Hanegbi: Mazel deserves citation for damaging 'suicide' artwork

By Yossi Melman, Haaretz Correspondent, Haaretz Service and Agencies

Public Security Minister Tzachi Hanegbi on Saturday said that Israeli Ambassador Zvi Mazel should be awarded a citation for intentionally damaging a piece of artwork depicting a Palestinian suicide bomber on display in a Stockholm museum.

"If there is a situation in which an ambassador should act in an undiplomatic manner, this is it," the Likud minister said, adding that he was "proud of the ambassador."

The artwork, entitled "Snow White and the Madness of Truth," consisted of a rectangular basin filled with red water on which floated a boat carrying a portrait of Islamic jihad suicide bomber Hanadi Jaradat, who killed herself and 21 others in an attack at the Maxim restaurant in Haifa on October 4.

Video footage showed Mazel disconnecting electrical cables to spotlights that surrounded the work Mazel then shoved a spotlight into the basin.

It also shows one of the artists who created the piece, Dor Feiler - an Israeli who resides in Sweden - telling Mazel, "What you're doing here is exactly what you're doing in Nabulus and Tal Karm." He added, "I had all the right in the world to act as I did," Mazel told Reuters in an interview.

Ambassador Mazel was among the guests at the opening of the Historical Museum's art exhibition ahead of an international anti-genocide conference to be held in Stockholm from January 26 to 28.

"This was not a piece of art," Mazel said. "It was a monstrosity. An obscene distortion of reality."

Israel demands Sweden removes piece Israeli on Saturday demanded that Sweden remove the artwork. Deputy Director General for Western Europe at the Foreign Ministry, Ran Curiel, told Sweden's ambassador to Israel that Jerusalem views his country as responsible for the artwork, and "would not let Sweden hide behind claims of freedom of expression for actions which justify terror attacks against Israelis."

The Foreign Ministry said that the display was a violation of understandings between Israel and Sweden, and that the Swedish government had promised not to link the conference with the Middle East conflict.

"The exhibit that glorified the actions of a suicide bomber who murdered 22 people is a violation of that understanding, and if it is not removed, Israel will reconsider its participation in the conference," the ministry said.

Hanegbi said that Israel's ambassador to Sweden behaved as did in order to shock public opinion and to emphasize the insanity in which a mass murderer is portrayed as a hero.

"This is the ambassador's duty, and in [Sunday's] government meeting I will call for him to be awarded a special citation for his actions, even if they were extreme," the minister said.

Sweden summons Mazel to explain actions Sweden on Monday will summon Ambassador Mazel to explain his actions Friday when he damaged the piece of art.

"We will ask him to explain and from our side we will maintain that it is unacceptable to destroy works of art in this way," Swedish Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Anna Larsson said Saturday.

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Mazel told Haaretz that he didn't cut the electrical wires or rip them, but merely unplugged the three electrical projectors that provided lighting to the display. He said he had decided on this act of protest in advance after reading about the exhibition in the newspapers.

"I couldn't stand by and see how an exhibition titled 'making a difference' and dealing with the prevention of genocide, would display an artwork with a photograph of a murderer who killed 21 human beings. It was a shock for me," Mazel said, adding that he asked the exhibition's director to remove the artwork, and after he was turned down decided to disconnect the projectors.

The piece was created by Feiler and Gunilla Skold Feiler, his Swedish wife. Feiler, who described the ambassador's actions as "vandalism," was to play his saxophone at the exhibition, but announced that he would not perform as long as Mazel was present, Israeli Radio reported. Museum director Kristian Berg then requested that Mazel leave, and escorted him out of the exhibition hall.

"The artwork was supposed to call attention to how weak people left alone can be capable of horrible things," said Feiler. He went on to say that Mazel "tried to stop free speech and free artistic expression from being carried out in Sweden."

Berg said he realized the installation may have been emotional for Mazel, but that destroying art was unacceptable. "If you don't like what you see, you can leave the premises," he said.

Israeli Radio reported that the genocide exhibit included 20 pieces of art from artists around the world. Three works were selected from Israel, all of which presented the conflict from a Palestinian point-of-view, while a pro-Israel piece of art was excluded following diplomatic pressure from Syria.