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Yonatan Leibowitz - Israel's nuclear program destabilizes region Photo: Ofer Amram



Rainbow Warrior Captain Mike Finkin - Israel very welcoming Photo: Ofer Amram

Greenpeace slams Israel's nuclear program

Organization's campaign for denuclearized Middle East takes it from Teheran to Tel Aviv. Activists warn aging Dimona plant a disaster waiting to happen, issue report detailing Israel's nuclear capabilities

Tal Rabinovsky
Published: 03.29.07, 19:05 / [Israel News](#)

"Despite Israel's policy of nuclear ambiguity, international reports maintain that this country has developed nuclear facilities and one of them, the Nahal Sorek science reactor, is only 30 kilometers from Tel Aviv," said Yonatan Leibowitz, Greenpeace Mediterranean communications director, on Thursday as environmental activists rallied against nuclear power in the Middle East.

Speaking at a press conference on the beach with the Rainbow Warrior, Greenpeace's official flagship docked in the background, Leibowitz released a report detailing the potential dangers

posed to the populations of Iran, Israel and Turkey by nuclear installations. In front of the Rainbow Warrior, a Zeppelin flew with

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a banner calling for a 'Nuclear Free Middle East' and, in Hebrew, 'Nuclear is dangerous for us all.'



Greenpeace in Israel on Thursday (Photo: Ofer Amram)

This is the latest stop for the Rainbow Warrior, who in its three-month tour of the region has already visited Iran, Yemen, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Bahrain, Kuwait and Egypt.

Rainbow Warrior Captain Mike Finkin told Ynet on Thursday that the voyage, while rewarding has been difficult. "It's hard to tour the Gulf, one hurdle after another, a lot of bureaucracy and many difficulties. Here in the western world Greenpeace has a reputation and it's recognized, especially in Israel. It's a relief to get here because we're welcomed with open arms, even the navy knows us. But there we're strangers."

'Israelis have a right to know'

A heavy water plutonium/tritium production reactor, plutonium reprocessing facility, uranium processing and fuel production facility, uranium enrichment facilities, waste-treatment plant, high-level waste storage facility, five megawatt research reactor and several storage facilities for tactical nuclear weapons – all these and more, says the Greenpeace report, are housed near population centers throughout Israel.

The report also asserts that Israel has 20 SLCM (submarine-launched cruise missiles) with nuclear warheads, all of which are stored in a Haifa naval base. Haifa was a frequent target for Hizbullah rockets during the Second Lebanon War.

"Israelis have the right to know where these facilities are and the

right to be informed about the serious risks to health and the environment posed by these installations. The pursuit of a policy of ambiguity about the possible existence of a nuclear program in Israel only serves to destabilize the region. What is needed is a policy of honesty and transparency - one that will pave the way to a nuclear free Middle-East," said Leibowitz.

The report presents various disaster scenarios in the Dimona nuclear facility, stating that the advanced age of the plant and its constant use have rendered it even more dangerous. A melt-down in Dimona could affect an area of up to 400 km, said the report.



The Rainbow Warrior (Photo: Ofer Amram)

"Dispersal of the uranium from site would also be highly toxic to populations around the facility causing damage to internal organs, particularly the kidneys as well as increasing the risk of cancer and other genetic defects in affected populations," details the report. However the more likely course of events, according to Greenpeace, will be an accident involving leakage of radioactive material from the site or a fire involving the highly pyrophoric plutonium stored on-site.

'A threat to the entire region'

"Nuclear power and nuclear weapons pose a serious threat to the safety and security of the entire region," said Paul Horsman, peaceful energy coordinator for Greenpeace. "Throughout this tour Greenpeace has been calling on all countries to join the discussion for a nuclear free Middle-East and today in Tel Aviv we call on Israel to do the same. Nuclear technology is not the


solution to either national security or energy needs.

"In Iran we spoke with academics, government officials and various organizations about the alternate energy sources Iran can use," said Horsman.

"No matter what the intent, military or peaceful, the presence of nuclear technology and facilities in the Middle East are a clear and present danger for the local population, both in the minor accident scenarios and in the worst cases the threats that could extend beyond national boundaries and threaten neighboring populations," concludes the report.

The Greenpeace tour will continue to Lebanon, and is scheduled to end in Turkey by mid-April.

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