



MEI MEDIA WATCH

(A Survey of Editorials)

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Katsav Found Guilty of Rape

[**Note:** On 30 December 2010 former Israeli President Moshe Katsav was found guilty of 'rape, sexual harassment, committing an indecent act while using force, harassing a witness and obstruction of justice.' This marked the end of the long-running controversy since January 2007 when Attorney General Menahem Mazuz declared that he would consider charging the sitting President for rape and sexual harassment. This led to Katsav's pre-mature resignation in July 2007, weeks before the end of his seven-year term. Such a far reaching development has largely been ignored by the international media. Hence, the editorials of the Israeli media are reproduced here. Editor, MEI@ND]

THE JERUSALEM POST
JPOST.com Israel's Best-Selling English Daily and Most-Read English Website BETA

Editorial, 30 December 2010, Thursday

1. Katsav's Fall

It was only the hubris of Katsav, who demanded to be cleared of all the charges against him that paradoxically resulted in justice being done.

Moshe Katsav's conviction for rape, sexual assault and harassment truly is 'a sad day for Israel,' as Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu aptly noted Thursday (30 December).

It is a bitter end to Katsav's 'rags to riches' story of a poor Iranian immigrant turned president. He had been a trailblazer for ambitious young men and women from Sephardi families who hoped to reach positions of power in what had been an Ashkenazi-dominated political world.

In light of his tremendous success, Katsav's fall is all the more painful. This was most evident in Kiryat Malachi, the town where Katsav grew up and was later elected mayor at the record young age of 24. The reactions of residents there, many of whom had known Katsav for most of his life, ranged from denial to disgust, to fierce anger at his betrayal.

The Katsav conviction also sullied Israel's name internationally. Foreign news media, rarely anything but eager to slam the Jewish state, pounced on the juicy story of Israel's figure-head turning out to be a base sex offender.

'Ex-leader of Israel declared serial rapist,' read a prominently placed headline on *Pravda's* website. Britain's *Guardian* and Spain's *El Pais* featured similar headlines.

CNN led its website with 'Former Israeli president Katsav guilty of rape' for hours. Al-Jazeera also chose Katsav as its top story and, for good measure, added details from the sexual misconduct trials of former justice minister Haim Ramon and former defence minister Yitzhak Mordechai.

The unanimous conviction on all the major charges by Judges George Kara, Miriam Sokolov and Judith Shevah raises serious questions about the professionalism of the offices of the attorney-general and the state attorney. In 2007, both had been willing to remove the most severe charges of rape against Katsav within the framework of a plea bargain. In February 2008, the High Court of Justice upheld the plea agreement, rejecting petitions brought by women's rights organizations, after the state attorney and the attorney-general claimed that the rape-related testimony was not reliable enough to ensure a conviction.

It was only the hubris of Katsav, who demanded to be cleared of all the charges against him that paradoxically resulted in justice being done. Rape victims had watched helplessly as the state attorney and attorney-general debunked their testimony. It must have been no easy task to continue to work with the prosecutors afterwards.

But there is also a positive side to the Katsav conviction.

It is tangible proof that no one, not even the state's most elevated citizen, is beyond the reach of justice.

Equality before the law is protected in Israel, regardless of the extent of one's political clout or powerful connections.

This is a testimony to the strength of Israeli democracy.

His conviction also mark the ongoing deconstruction of an intolerable machismo – once prominent among IDF figures and others – according to which a certain amount of rakishness was considered integral to a uniquely Israeli 'new Jew' masculinity. The court's verdict takes Israel another step toward clearing up any cultural ambiguities about 'what she means when she says no,' to paraphrase a popular song of the 1960s. (Tellingly, as part of the increased awareness of a woman's right to protection from crass sexual advances, Dan Almagor in the 1990s changed the lyrics in his song – 'You say 'no' so nicely that it

sounds more inviting than 'yes' – after its message was derided by Supreme Court justice Mishael Cheshin in the Kibbutz Shomrat rape case.) Perhaps most important of all, however, the conviction gives a major boost to sexually victimized women fearful of stepping forward. The Katsav trial, coming after the guilty sentences handed down in the Ramon and Mordechai trials, is further proof that a woman has a fair chance of defending her honour in a court of law even against the most powerful masculine figures. The Tel Aviv District Court's insistence on conducting the entire trial behind closed doors to better protect the identities of the victims was central to this bolstered empowerment.

One small bit of business remains. In the garden of the President's Residence, Beit *Hanassi*, there are sculptured busts of all previous presidents, including our eighth. In light of his conviction, and as a symbolic step toward the removal of the stain to Israel's honour, it would behove the government to remove Moshe Katsav's bust from that exalted company.

Source: <http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Editorials/Article.aspx?id=201632>

HAARETZ.com

Tel Aviv, Editorial, 31 December 2010, Friday

2. The shame and the praise

Former President Moshe Katsav's disgraceful loss is a victory for the complainants and for law enforcement in striving for justice and for Israeli society.

The conviction yesterday (30 December) of ex-President Moshe Katsav for sex crimes in the Tel Aviv District Court is a milestone - for the legal system and the government in Israel. It wasn't only the private matter of citizen Katsav that was weighed in the scales of justice; so were equality before the law and the ability of the investigative, prosecutorial and court systems to handle the rarest of cases, that of the highest level of officials. The former president is not the issue; these weighty concerns are the issue and the lesson we can learn from Katsav's shame.

Judges George Karra, Miriam Sokolov and Judith Shevah ruled courageously and unequivocally. Katsav's gamble - at the last minute, he jettisoned the plea bargain his lawyers had obtained from then-Attorney General Menahem Mazuz - proved a colossal misjudgement. His insistence on total denial of the events and their significance, instead of admitting to some charges, cost him a total loss.

Katsav served as a mayor, a member of Knesset, a minister and, finally, as president of the country. A man of the public from his youth, he was skilled at politics and manoeuvrability, and these skills in the presidential elections of 2000 brought him - from the opposition - a victory over the ruling party's candidate, Shimon Peres.

But Katsav could not control his instincts. Apparently, quite the opposite was true. He took advantage of his high status and his office in the President's Residence, to molest women under his authority. He thus brought shame not only on himself, but also on the office from which he was forced to resign, under pressure from Mazuz, just weeks before his term were to end.

In this court case there is shame, but there is also praise. The police investigators did their work devotedly, in collecting and summarizing evidence and in recommending that Katsav stand trial.

While the prosecution and Mazuz faced difficulty in navigating through the storm of reaching the plea bargain, their mistakes are dwarfed by the final outcome. The judges were not to be daunted by Katsav's public relations onslaught.

Katsav's disgraceful loss is a victory for the complainants and for law enforcement in striving for justice and for Israeli society, which atones for its flaws even when those accused are found at the highest levels.

Source: <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/opinion/the-shame-and-the-praise-1.334419>

HAARETZ.com

Tel Aviv, Editorial, 2 January 2011, Sunday

3. The weakness and strength of Israeli society

The conviction on serious sexual charges of former president Moshe Katsav is a tragic moment for the perpetrator and a sad one for a country that once gave such a person its highest office.

The conviction on serious sexual charges of former president Moshe Katsav reveals the weakness and the strength of Israeli society. This is the shining moment of the rule of law, which makes no distinction between the highest in society and the lowest. It is a tragic moment for the perpetrator and a sad one for a country that once gave such a person its highest office and allowed him to benefit from state support to keep things quiet for years.

Above all, however, it is a welcome moment for the women hiding against their will behind the anonymous letters by which they have been referred in the media. The court heard their voices, gave expression to their suffering and gave them back a bit of their trampled respect.

The Katsav trial gives expression to a social change in relations between men and women which at its core reflects recognition of the right of a woman to say 'no,' even to her employer, to her supervisor, to her army commander or any other senior person in authority who tries to force sexual relations upon her.

The turning point came in the passage of the sexual harassment law of 1998, which rejected the distorted norms that were firmly established at many places of employment. In a militaristic and traditional society that had clearly viewed women and their bodies as male property, step by step the law changed norms that had also been established in the higher levels of government.

Case after case involving government officials and other public figures - Yitzhak Mordechai, Ofer Glazer, Haim Ramon, Hanan Goldblatt, Uri Bar-Lev and others - were etched into the public consciousness, making it clear that the rules had changed, that sexual exploitation wouldn't be tolerated among the good old boys and that a woman's body and spirit were no longer up for grabs.

The deeds uncovered in the investigation of Moshe Katsav and at his trial are particularly grave due to their serial nature and as a result of the former president's web of denials and the mudslinging campaign that he conducted with the help of his associates, against the women who mustered the courage to file complaints against him.

In deciding to accept the testimony of the complainants and their supporters as true and completely rejecting Katsav's lies, the judges made it clear that the law is the protector of women who have been harassed, degraded and persecuted. The verdict against the former president is not simply a verdict rendered in a criminal trial. It is also an important step on behalf of human rights.

The path to gender equality is still long. Women in Israel are discriminated against in laws regarding personal status and in their salary levels, and trafficking in women continues. There is no doubt, however, that Katsav's conviction gave new, clear and powerful force to these proper and desirable norms.

Source: <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/opinion/the-weakness-and-strength-of-israeli-society-1.334722>

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