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# **We need a citizen candidate, pro-climate and anti-nuclear, to contest the presidential election of 2022**

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## **Citizens of France,**

For humankind and for each of us, there are now four big urgent challenges (and some others of course): they are climate change, the nuclear threat, the social and health challenge, and the threat to democracy.

That is why, we as citizens need to take ownership of the presidential and legislative elections of 2022. Calmly but firmly. Despite the paradox that the path to annulling the democratic hold-up which a presidential election represents goes via that election. For democracy does not consist in electing a chief and his cronies and then living under their wishes and whims for five years. The nation's public life needs to be in the hands of civil society itself. Sure, political parties can aid the expression of the people's will, but they must subject their interests and their leaders' interest to the general interest of all. The voice of the people, often more sensible than the elite and obviously more concerned with the common good than are the lobbies, needs to be heard and respected. That is essential! Nevertheless, in 1993 Philippe Séguin, then president of the National Assembly, already noted: "There is a growing divorce between the citizens and those whose mission is to represent them (...) The Chamber is now a mere antechamber". Since then the gap has become a gulf, and democracy, which was already sickening, keeps shrinking rapidly.

One of the most flagrant examples of democratic trickery is the nuclear domain - the bombs and power-plants. The development of the so-called "deterrent force" was never subject to any public consultation, and the referendum about it which General de Gaulle envisaged in 1962 did not take place. As a result we continue to finance through our taxes a policy that is absurd and criminal, without ever having had a chance to have our say. It is the same with the nuclear power-plants. In 1971 several thousands of us marched on the Rhine plain to object to the start of work on the Fessenheim reactor. But it was built and France was assigned, without any consultation, to an all-nuclear future, even at the risk of a catastrophe - and our descendants were given the huge task of managing radioactive wastes for thousands of years.

A historical note helps to measure the seriousness of the problem. In January 1986, even before the Chernobyl disaster, Mikhail Gorbachev proclaimed: "No more nuclear weapons by the year 2000!" That was a notable event, and led in December 1987 to the Washington Treaty that eliminated Intermediate Nuclear Forces in Europe (the SS20 missiles of the USSR and the US Pershings), and then, two years later, the fall of the Berlin Wall. No less than that! That surprising appeal changed the atmosphere of the time and the course of history. "Gorby" made me understand that nuclear weapons were the worst threat to humankind, the one that we absolutely need to eliminate if we want to survive and face together the numerous other challenges confronting us. Today, of course, one of these is the climate challenge, which aggravates the nuclear risk, and the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* emphasizes.

In 1996, some friends and I founded ACDN (Action des Citoyens pour le Désarmement Nucléaire). In 2001, ACDN mandated me to enter the presidential campaign of 2002 to call for a phase-out of nuclear weapons and nuclear power. I was one of the first "minor candidates" declared. But to play in the "big boys' court", to contest the first round of the election and get media coverage, I needed to obtain 500 sponsors. I nearly had them, I fell short... by more than 490... At the time, admittedly, after the miraculous halt of the Chernobyl cloud at France's border, after 9/11 (a perfect demonstration of how useless nuclear deterrence is) the nuclear danger had become the last concern of the media, of public opinion, and therefore of the MPs and senators. Why would they have sponsored a partisan candidate wishing to eliminate such a negligible danger?

Ten years later, in 2012, after many futile approaches to presidential candidates - of all colours and importance - in particular to François Hollande who remained deaf and dumb, I began a fast on 15 May, the day when the successful

candidate got access to the nuclear button. It was an open-ended hunger-strike in order to be received by the new president and to ask him to organise a referendum on the subject. 42 days later, with a friend who had joined me in fasting from June 1, we were blocked by the police 50 metres far from the Presidential Palace, despite the promise of an interview that had been transmitted to us two days before by the prefecture of Charente-Maritime. We stopped our fast, but without surrendering. A rolling strike followed nationwide. Later at the start of 2016, ACDN launched a referendum initiative on the nuclear question, along with a dozen MPs and for the first time in the history of the 5th Republic - it was a procedure for a "shared-initiative" referendum (RIP in French). The elections of 2017 interrupted it two-thirds of the way through the first step, when we had gathered 126 parliamentarians' signatures out of the requisite 185 (20% of parliament).

In May 2018, after the election of Emmanuel Macron, we re-launched an RIP proposal for this question: *"Are you in favour of France participating in the abolition of nuclear and radioactive weapons and engaging with all the States concerned in negotiations aimed at drawing up, ratifying and implementing a treaty to ban and completely eliminate nuclear and radioactive weapons with mutual and international control that is strict and effective?"* The process is still continuing. At the start of 2021 fifty MPs and senators (belonging to 14 different political groups) have signed the Bill - a little over 5% of the Parliament. They represent the 85% of French citizens who answered YES to the question and who want it to be put to them (IFOP poll)... Kudos to those few humanist democrats, but shame on the Parliament and its representative bankruptcy.

Yet the question put does no more than ask for France to honour the commitment she made in 1992 when she joined the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and to thus respect Human Rights and France's own Constitution! Alas, *"no nuclear power without nuclear weapons. No nuclear weapons without nuclear power"* - that is the admission (and one of the few truths uttered) that Emmanuel Macron made in his speech in Le Creusot at Framatome, on December 8, 2020. It fails to add the corollary: *with nuclear power and nuclear bombs no democracy, just a State-terrorist president*, capable of liquidating millions of human beings without having to answer to anybody... and therefore naturally inclined to act in many other domains with a Jupiterian authoritarianism, ill-camouflaged beneath a few sly pseudo-democratic phrases.

So what can we do? Allow global warming. capitalist globalisation and geopolitical conflicts to provoke the nuclear apocalypse - which we are currently only 100 seconds away from, according to the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists? Give up? "After me, the flood of fire"?

No! "It's not a sure thing." That at least is the feeling of numerous "active pessimists", including me. We each can join with the others to make a difference. But if we are to liberate creativity, overcome injustices, preserve the planet and take our destiny into our hands, we must end the exacerbated presidentialism that is blocking us and enclosing us in a jacobine, over-centralised society. *We must force the lock of the presidency.* We need to have in the race of candidates for presidential omnipotence some voices that rise to denounce the democratic ravages that this race implies, under the 5th Republic. And we need the vocal people to find a candidate to express this demand and to be capable also, if miraculously the voters elect him or her, of working to reduce presidential power in its antidemocratic and inhuman aspects, for example in calling negotiations to abolish nuclear weapons and also - why not - calling a States-General for a new Constitution!

As for me, though repelled by the misery of so many human beings, by the horror of "conventional wars" supported by the arms merchants including France, and by the risks of nuclear crime - through power-plants as much as bombs - I don't think that I can play this role. But we ought to be able to find in civil society a candidate, male or female, who can insert into the heart of the next electoral campaign the vital demand for a world without nuclear arms or power-plants; who can assist the young people mobilised for climate in imposing their resolute refusals of injustice - be it economic, social or fiscal - of authoritarianism, of arbitrary decisions, and of the carving up of public services. We need a true ecological, social, democratic and humanist *mutation*, but it will remain totally impossible as long as our nation gives the Bomb first place in our priorities.

## **We need a citizen candidate, pro-climate and anti-nuclear, to contest the presidential election of 2022**

Since the start of the 21st century, the general situation in France and the world has kept getting worse, at least until the recent election of Joe Biden in the USA, who might shift back, at least a little, the long hand of the Doomsday Clock. This degradation was present already, foreseeable and foreseen, ten years back. It was described in the Preamble to the States-General for a liveable world, a gathering held in Saintes in October 2011 on the call of 6 NGOs including ACDN. Having edited it and finding nothing to delete or add (pandemics were already mentioned...), I adopt it in full, and ACDN owns the "[Charter for a Liveable World](#)" which emerged from that gathering, a text worked out collectively in four days by 150 people, and then updated in 2019 with a group of Yellow-Vests in Saintes under the heading "[Charter for a Human France and Human World](#)". This programme, or at least this charter of demands still improvable, is what we would like to popularise and carry with other democratic forces into the 2022 presidential and legislative campaigns, labelling the candidates who share it.

« A France that is free, just and fraternal, in more human world », as the Charter puts it, a world free of climate dangers, pandemics, starvation and nuclear threats, a world of equality and solidarity, that is still possible if a lot of us join together, roll up our sleeves, and rid France of the presidential strait-jacket. The time has come for a peaceable world, less militarised, more democratic and convivial. Not too hot, but warm and hearty! For our children and grandchildren.

**La Rochelle & Saintes, 20 -21 January 2021**

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