

# Nobel Prize Winner, Günter Grass: the Voice of the World's Conscience, now Stilled

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Region: [Europe](#)  
Theme: [History](#)

*Günter Grass, acclaimed author, social commentator and 1999 Nobel Prize Winner for Literature - writing about Israel and its nuclear weapons:*

## ***'What must be said***

*Why have I kept silent, held back so long,  
on something openly practised in  
war games, at the end of which those of us  
who survive will at best be footnotes?*

*It's the alleged right to a first strike  
that could destroy an Iranian people  
subjugated by a loudmouth  
and gathered in organized rallies,  
because an atom bomb may be being  
developed within his arc of power.*

*Yet why do I hesitate to name  
that other land in which  
for years - although kept secret -  
a growing nuclear power has existed  
beyond supervision or verification,  
subject to no inspection of any kind?*

*This general silence on the facts,  
before which my own silence has bowed,  
seems to me a troubling, enforced m,  
leading to a likely punishment  
the moment it's broken:  
the verdict "anti-Semitism" falls easily.*

*But now that my own country,  
brought in time after time  
for questioning about its own crimes,  
profound and beyond compare,  
has delivered yet another submarine to Israel,  
(in what is purely a business transaction,  
though glibly declared an act of reparation)  
whose speciality consists in its ability  
to direct nuclear warheads toward  
an area in which not a single atom bomb  
has yet been proved to exist, its feared  
existence proof enough, I'll say what must be said.*

*But why have I kept silent till now?  
Because I thought my own origins,  
tarnished by a stain that can never be removed,  
meant I could not expect Israel, a land  
to which I am, and always will be, attached,  
to accept this open declaration of the truth.*

*Why only now, grown old,  
and with what ink remains, do I say:  
Israel's atomic power endangers  
an already fragile world peace?*

*Because what must be said  
may be too late tomorrow;  
and because - burdened enough as Germans -  
we may be providing material for a crime  
that is foreseeable, so that our complicity  
will not be expunged by any  
of the usual excuses.*

*And granted: I've broken my silence  
because I'm sick of the West's hypocrisy;  
and I hope too that many may be freed  
from their silence, may demand  
that those responsible for the open danger  
we face renounce the use of force,  
may insist that the governments of  
both Iran and Israel allow an international authority  
free and open inspection of  
the nuclear potential and capability of both.*

*No other course offers help  
to Israelis and Palestinians alike,  
to all those living side by side in enmity*

*in this region occupied by illusions,  
and ultimately, to all of us.'*

**Günter Grass. Died April 13th 2015, aged 87**

[www.theguardian.com/books/2012/apr/05/gunter-grass-what-must-be-said](http://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/apr/05/gunter-grass-what-must-be-said)

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