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Letter to Emmanuel Macron about the nuclear threat

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Monsieur le Président,

You have not yet been elected President of the Republic, but if you are in the evening of 7 May, we ask what you intend to do to protect France and the French people from the gravest threat: the nuclear danger. The reason why we are putting this question shortly before the second round of the presidential election is that you did not answer the three questions we sent to you and to other candidates in December 2016 :

1. Do you want France to negotiate and ratify with all states concerned a treaty to ban and totally eliminate nuclear weapons, under mutual and international control that is strict and effective?

2. Do you undertake if elected to support the holding of a referendum that puts that question to the French people without delay after your election?

3. In order to avoid a French Chernobyl or Fukushima, do you commit to having France programme the closure of all the nuclear power reactors and implement during the next five-year term the fastest possible transition towards electricity production without nuclear technology ?

Regarding that last question, you will certainly understand that, apart from the closing of the Fessenheim plant (too much delayed and less significant than the opening of the EPR or the unjustified demands of Electricité de France) none of the declared objectives in your programme can satisfy us. We would like to convince you that nuclear energy is moribund, and is far too dangerous to be maintained under state support - and that on the day when a Fukushima-like disaster hits France, as almost happened at the Le Blayais plant on 27 December 1999, you will be seen as having prime responsibility.

We would like even more to persuade you to re-examine your programme in the light of our first two questions.

In our view nuclear weapons are a nonsense, and we are not alone in that view. All round the world voices are being raised to say so, from Pope Francis to the Nobel Laureates, the Pugwash scientists, the US mayors and bishops, the mayors of 7500 cities and the governments of 130 countries. The Bill to organise a referendum on France's participation in abolishing nuclear arms and the Appeal for a Referendum, both signed by over 120 French parliamentarians, testify to that: nuclear weapons only produce insecurity in the world. As US General Lee Butler (former head of the Strategic Air Command) said in 1996: « nuclear weapons are fundamentally dangerous, extraordinarily costly, militarily ineffective and morally indefensible ».

Their danger, even in peacetime and more so at times of international crisis, was demonstrated long ago with Hiroshima, Nagasaki, the Cuba Missile Crisis, and other near-disasters like the false alarm of autumn 1983. That danger led to three conferences on the « humanitarian impact » (i.e. human suffering) that these weapons have, conferences held in 2014 and 2015 in Oslo, Nayarit and Vienna with 127, 146 and 158 government delegations respectively.

Their exorbitant cost - for France, well over 300 billions euros so far, and every year 5-6 billion more for their upkeep and « modernisation » (useless though that be) - is flagrant. It is pure wastage, taking away from the budget for operating and equipping the armed forces, and also from the nation's social budget.

Their military ineffectiveness is obvious against terrorism. But also against other nuclear-armed states - except for a few French strategists who have never had to put their ideas to the test. The only military men who did were the

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generals of the "Blues" fighting the "Reds" in a simulation in May 1980 held in the French-Occupied zone of West Germany, and the only politician was then-president Giscard d'Estaing. He had wanted these manoeuvres to test the moment when the Blues overwhelmed by the tanks of the Reds (3-4 times more numerous) would ask him to authorise the use of nuclear-armed Pluton missiles to stop the Reds' advance on the ground.

"One conclusion emerged, gradually : neither far away where I was, nor on the ground where the miliatary leaders were, did a decision to use tactical nuclear weapons seem appropriate." As for the "strategic" nuclear weapons targeting enemy cities, President Giscard had resolved there also, deep inside himself, to never use them first, so as not to provoke a response that would destroy France. But since their deterrent function depended on first use, Giscard was envisioning surrender if ever France were defeated by conventional means or Soviet invasion - pointing out correctly that France in her history had more than once recovered from an occupation, but she would never recover from annihilation.

Those are the military realities which usually are not mentionned.

Finally, these weapons are totally immoral. They strike soldiers and civilians indiscriminately, they provoke atrocious suffering, they affect future generations (read the hibakusha's testimonies!). What will you do if one day you have to decide on their use? Would you refuse to cause death, injury, the miserable survival of thousands, hundreds of thousands, millions of people? And cause your family and compatriots to suffer the same fate? If so, now is the time to refuse, and to draw the other nuclear states into the abolition process. Or else will you become, in the name of supposedly defending our republican values - liberty, equality, fraternity - a war-criminal, a culprit in crimes against humanity?

Out of the 193 UN member states only 9 possess nuclear arms - including France, alas. They are all "rogue states" like North Korea. They take hostage the other states, and people, and the whole world. They arrogate to themselves some absolutely unacceptable "rights".

The UN knows this. The General Assembly decided with a big majority to convene negotiations to decide on a nuclear ban treaty leading to their total elimination. 132 states took part in the first session of that conference, held successfully on 27-31 March 2017, and the second session ending on 7 July is expected to produce a text banning nuclear weapons - a text that will be submitted in autumn to the General Assembly.

When you wrote to the MAN association, you said that "France cannot engage in such negotiations unless the other nuclear-armed states engage also." But if each one says the same thing, all sheltering behind the immobilism of the others, then none will.

What then are we asking you? To commit France to negotiation in order to bring in the other nuclear states, in accordance with Article VI of the NPT which obliges them to negotiate, in respect for the UN Charter, for humanitarian law, for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights - and in respect for the French Constitution, which makes the president the "guarantor of the good functioning of institutions" and the guarantor of international treaties. Numerous countries are hoping that France will do this.

When the ban treaty exists, even before any nuclear-armed state signs it, nuclear weapons will be stigmatised, just as biological and chemical weapons are today, along with the states that hold them. Do you want to place France beyond the pale of civilisation?

So, Monsieur le président, please send French diplomats to the UN on 15 June. Not to say, as was said in the earlier session, that France will not join the negotiations, but to say that she will.

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And if you doubt that the French people want this, look at the IFOP poll (attached) or better, put the question to them!

Please accept, Monsieur le Président, our respectful and republican sentiments,

Yours sincerely,

Jean-Marie Matagne
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Attachments:

- Appel à référendum
- Proposition de Loi référendaire
- Liste des signataires
- Soutiens étrangers
- Sondage IFOP-ACDN

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