Mordechai, then 44 years old. It seemed his time in isolation had aged him beyond his years. He walked up to the steel grate which separated us and put his fingers through the small openings of the cage. Able only to touch his fingers, we tried to hug him with our eyes.

It was a bewildering first experience. "Hi, Mordechai! How good it is to meet you and to see you after all these years!" Through tears we asked for forgiveness for waiting so long to move on the adoption (we still held out hope that the adoption would end in an early release and freedom). He assured us that there was no need for apologies and that he appreciated the action we had taken.

We asked him if he prayed and he told us that for five years he had read the Bible but now he gets his strength from within. We spoke from the heart when we told him that that was the God within him.

We had been promised an hour's visit with the proviso that we not talk about the kidnapping, the secret trial or Dimona. After about 20 minutes, Mordechai mentioned the kidnapping, but the translator said nothing so we assumed that he was either daydreaming or allowing the mention of the kidnapping. However, we brought up another topic – what it was we no longer remember – but Mordechai again began to talk of the kidnapping. This time, the guard said, "That's it – the visit's over!" We began to cry; Mordechai started to rant and the two brothers appealed to the guard in Hebrew. The commander was summoned and entered to try to defuse the situation but upheld the guard's decision to end the visit.

When we returned to Asher's car Meir said that he and Asher had reconsidered the matter of the media attention and would allow it. Gideon Spiro, a member of the Vanunu Campaign living in Jerusalem, immediately arranged an interview with the Yeroshalyim Israeli weekly; the interview was published while we were still in Israel. Sam was thrilled; Mordechai was no longer a non-person.

To our great surprise, many members of our peace group and our entire family were waiting to welcome us home at the airport. We had seen our adopted son for the first time and everyone wanted to know how he was and what the visit was like. We are hoping to give Mordechai such an emotional and enthusiastic homecoming, only magnified a hundred times.

On March 12, 1998, Mordechai's solitary confinement ended as suddenly as it had begun. In April of that year, we made a return trip to Israel. Having learned that Mor-

dechai was released from isolation, Sam arranged for us to join an international delegation to visit the offices of Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Ezer Weizman to press for Mordechai's release. Before we met with the delegation, we traveled to Ashkelon. It was the first time that we presented ourselves to prison officials alone at the appointed hour. The "ritual" for our entry is as follows: We surrender our passports at the prison office window and the waiting process begins. After at least a half hour, the guard emerges to escort us to a small building in front of the complex where we must surrender any items we have for Mordechai. We are instructed to empty our pockets. All objectionable items, including money, are either placed in a bag or my purse and are then locked in a small safe for 5 shekels. We are then directed into separate rooms where body searches and shoe removal are conducted by male and female guards. We are then admonished not to talk about the forbidden subjects as we are escorted to the first of two electrically controlled steel doors. We have experienced this procedure for every subsequent visit to the prison.

When we entered the prison garden court we saw Mordechai waving at us, standing in the middle of the paved street about a city block away. He began to approach us and we met halfway to a visitor's trailer, a non-permanent structure that has become our customary meeting place. He appeared to be ten years younger than when we had last seen him. It was an emotional high moment for all of us as we hugged and embraced for the first time! He appeared to be in good physical health, he was well groomed but wearing drab prison clothing. A Christian cross hung from a chain around his neck.

At this stage of our relationship, we had no sense of the psychological impact of the horrendous years of isolation. But he was eager to spend time with us, anxious to talk, even about current international affairs, and willing to answer all our questions about prison life. Inside, we sat around a small table. Our conversation was monitored by an English speaking guard who sat within earshot, continuously taking notes and making sure that we steered clear of "forbidden" topics. We told Mordechai how thrilled we were to learn that his isolation had ended and he said, "You can't imagine what it is like to see green grass again and to have my cell door open during the day."

Mordechai told us of his routine during isolation, awaking at 5 a.m., reading in bed for another two hours, and then going out to exercise alone in a yard that he could not see beyond. His 6 x 9' cell has no windows, and lights would shine on him night and day when he was in

isolation. Every day he would take a one hour nap because the guards would wake him during the night. He said that the system is finally seeing him as a person because he has to stand for the 6 a.m. count. Before, no one cared; no one counted him.

We asked him if he had ever been physically abused and he responded that only once had he been struck in the face by a prison commander, but that the mockery and verbal abuse continued.

We were eager to tell him of the efforts of the Israeli Committee to Free Vanunu, which had issued a statement to the effect that the real damage to state security was done not by Vanunu but by the Israeli government when they built 200-400 nuclear bombs without the knowledge of their citizens and without any international oversight.

We told Mordechai about the British and Norwegian delegates who had come to Israel not only to visit him, but to go to the offices of the Israeli Prime Minister and President on his behalf. We also expressed our concern about the upcoming parole hearing and our hopes that his attorney, Avigdor Feldman, would be successful in persuading the parole board that long years in prison isolation was enough punishment, warranting early release. At the conclusion of our visit, we promised to never cease our efforts for his freedom.

The following day, we and Sam Day joined with the delegation, which consisted of Britons Lord Eric Avebury, Labor M.P. Jeremy Corbin and actress Susannah York, as well as Ole, the representative of the Norwegian Labor Federation. When we arrived at President Ezer Weitzman's office, Sam was told that the president was not in but that we could see his chief of staff. Sam spoke first, asking that the President include Mordechai among the 1000 prisoners he planned to grant amnesty on the occasion of Israel's 50th Jubilee Year. The President's aide explained the amnesty process, expressed reservations about our request, but indicated that he would communicate our request to President Weizman.

Then the English Parliamentarians, leaders of the British Parliament Human Rights Committee, asked for permission to visit Mordechai, declaring that any foreign government official could submit a pro-forma request to visit any British prisoner in any British prison, and the request would be granted. The aide said he would take their request under advisement. They also pleaded for clemency for Mordechai.

A freedom petition signed by 700 world political and social leaders was delivered. Ole also handed the aide a thick packet of petitions, and told of his own role in gathering the 17,000 signatures there. He also mentioned that the Norwegian Prime Minister had expressed concern for Mordechai.

The delegates later learned that under no circumstances would the British Parliamentarians be permitted to visit Mordechai, and that President Weizman considered Mordechai a traitor and had categorically stated that he "would never grant Mordechai amnesty."

Because of the status of the British Parliamentarians, we were given an opportunity to meet with David Bar-Elan, Prime Minister Netanyahu's chief of staff. The fruitless meeting began with pleasantries and cups of tea. Bar-Elan admitted to us that Israel had nuclear weapons, but he said, "We just don't acknowledge it." He went on to justify the stockpiling of nuclear weapons with the words, "Everything in war is acceptable." Immediately, I thought of the firebombing in Dresden and I was horrified. "If that's true," I replied, "then the Holocaust was acceptable." His face flushed red and I thought that he was going to jump out of his chair. "That's an exception," he said, and continued the "polite" discussion with Lord Avebury and Jeremy Corbin. I could not pay attention for the rest of the meeting. It was shocking to hear of the moral depravity to which governments had succumbed. Not only was killing in war justified, but genocide and ecocide had become "acceptable."

Appeals on Mordechai's behalf by the delegation were brushed aside with a wave of the hand that effectively ended the meeting.

Later in the week we met with Knesset member Yossi Katz of the Labor Party, who had earlier visited Mordechai and expressed his opposition to the solitary confinement because of concern about Mordechai's mental health. He, along with a member of the Meretz Party, Dedi Zucker, had publicly declared their support for Mordechai's release.

Three weeks after our trip, we were very saddened to learn that Mordechai was denied parole.

Five months later, the grim, gray prison walls and barbed wire fencing were as ugly as before. But the occasion was more joyful than ever when we entered the prison for our next visit in September 1998.

We were especially pleased that this visit included our

29 year old youngest son, Jonathan, who was very eager to meet his brother. After our hugs and greetings, Jonathan and Mordechai engaged in a serious discussion of the disparity between the rich and the poor, because he knew of Jonathan's service in Guatemala as a volunteer for Witness for Peace. They had a lively discussion of academics, and we experienced Mordechai's laughter for the first time.

We told Mordechai about the week's activities planned by an international delegation there on his behalf. Participants from Norway, Australia, U.S. and the U.K., along with Israelis, would vigil at Ashkelon Prison, the Ministry of Defense, the Atomic Energy Commission, President Weizman's residence and foreign embassies— a similar week of activities to one that had happened the previous year. We mentioned the demonstration at Dimona planned later that week, and the group of internationals who were planning an international citizen's inspection of the Dimona reactor after the demonstration. When Mordechai uttered the word "Dimona," the female English speaking guard cut him short. We changed the subject.

We asked him how he was able to cope with the daily ridicule and verbal abuse. His response indicated that it deeply bothered him but that he was struggling just to ignore it. Having personally experienced the need for nurturing in nonviolence through our membership in Pax Christi, we fulfilled our earlier promise to bring him Tolstoy's book "The Kingdom of God Is Within You." The book is Tolstoy's philosophy on Christian nonviolence and reading it was said to be the turning point in Gandhi's life. We told Mordechai that we left this and other books with the guard.

Now that Mordechai had met Jonathan we intended to send him a family photo and concluded our visit with that promise. As we left the prison, there was no doubt that Jonathan's visit had lifted Mordechai's spirits.

The next day, we vigiled at the prison with about 25 internationals and members of the Israeli Committee, who held signs saying "Free Mordechai Vanunu" in Hebrew and English. Responses of passing vehicles were for the most part negative, but there were a few enthusiastic thumbs up.

During the vigil, I separated from our group in order to introduce myself to the new Prison Commander, who was standing nearby.

We had previously received word from Mordechai that



In front of Ashkelon Prison, Sept. 1998, left to right, Sam Day, Art Laffin, Ruth Haun, Felice Cohen-Joppa.

a new and very domineering commander, Avraham Lazarian, had replaced Itzak Gabai. To my shock, in a very bullying manner, Lazarian said, "You're not getting a second visit with Vanunu."

"Why?" I stuttered. And he sneered at me, "Because he's bad-mouthing the Army and the state of Israel, he's bad-mouthing the guards, he's bad-mouthing me and the prison."

"Well," I replied, by then composed, "You've kept him in solitary for 11 years. Do you think that he's going to say 'You guys are just great?'"

Lazarian countered, "That's his problem," and warned me that he might tear up our visitation rights unless our son cleaned up his bad mouth and improved his behavior. Then, hollowly, he wished me a Happy New Year. I was dismissed. I could not help but reflect that Mordechai had been dismissed for 11 years. We concluded the vigil with heavy hearts.

In March, 1999, another hopeful event for Mordechai was the result of a lobbying effort by the U.S. Campaign to Free Mordechai Vanunu in the House of Representatives. An appeal to President Clinton signed by 36 members of Congress asked him to intercede with Israel for the release of Mordechai Vanunu on humanitarian grounds.

The letter, sponsored by Representative Lynn Rivers of Michigan and our Congressman, Rep. Bruce Vento, declared, "We believe that Mordechai Vanunu has suffered enough for his crime of conscience. Mr. Vanunu stands for the ideal that every child has the right to live in a world

that is free of nuclear destruction."

At a press conference we attended in Washington, D.C., Vento said, "Mr. Vanunu's commitment to global peace and to living in a world free from the threat of nuclear devastation should be commended, not condemned. Yet, ironically, Mr. Vanunu's commitment to human rights has cost him his freedom. He has paid too high a price for his act of conscience. It is time to right the scales of justice by allowing for his immediate release and return to his adoptive home of St. Paul."

We wrote a letter to the late Senator Wellstone, asking him to intercede on Mordechai's behalf. The senator wrote a letter to Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, who responded that the issue was an internal matter of the state of Israel and that the United States does not interfere in the internal affairs of other countries. The senator also wrote a personal letter to President Clinton asking him to intercede on Mordechai's behalf.

When we visited again in December of 1999, Mordechai was exhilarated that the press had recently published some of the censored transcripts of his secret trial. It was a major breakthrough, because now the Israeli public could read for the first time Mordechai's own words about his motivation to disclose Israel's nuclear weapons. He showed us the newspapers that he had kept, but was angered by its constant references to him as a spy.

The following spring, we were excited to hear that a coalition of Israeli peace and justice groups were planning a demonstration at Dimona on May 26, 2000 to mark the International Women's Day of Nuclear Disarmament, along with a May 24 meeting at the Knesset on the nuclear issue. We decided to schedule our next visit with Mordechai so we could attend these events. We were joined by two women from the U.S. and U.K. campaigns, Felice Cohen-Joppa and Marie Stone.

At our visit, Mordechai looked fit, tanned and thinner than when we had last seen him. We told him how much more relaxed he looked. We told him about the plans for a demonstration at his "place of former employment" and about the meeting to be held in the Knesset. We assured him that we would report back to him about the two activities when we visited him later that week.

The symposium in the Knesset was sponsored by MK Tamar Gozansky. Mordechai was acknowledged and praised by several speakers. I addressed the assembly and encouraged everyone to take positive action to keep the world nuclear free, and thanked them for speaking out on

Mordechai's behalf.

The rally near the Dimona reactor was very inspiring. One hundred seventy people gathered under the make-shift tent in the Negev Desert to hear many speakers address the nuclear issue. The highlight of the rally was a speech delivered by Issam Makhoul, an Arab member of the Knesset. He condemned Israel's secret nuclear arsenal and called for dismantling the weapons. He praised Mordechai for his selfless action and demanded his immediate release. Many of us carried "Free Vanunu" signs in both English and Hebrew.

When we returned to the prison, we reported on the week's events. Mordechai was glad to hear about our active participation and expressed a hope that civil disobedience and other acts of nonviolent resistance would continue at the Dimona reactor.

We were next granted two visits with Mordechai on January 17 and 18, 2001. After the usual search, we saw Mordechai standing at the red line. After 15 years of imprisonment, it had been deliberately painted to restrict Mordechai's movement within the prison's confines—another gesture in the dehumanization process.

The first day's visit was more somber and serious in tone than previous visits. After the exchange of pleasantries, we talked about release prospects. Mordechai expressed little personal hope for an early parole, and repeated the April, 2004 release date he had been given. The stifling, ever-present boredom and loneliness of daily prison life continued to discourage him. Unfortunately, he continues to eat alone. He said he doesn't mingle with the Israelis imprisoned there and is never permitted to even see the Palestinian prisoners.

Mordechai treated us with slices of chocolate roll, Coke and mineral water that he was able to buy in the prison canteen. We were moved by this act of kindness. He was now out of temporary isolation, a punishment for, among other things, disobeying prison rules regarding daily muster calls. He considers these small violations to be acts of "civil disobedience" and feels compelled to engage in them.

We talked about the letters, cards and tapes that he continues to receive from his faithful friends and supporters. These items from the outside world sustain him and help to relieve boredom. He told us that he remains totally driven and determined to see this crisis in his life through to the bitter end.

Our visit the next day was more upbeat. We joked a little about his physical regimen, since he claimed that he can do 50 pushups! He even smiled on several occasions. He knew that Mairead Maguire, Nobel Laureate from Belfast, North Ireland, had nominated him for the 2001 Nobel Peace Prize. We brought with us a copy of the "Humanist Award for 2000" awarded to him by the Church of Humanism of New York. All these laurels give him hope.

Again we talked at length about a Gandhian response to the evils of prison life and about prison workers who obediently "do their jobs and obey authority" to dehumanize him. Having read and been moved by Tolstoy's book, he vowed to continue to endure and non-violently resist whenever possible. He reminded us that we have no sense of what it means to be confined year after year in a degrading environment.

When our second visit was over, we told him we loved him and we would see him again.

Soon after our return home, on the evening of January 26, 2001, Felice Cohen-Joppa, an associate coordinator of the U.S. Campaign, called to tell us the tragic news of Sam's untimely death that day from a stroke. Sam had been a dear friend, a mentor and an untiring campaigner for Mordechai's release and the abolition of nuclear weapons. Sam so loved Mordechai that he encouraged him to tell the Israeli authorities whatever was necessary to bring about his freedom. He felt that Mordechai had suffered enough and that his freedom was long overdue.

It was a very sad trip to Madison, Wisconsin to attend his memorial service. Felice, of Tucson, Arizona, graciously accepted the responsibility of becoming national coordinator of the campaign, and agreed to continue to help us in the struggle to free Mordechai and to bring him to the United States.

Having written to Mordechai about Sam's death, we knew that it would be a sad encounter with him on the next visit in November. The evening of our departure, Rayna Moss phoned to notify us that our approved visit had been canceled. No reason was given. Having purchased our tickets, we decided to make a personal appeal through Mordechai's attorney, Avigdor Feldman, and departed for Israel. Making contact with Feldman was impossible the entire week and we continued to leave messages. A saving grace was that Peter Hounam, the London

Sunday Times journalist, to whom Mordechai had given the Dimona photos, was in Jerusalem on the final day of our visit. He contacted Rayna, who told him about our dilemma. He and his wife, Hilary, insisted on driving us to Ashkelon to present ourselves at the prison. When we arrived late in the afternoon, the prison staff greeted us with the question, "Oh, you're here to see Vanunu?" And the entry ritual began,



Mordechai Vanunu, after 18 years in prison, is due to be released on April 21, 2004.—The Campaign to Free Modechai Vanunu

much to our surprise.

Our brief visit with Mordechai was subdued because of our reminiscence of Sam. Despite Sam's appeal to do whatever was necessary to gain his freedom, Mordechai declared, "I will never compromise my principles."

While we were visiting with Mordechai, Peter had learned from Rayna that Feldman had gotten approval for the visit. Without Peter's insistence on driving us down to Ashkelon, we would have returned home, not having seen Mordechai.

About a year later, in April, 2001, we received a call from a long-time supporter of Mordechai, Fredrik Heffermehl, who is president of the Norwegian Peace Alliance and vice-president of the International Peace Bureau. He informed us that Mordechai would be awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of Norway at Tromsø. We

accepted his invitation to attend the formal ceremony.

Our entire experience of Tromsø was memorable—from the beautiful snow-capped mountains surrounding the island city, the midnight sun, the beautiful campus and all of the May 15 events leading up to and culminating with the formal ceremony on the campus.

The day began with a happy reunion with Mordechai's brother, Meir, and the introduction and meetings with various academics and professionals scheduled to be presenters at The Vanunu Seminar. The seminar was attended mainly by graduate students, and several speakers, including university professors and Nobel Laureate Sir Joseph Rotblat, explored the moral and legal dimensions of Vanunu's act. The climax of the day was the formal conferral celebration with its pageantry, academic procession and beautiful music by the Chamber Choir of the Regional College and the University of Tromsø. Meir Vanunu accepted the honorary degree on behalf of his brother Mordechai.

On our next visit to Ashkelon in November 2001, we noticed a change in the usual routine. Visitors were now buzzed through a new heavy steel security gate near the street. Sadly, while waiting for our routine body searches we witnessed a shackled Palestinian youth being led to the prison and then blindfolded as the steel prison door slid open.

In May of 2002, we were full of anticipation as we finished the security search and gift inventory at the prison. For the first time, every gift, including those from others, was recorded and a copy made for Mordechai. Included was the beautiful award presented to Mordechai on May 4 by the Lakes and Prairies Life Community at their semi-annual gathering in Wisconsin. Mordechai was given the first Sam Day Memorial Peacemakers Award, which we received on his behalf. Also present were Sam's widow, Kathleen Day, and their son Josh. The framed award had been designed by Bonnie Urfer while she served prison time for an anti-nuclear action. How we would love to have shown it to Mordechai ourselves!

As a prisoner, there is so little about which he has a choice. The guards still awaken him at 6 a.m. for count, after which he goes back to sleep. When he is not walking, he naps, reads and writes letters. He has to be present for count twice more during the day. More and more we appreciate how controlled and boring his prison life is.

A friend had sent a copy of Beethoven's only opera, *Fidelio*, and he could identify with the story and its central

character who is unjustly imprisoned. Mordechai said that when he is discouraged, listening to opera lifts his spirits.

Our second visit in 2002 did not lead us directly to Ashkelon prison, but diverted us on a rewarding journey to St. Petersburg, Russia. We were invited by the Nuclear-Free Future Society of Munich, Germany, to receive, on Mordechai's behalf, its 2002 award in the resistance category. Mordechai received the award for "his selfless and courageous act of ethical obedience to a power higher than the state by blowing the whistle on Israel's secret nuclear weapons program".

Russia's Green World Coalition hosted the October 5 event. Each awardee spoke in his or her own language without translation so we had to imagine what was being said. But the enthusiasm was contagious. We spoke on behalf of Mordechai, in gratitude for the acknowledgment of his heroism and in sorrow that he could not receive his award personally.

Part of the honors also included a tree planting ceremony on the Baltic coast, during which the award recipients donned garden gloves to plant 5 pine trees. We planted a small pine that we named the Mordechai Vanunu Tree in his honor.

After formal ceremonies, with award and gifts from our Russian hosts in hand, we headed to Israel and Ashkelon Prison, where we were granted two visits with Mordechai on October 8 and 9. Interestingly enough, there seemed to be an easing of restrictions. We noticed that the body searches were perfunctory, we did not have to wait for long periods to get into the prison and the English speaking prison personnel engaged us in polite conversation. Mordechai also observed that the guards were less confrontational of late, and in any event he studiously avoids confrontation and ignores insults.

We were excited to tell him that we had brought the award from the Nuclear-Free Future (NFF) group, along with some gifts from Russia. You can imagine our sadness when the guards returned everything to us at the end of our visit. We learned the next day that despite the promise of prison officials the previous May, Mordechai did not receive the Sam Day Memorial Peacemaker Award we had delivered for him. He was nonetheless very pleased at having been given the awards and gifts, and expressed sincere thanks to all.

Since Mordechai is not allowed access to a phone, between visits we keep in touch by writing letters. Although our mail to him is apparently delivered promptly, his out-

going mail is held for months before being sent out. Last October, we received a letter Mordechai had written in August that revealed shocking news. He had dismissed his attorney, Avigdor Feldman—just months before his release. We understood immediately what had provoked the letter. Mordechai wanted Feldman to visit him as often as he had promised, and he felt that the lawyer wasn't doing enough for his case. We had even visited Feldman twice in his office over the years and both times he had promised to visit Mordechai—even saying, "I plan to see him next month" or "A year before his release I will start working on getting him a passport." These were nothing but empty promises, so we understood Mordechai's frustration.

As we prepared for our most recent prison visit with Mordechai in November, 2003, our third last year, we struggled with how to convince Mordechai that he should retain an attorney in the months before his release.

When we entered the prison, Mordechai was standing at the red line, waving enthusiastically at us. While he served us soda, we discussed the matter of a lawyer. Mordechai felt that he didn't need one, insisting that he had served his sentence and that he would walk out a free man on April 21. When we began to suggest "what if" scenarios, he firmly stated that there would be no "what ifs." For him there was no such thing as "prepare for the worst, but hope for the best." He said he is optimistic and counting down the days. His physical appearance mirrored the enthusiasm he exhibited. Having lost 26 pounds, he now weighed 128, the exact weight as when he entered prison.

After an equally happy second visit before leaving Israel, we assured him that the U.S. immigration attorney retained by Felice would actively pursue the process of bringing him home. We realized that this was our last trip to Israel before returning in April for Mordechai's release.

On the way back to St. Paul, we stopped in London, at the invitation of Ernest Rodker of the British campaign, to participate in a large London benefit for Mordechai. It was good to meet so many of Mordechai's supporters there, many of whom have vigiled for years each Saturday near the Israeli Embassy in London to call for his freedom.

Now, on the eve of Mordechai's release, news reports have begun to discuss conditions and restrictions being considered by Israeli authorities, including never allowing him to speak to the press or leave the country, and even administrative detention. On February 24, Prime Minister Sharon and other Israeli officials had a meeting to discuss their options. They decided that keeping Mordechai in

administrative detention would likely not pass a High Court review. But they do plan to impose restrictions, including refusing to issue him a passport and permission to leave Israel.

Any restrictions on his freedom after he has served his complete sentence are unnecessary and absurd. Mordechai has been locked away from the world for almost 18 years and has nothing further to reveal. Our son does not pose a threat to Israel's security, as some claim, and should be allowed to leave Israel a free man.

Israel's intent raises a myriad of questions and concerns, and complicates Mordechai's life and the lives of his supporters. How will this decision affect us, we wonder? Will they allow us to visit Mordechai before, or even after, he is released? Will we be able to bring him home? Will he be able to meet with his supporters from around the world? Will they change his release date to avoid the attention of the large gathering of media and supporters waiting outside the prison on April 21?

We will be part of an international delegation at Ashkelon Prison that will welcome Mordechai as he walks through the open prison gates a free man. Participants, including Nobel Laureate Mairead Maguire, are coming from the United States, England, Israel, Holland, Italy, Australia, Hungary, Japan, Ireland, Norway and more. There will also be vigils to celebrate his release in cities around the world.

As together we mark down the days to his freedom, we ask for continued support for Mordechai by way of letters and cards until he is finally and unconditionally free. The Israeli government must never be permitted to think that the world will forget the injustice it has done to this noble and brave man. □

• • •

Letters may be sent to Mordechai Vanunu, Ashkelon Prison, Ashkelon, Israel. For more information, to sign the international petition for his release and find out about writing letters to Israeli officials, to make a donation to the Campaign to help with the Eoloff's April trip to Israel and other upcoming activities, and to see some of Mordechai Vanunu's 1985 photos of Dimona, visit www.nonviolence.org/vanunu or write to the U.S. Campaign to Free Vanunu, P.O. Box 43384, Tucson, AZ 85733; email: freevanunu@mindspring.com; phone/fax: 520-323-8697. Also, if you'd like to organize an April 21 vigil in your town to celebrate Mordechai's release, please contact the Campaign right away so your plans can be included in international media outreach.

In the mailed issue of this *Link*, page 14 lists a small selection of books available from AMEU. The full catalog of books and videos is available on this web site, and for that reason the book selections are not repeated here.

AMEU's Video Selections

All AMEU Prices Include Postage & Handling

- AJPME, **Beyond the Mirage: The Face of the Occupation** (2002, VHS, 47 minutes). Israeli and Palestinian human rights advocates challenge the misconceptions most Americans have about the Occupation and Palestinian resistance to it. **AMEU: \$25.00.**
- DMZ, **People and the Land** (1997, VHS, 57 minutes). Documentary by Tom Hayes that appeared on over 40 PBS stations, despite efforts to ban it. See Hayes's account of the campaign against his film in our December 1997 Link (v. 30 #5) now on our website www.ameu.org. **AMEU: \$25.00.**
- Howard Film, **The Loss of Liberty** (2002, 53 minutes). Updated account of Israel's 1967 attack on the *USS Liberty*. **AMEU: \$20.00.**
- Jones, R., **500 Dunams on the Moon** (2002, 48 minutes). Documents Israel's 1948 depopulation of the Palestinian village Ayn Hawd. **AMEU: \$25.00.**
- Jordan, S. & Vasquez, R., **Dispatches: The Killing Zone** (2003, 50 minutes). British correspondent Sandra Jordan reports on the lethal violence by Israeli occupational forces against international aid volunteers and reporters in the Gaza Strip, as well as against Palestinian civilian bystanders, many of them children. Documentary also includes the bulldozer killing of Rachel Corrie, whose mother wrote our December 2003 Link. While this powerful documentary has been shown on British television, it has only appeared on a very few public access channels in the U.S. To help promote its distribution, we are offering it at the lowest possible price of **\$10.00**, which includes postage.
- Longley, J., **Gaza Strip** (2001, 74 minutes). An American filmmaker documents the hellish plight of the Palestinians in Gaza. The effect on the children is both chilling and haunting. **AMEU: \$25.00.**
- Masri, M., **Frontiers of Dreams and Fears** (2002, 58 minutes). This film, by the BBC documentary filmmaker, Mai Masri, has appeared on several PBS stations across the country. It focuses on two Palestinian girls growing up in refugee camps in Beirut and Bethlehem. **AMEU: \$25.00.**
- Middle East Council of Churches, **Disabled for Palestine** (1993, 21 minutes). A Palestinian doctor presents cases of civilians who have been maimed for life by Israeli bullets, beatings, and tear gas. **AMEU: \$10.00.**
- Moushabeck, M., **Anatolia: Lost Songs of Palestine** (2001, CD, 52 minutes). **AMEU: \$12.50.**
- Munayyer, F. & H., **Palestinian Costumes and Embroidery: A Precious Legacy** (1990, 38 minutes). A rare collection of Palestinian dresses presented with historical commentary. **AMEU: \$25.00.**
- Pilger, John, **Palestine Is Still The Issue** (2002, 53 minutes) A candid assessment by an award-winning journalist of why there has been no progress towards peace in the Middle East.. Available in DVD or VHS (please circle which one you want). **AMEU: \$25.00.**

See our catalog of more than 100 books and videos at www.ameu.org

Video-Cassettes (VHS)

- S. Smith Patrick, **The Children of Ibdaa: To Create Out of Nothing** (2002, 29.30 minutes) The story of Palestine as told by the children of Bethlehem's Dheisheh Refugee Camp and its world renowned dance troupe. AMEU: \$25.00.
- Studio 52 Production, **Checkpoint: The Palestinians After Oslo** (1997, 58 minutes). Documents the post-Oslo situation with off-beat humor and historical insights provided by Palestinian and Israeli activists like Naseer Arad and Hanan Ashrawi. AMEU: \$25.00.
- Xauen Music, **Promises: Oriental Classical Music** (2003, CD, 53 minutes) Features Nawa Athar, Farahfaza, Bayyati, Rast, Naha-wand. AMEU: \$12.50.

To Support The Link

A \$40 voluntary annual subscription is requested to defray cost of publishing and distributing The Link and AMEU's Public Affairs Series.

- Contribution to AMEU (tax deductible)
- Please Send Recent *Link* Issues

A check or money order for \$_____ is enclosed, payable to AMEU.

Name _____

Address _____

Zip+4 _____

4/04

Rush Order Form

Place ✓ next to the video you are ordering and indicate quantity if ordering more than one. Make checks payable to AMEU.

No. of Videos Ordered: _____

Total Price (includes USPS postage): _____

Add \$3 for UPS delivery, if desired _____

Add \$2 per video for intern'l delivery _____

Total Amount Enclosed _____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip+4 _____

MAIL ORDER WITH CHECK TO:

**AMEU, Room 245, 475 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10115-0245
Telephone 212-870-2053, Fax 212-870-2050, or
E-Mail AMEU@aol.com**

**Americans for Middle East Understanding, Inc.
Room 245, 475 Riverside Drive
New York, NY 10115-0245**