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Letter to the President of the French Republic

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Publication date: Thursday 3 August 2017

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Letter to the President of the French Republic

To President Emmanuel Macron

copies to the PM,
and to the Ministers of the Interior, of Ecological and Solidary Transition, of Justice, of Europe and Foreign Affairs, of the Armed Forces

Subject: Nuclear Disarmament

Attachments: list of 126 parliamentarians who signed a draft bill to organize a referendum on France's participation in the abolition of nuclear weapons (April 2017)

Monsieur le Président,

On the initiative of our association, the city of Saintes made a commitment nearly twenty years ago in favour of nuclear disarmament, and has maintained it despite political changes. In 1999 Saintes joined the global network « Abolition 2000 », which links municipalities and NGOs of the whole world aimed at abolishing nuclear weapons. In 2008, Saintes joined "Mayors for Peace" which has the same objective, and groups nearly 7500 cities around the world, under the chairmanship of the mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The Nuclear Disarmament Flame was lit for the first time in Saintes by the mayor Madame Schmitt in May 2001, on the occasion of the first Nuclear Disarmament Days; and lit again on various occasions such as the Rallies for International Disarmament, Nuclear, Biological and Chemical in 2004, 2006 and 2008; and lit every year from August 6 to 9 to commemorate the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and to proclaim: "Never Again!".

The only certain way to avoid new atomic massacres is to eliminate all the "weapons of mass destruction" - which are above all weapons for massacres, war crimes, and crimes against humanity, and which could lead to the end of humankind.

The other weapons that are unable to distinguish civilians from soldiers have all been banned: biological weapons in 1972, chemical weapons in 1993, anti-personnel mines in 1997, cluster munitions in 2008. And the most dangerous of all, nuclear weapons, have now at last been banned by a UN treaty, resulting from a General Assembly decision last December. On 7 July 2017, 122 states voted for this new Treaty, and one against.

The outlawing of these weapons ought to be a big step forward towards their total elimination.

Unfortunately, France and the other nuclear states boycotted the negotiations that produced the Treaty. France even led the boycott. She incited the states under her influence to not take part. On 27 March 2017, when the conference's first session opened, France's representative at the UN, along with those of the USA and the UK, held a press conference stating their refusal to negotiate. And on 7 July, the very day when the Treaty was adopted, those three states rejected it, in a common communiqué insisting that they will never join it.

After that, how can France ever convince the other nuclear-armed states to renounce their nuclear weapons? Or denounce North Korea, whose nuclear programme merely imitates hers? Or make her defense depend on the threat to commit a crime against humanity by using prohibited weapons? Or make anyone else believe that she is still the homeland of human rights?

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Monsieur le Président,

ACDN (Action des Citoyens pour le Désarmement Nucléaire) wrote and submitted to you on May 3, before you were elected, a Letter on the Nuclear Threat, which has not yet received an answer.

However, on July 3 at a meeting of the full parliament, you declared that nuclear deterrence was the « keystone of our security ». The next day you had yourself winched down onto a nuclear-armed submarine, « Le Terrible », to witness a simulated missile-launch. And on 20 July in Istres, the air base where President Hollande had given his Speech on Nuclear Deterrence in February 2015, you inspected the Rafales, Mirages, AWACS and service aircraft that form the airborne component of the so-called « deterrence force ». In addition, you announced that the armed forces budget would be the only one to rise in the coming years. The budget for developing nuclear weapons is to be increased also, to push past 6 billion euros.

Under those circumstances, we do not think it possible to continue to commemorate the victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as usual, as if France were about to heed the call of the survivors, and cooperate in the abolition of nuclear weapons. The call of the hibakusha is our call too, and is shared by three out of four French citizens, according to an IFOP poll. On 6 August 2017 we will not re-light the Nuclear Disarmament Flame.

But please, Monsieur le Président, give us at least a reason to light it next year!

If France does not wish to disarm unilaterally, why not invite the other nuclear-armed states to negotiate a coordinated and duly verified elimination of their arsenals?

And if you don't think that nuclear weapons are "fundamentally dangerous, extraordinarily costly, militarily ineffective and morally indefensible" (as was said in 1996 by the US general Lee Butler, the last head of Strategic Air Command), then we ask you at the very least, on democratic grounds, to consult the French people on this question, which is so fundamental, and in which their survival and humanity's survival are at stake.

Yours respectfully,

For ACDN,

Jean-Marie Matagne, Président Aude Labat, Vice-présidente Jean-Michel Audoire, Secrétaire

Patrick Moquay, Trésorier (Formerly mayor of Saint Pierre d'Oléron, which like Saintes is a member of « Abolition 2000 » and « Mayors for Peace »).