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Humanist double standard

OPEN LETTER TO PRESIDENT CHIRAC

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from Jean-Marie Matagne

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Action of Citizens for the total Dismantling of Nukes

to Monsieur Jacques Chirac, President of the French Republic

Saintes, 4 January 2006

Monsieur le Président,

You have just announced that you will cause the abolition of the death penalty to be written into France's constitution. This solemn act, of real historical significance, will confirm the message which was read on your behalf by Madame Nicole Guedj, on 6 October 2004, to the participants in the Second World Congress against the Death Penalty. It began thus:

"You are gathered today in Montreal in the name of a belief and a commitment which France also shares. Human life is sacred and inviolable. There is no situation where death can be an act of justice"

Bravo, Monsieur le Président! You do honour to the France of Human Rights and in so doing you show your great humanism.

But alas, Monsieur le Président, why does this humanism serve only to conceal the worst intentions of human massacre that the world has ever known?

"Human life is sacred and inviolable. There is no situation where death can be an act of justice" you say. Then explain to us why at the same time you are maintaining and modernising France's atomic weapons: 348 nuclear warheads placed on missiles which are ready to be fired by planes and nuclear subs, these warheads having on average a power exceeding 10 times the Hiroshima bomb.

Judging by that bomb, which caused over 200 000 deaths, France's estimated equivalent of 57 millions tonnes of TNT could kill a billion people. Explain to us why France ought to maintain at great expense a billion guillotines - along with, admittedly, only one executioner: the head of state, i.e. yourself.

Explain to us how human life can be *"sacred and inviolable"* in the case of a single individual presumed to be criminal, and not in the case of millions of people whose sole mistake is to be born and live in foreign cities. If *"there is no situation where death can be an act of justice,"* could it be just in this case?

To those at the Montreal Congress, you spoke of their *"refusal of fear and of the vengeful spirit" and their "choice of justice and humanism".* You continued:

"The partisans of the death penalty seek to legitimize it by considerations of equity and effectiveness. There is no infallible justice and every execution can kill an innocent person. The death penalty does ***not*** provide reparation to

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victims any more than it serves the security of society."

What do you say then about the partisans of **death penalty by nuclear explosion**? Would this penalty suddenly become legitimate, equitable, effective, just and reparative just because it would be administered wholesale? How many innocent victims could that execution kill, infallibly yes, but without justice or process of law?

"The death penalty is also intrinsically unjust. The arguments of the defense counsels and their means of legal recourse are exhausted more quickly for poor and minority defendants than for rich ones".

Would **the death penalty by nuclear explosion** conversely, be intrinsically just? In the mere quarter-hour you would have when deciding on execution, would the population you would condemn - rich or poor and more likely the latter - have the time to develop their defense arguments and exercise legal means of recourse?

Do not come telling us, Monsieur le Président, that these "exceptional" weapons are destined to never be used, that they exist solely to deter a hypothetical aggressor from attacking "our vital interests". If you consider human life to be *"sacred and inviolable",* you will forbid yourself from sending millions to their deaths but pressing buttons on your nuclear briefcase. And since you condemn *"the vengeful spirit"* and since *"the death penalty does **not*** provide reparation to victims", you will not do that even to "avenge France" if the worst were to happen - a nuclear attack on France (which is something that our nuclear arsenal risks provoking).

Your deterrence is worth nothing, Monsieur le Président. It is worth nothing, but it costs a huge amount: 1500 billion francs from 1945 to 1988 for the strike force itself and tens of billions of Euros which keep going year after year into a growing section within the Military Programme Budget which you pushed through in 2002.

It is time to choose, Monsieur le Président, between two radically opposed attitudes. You cannot **on the one hand** affirm humanist values and the sacredness of human life and **on the other hand** retain the right and means to massacre whole populations. You cannot **with one hand** consign the guillotine to the scrapheap of history and **with the other hand** oil the tools that can kill billions.

"Without delay, I again call for a general moratorium on all executions, as a first step towards universal abolition", so you said.

Without delay, I call again, Monsieur le Président, for you to place a general moratorium on all nuclear arms programmes, and especially France's (the M45, M51, 4e SNLE, TNO, LMJ...), as a first step towards their universal abolition, in accordance with article VI of the Non-Proliferation Treaty which France has ratified.

"At a time when the world seems to be gripped by the vertigo of violence, let us prove that we are confident in the future. Let us choose resolutely the path of education and prevention. Let us demonstrate by new progress in justice and law that we intend to be firm in combatting the scourges of today with the weapons of freedom and humanism."

Not with weapons of mass destruction.

"The abolition of the death penalty is necessary part of the progress of civilisation". So is the abolition of nuclear arms. It is up to you, Monsieur le Président, to make France lead the progress of civilisation now, before nuclear proliferation ends in destroying it completely.

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