

Natan Sharansky Minister of Industry and Trade

Ten years after his release from Soviet prison and his subsequent immigration to Israel, Natan Sharansky was elected to the Israeli Knesset on May 20, 1996. Two weeks later, he was appointed to the Cabinet as Minister of Industry and Trade.

Yisrael ba-Aliya, the political party headed by Natan Sharansky, was officially formed on June 7, 1995. Yisrael ba-Aliya, which means "Israel on the Rise," also denotes "Israel for Immigration." As party chairman, Mr. Sharansky aspires to improve Israel by bringing immigration and absorption issues to the forefront of the Israeli political dialogue. He firmly believes that the improvement of social conditions for all Israelis is crucial in order to create an attractive and spiritually creative society that will encourage aliya from the former Soviet Union and from the West. Yisrael ba-Aliya won seven seats in its first Knesset elections. In addition to the Industry and Trade Ministry, Yisrael ba-Aliya was also assigned the Absorption Ministry portfolio.

After graduation from the prestigious Physical Technical Institute in Moscow, Mr. Sharansky applied for an exit visa to Israel, which was denied for "security reasons." In 1976, he helped establish the Helsinki Monitoring group, a human rights movement in Moscow headed by Andrei Sakharov, thereby beginning his life-long struggle for basic freedoms.

In 1977, a Soviet newspaper alleged that Mr. Sharansky was collaborating with the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency. Despite denials from every level of the U.S. government, including President Carter himself, Mr. Sharansky was found guilty and sentenced to 13 years of solitary confinement and hard labour. Due to intense international pressure, Mr. Sharansky was released in a "prisoner exchange" February 11, 1986. He emigrated to Israel that day.

Prior to his advent on the Israeli political scene, Mr. Sharansky worked tirelessly in support of Soviet Jewry and immigrants' rights. In 1988, he was elected President of the newly created Zionist Forum, an umbrella organization of former Soviet activist groups dedicated to helping new Israelis and educating the public about absorption issues.

In early 1994, Mr. Sharansky co-founded Peace Watch, an independent, non-partisan group committed to the monitoring of compliance to agreements signed by Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Mr. Sharansky's memoirs, *Fear No Evil*, were published in the United States in 1988 and translated into nine languages. From 1990 to 1995, Natan Sharansky served as Associate Editor of *The Jerusalem Report*.

Natan Sharansky is married to Avital Shtieglitz Sharansky. They reside in Jerusalem with their two daughters, Rahel and Hanna.