

Affirm Life against Atomic Terror

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On the initiative of Action des Citoyens pour le Désarmement Nucléaire (ACDN) and its president, who incidentally is a candidate for the 2022 presidential election "for a world decarbonised, de nuclearised and demilitarised", the Op-Ed below has been co-signed by 45 prominent people - NGO leaders, MPs and mayors, artists and writers, including 15 from outside France. It is open for all to sign.

Sixty years ago, on 24 November 1961, the UN General Assembly formally declared that « any State using nuclear and thermonuclear weapons is to be considered as violating the Charter of the United Nations, as acting contrary to the laws of humanity and as committing a crime against mankind and civilization. » (Resolution 1653 XVI)

Today we are only 100 seconds from Doomsday, according to the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists - and humankind, threatened in our dignity and very existence, needs to enjoy a fundamental right: the right to life, with its corollary, the right of peoples to ensure their survival by peaceful means.

According the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (10 December 1948) "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood." (Article 1), "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person." (Article 3) and "Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status." (Article 2).

In the same spirit, the death penalty was abolished in France by the law of 9 October 1981. This means that France, less than any other country, cannot condemn or execute any individual, either in France or abroad, and would be guilty of a monstrous crime against humanity if she used nuclear weapons for what would be a mass execution.

Furthermore, France ratified on 2 August 1992 the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which stipulates in Article VI that "Each of the Parties to the Treaty undertakes to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control". The International Court of Justice confirmed this unanimously in its Advisory Opinion of 8 July 1996: "There exists an obligation to pursue in good faith and bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under strict and effective international control"

France is thus required to negotiate with the other nuclear-armed states the complete elimination of their nuclear arsenals, which are weapons for crimes against humanity.

Such power of annihilation is exorbitant and tyrannical. A handful of Heads of State, including France's president, can decide to use them at any moment, without trial or appeal, without being answerable to anyone, and can carry out the sentence immediately. The populations of nuclear states have never been consulted on the possession of these weapons, and will not be consulted on their

use, yet they are forced to finance them and to jeopardise their own lives as well as those of other peoples.

France has had nuclear arms since 1960, has spent over 300 billion euros on them and never stops developing them. France's estimated 300 bombs could cause a billion deaths - what the strategists call "strict sufficiency"... This situation is absurd, inhuman, and contrary to international law and to the French Constitution, which places Human Rights above everything else and requires respect for them, and for treaties.

France's nuclear arsenal is contrary to good sense, because it is illogical to defend republican values, such as fraternity, while threatening to commit massacres; illogical to link France's "vital interests" to the use of weapons that would be suicidal against a nation that also had them; illogical to claim to guarantee our nation's security by these weapons while forbidding others to have them; illogical to want to economize while wasting billions on death devices unusable against other nuclear States, unusable for moral and political reasons against States without them, incapable of deterring terrorists and only good for falling into their hands.

It is contrary to democracy, finally, for the French people have never had a say about it, yet we know from a poll (IFOP-ACDN, 2018) that more than eight out of ten French citizens (85%) would answer YES to the following question:

« Do you want France to participate in abolishing nuclear and radioactive weapons, and commit with all the states concerned to negotiations aimed at drawing up, ratifying and implementing a treaty to ban and completely eliminate nuclear and radioactive weapons, under mutual and international control that is strict and effective? »

That question should have been resolved long ago, and must be now, urgently - we are asking it of all the candidates to the Presidency and all the future candidates for parliament, and we wish to put it to the French people. We know that the people alone has the power to force the state to honour the right that it has flouted for decades, and the ability to overcome the weight of the nuclear and military-industrial lobbies. And we place confidence in the hearts of each one of us to choose "between hell and reason", as Albert Camus said on 8 August 1945.

To remove the Sword of Damocles hanging over our heads would multiply both our security and our freedom, in the full respecting of Human Rights and the republican motto: Liberty, Equality, Fraternity. It will enable all human beings, without distinction, to benefit from France's law abolishing the death penalty.

Sixty years after the UN resolution, forty years after the French parliament's decision to abolish the death penalty, it is urgent that we enter a new era, to take life seriously and to protect it. Failure to do so would be criminal folly.

FRENCH SIGNATORIES

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