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ACDN's Reply to the IRAN-RESIST article of 12 May 2008

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ACDN to IRAN-RESIST - Saintes, 26 August 2008

Dear Editors,

You placed on your site on 12 May 2008 an article entitled "[Iran, the Mullahs' Nuclear Lobbying in France](#)".

That unsigned article, using the pretext of false information, makes defamatory accusations about ACDN and its president. ACDN's AGM of 28 June 2008 and its national committee have commissioned me to send you the following reply.

Concerning ACDN

Your article begins by mentioning the "*mullahs' discourse*" about the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the way it discriminates between nuclear and non-nuclear states, and says that this discourse "*has arrived in France thanks to local complicities*". According to you "*the mullahs have found allies in an NGO of the Charente-Maritime, the ACDN, which has undertaken the mission of organising conferences on this theme dear to the mullahs.*"

That is a bad start.

In fact:

1. ACDN is not an NGO of the Charente-Maritime. Its headquarters is in Saintes, but it is a national body with members in numerous parts of France and even abroad (although none in Iran, by the way). Its president is a member of the world council of "Abolition 2000" which is known internationally. Its bilingual site <http://www.acdn.net> is visited thousands of times per month. When you type ACDN on a search-engine, this is the site you get first. It takes a simple click. So you had an elementary means of verifying your allegations.

2. Our mission is certainly not to aid the Iranian mullahs on a theme dear to their hearts. It is "*to act, notably by demanding a referendum, in support of nuclear, biological and chemical disarmament, of a total, universal and controlled kind, in the framework of a genuine system of international security; to take or support initiatives locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally, both public and private - political, cultural, economic, judicial and other initiatives - which can contribute to disarmament, general security, the development of exchanges, solidarity and peace*" ([Statutes of ACDN, 1996, art. 2](#))

The first, second and third Rallies for International Disarmament - Nuclear Biological and Chemical (RID-NBC, 2004, 2006, 2008), as well as the Nuclear Disarmament Days (Saintes 2001), followed precisely this objective. We certainly didn't wait for the mullahs' prompting before calling for respect of Article VI of the NPT - the article that commits the nuclear states to negotiate and achieve complete elimination of their nuclear arsenals. This is the cause for which I was already in 2002 a declared candidate for the Presidential Election and requested the Constitutional Council to invalidate the candidacies of Mr Chirac and Mr Jospin. The Constitutional Council, [examining my request on 7 April 2002](#), declared itself incompetent to judge.

We certainly take Article VI of the NPT more seriously than the political leaders or the guardians of the French Constitution - but we are not the only or the first people to view it in this way. That was also the unanimous conclusion (point F) of the International Court of Justice in its advisory opinion of 8 July 1996 in response to a question from the UN General Assembly: "*There exists an obligation to pursue in good faith and the bring to conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects, under strict and effective international control.*" Please admit, then, that this "*discourse*" did not arrive in France with the mullahs, and that we are acting not

to please them but to make our own leaders respect international law. It's as simple as that.

Contacts

You go on to say: *"The first contacts took place in 2006 during the 2nd Conference on disarmament organised by ACDN in Saintes. Invited by the organisers, the mullahs sent to Saintes an employee of the Iranian Embassy to sound out the terrain."*

There's one correct point there: a representative of the Tehran government did come on ACDN's invitation for the 2nd RID-NBC (6-8 May 2006). The rest is false. It is not true that *"the first contacts took place in Saintes"* or that they were limited to the presence of an "embassy employee" sounding out the terrain. Here is what was printed in the newspaper Sud Ouest of 8 May 2006 under the title *"Iran justifies its choice of nuclear energy"*:

"For more details on this matter [Iran's nuclear policy] ACDN had invited from Paris Seyed Ali Moujani, the chef de mission in the Iranian Embassy and temporary acting ambassador in the absence of the ambassador. He was accompanied by Alireza Khalili, the chef de cabinet, who interpreted for the discussions."

Further on one reads: *"In response to the Iranian wish to develop solely civilian nuclear plants, Jean-Marie Matagne, ACDN's president, suggested another solution, 'since it is known that reserves of uranium will run out in fifty or sixty years'. He proposed that Iran, as a sign of good faith, should renounce nuclear technology and undertake to explore other forms of energy production such as solar or wind energy. 'Why doesn't Iran take the lead among nations committing to this path?' he asked."*

So Mr Moujani was more than a mere employee of the Embassy out reconnoitring, but that doesn't make ACDN or myself mouthpieces for the masters of Tehran. We are not and never will be.

Here are the terms under which we contacted the Iranian ambassador in Paris on 20 March 2006:

"Deeply concerned about the situation surrounding Iran's nuclear policies, ACDN has been trying for months to attract the attention of French popular opinion and French political leaders to the need for a just and peaceful solution to the crisis.

(...)

"This desire to make known, among others, the Iranian view of the crisis and to contribute to its peaceful solution cannot be interpreted as approval for the Iranian government's policies in general, or for the principles and practices of any state which imposes on all its citizens the rules of conduct of a particular religion.

"We protest particularly and vigorously against the very serious violations of the fundamental rights of men, women and children, and against the infringements of freedom of conscience and expression which penalise individuals and minorities in Iran.

"Similarly, we have difficulty believing in Iran's peaceful intentions when we hear its President call for Israel to be wiped off the map. Such declarations lead us to doubt the assurance your country gives that it will not use for military purposes the knowledge and technical means initially acquired for purposes of 'civilian research'. The fear expressed by numerous governments and by the IAEA that Iran may one day follow the detestable example of North Korea does not seem to us totally groundless.

"We therefore reject in advance any use of this letter that quotes only those passages favourable to the Iranian position and is silent on the grave preoccupations we have just expressed"

This [3-page letter](#)

has been available in full on the ACDN site since 17 September 2007 and since 18 September [in English](#), and the extracts above were posted there on 20 May 2006.

Confusions

Be that as it may, for you it is ACDN's *"very anti-American and anti-Israeli approach"* that *"attracted the mullahs"*. It is true that we are firmly opposed to President Bush's policies on numerous points. But a host of US citizens are too, without being any more anti-American than France's "anti-Sarkozists" are anti-French. This black-and-white view of things is absurd (you who denounce the mullahs, are you anti-Iranian?) and it is dangerous. We make our own subtle judgements about complex issues. We reject the logic of camps, which regularly leads to wars (isn't that its purpose) and to refugee camps, prison camps, concentration camps and sometimes even extermination camps. Our basic political opposition did not prevent me from writing a very polite letter to President Bush asking him *"not to bomb Iran's nuclear facilities or any other target there and to seek a purely diplomatic solution to the current crisis. We think the best way forward would be for Iran to totally renounce its nuclear facilities, whether they are civilian or military."* This letter was mentioned in *Sud Ouest*. Its [English original](#) is on our site. It dates from 28 February 2006, that is three weeks BEFORE we wrote to the Iranian Ambassador making the same suggestion to him. Where then is our virulent *"anti-Americanism"*?

As for our supposed anti-Israeli orientation, that is of course the obvious reason why we successively invited three Israeli Ambassadors to the Rallies in Saintes: in 2004 (when we had invited the Israeli dissident Mordechai Vanunu, but no Iranians) we invited Mme Nissim Zvili, subsequently Israel's Minister of Foreign Affairs; in 2006 we invited Mr Rafael Barak, chargé d'affaires ; and in 2008 we invited Mr Daniel Shek, the Ambassador in Paris. We did this despite never receiving the least Israeli reply to our letters, ever since the first one on 11 October 2002, which, again politely, had asked for the release of the antinuclear whistle-blower Mordechai Vanunu.

At no time have we allowed our Iranian guests to think they would get privileged treatment. Here is the start of our interview on 30 March 2006 with Mr Moujani at the Iranian Embassy, according to a report written by Nicolas Dépret (representative of the *"Nuclear Phasing-out"* Network) and Matagne (of ACDN), a report verified by the official who also attended, Mr Khalili :

"(...) M. Matagne gives [to Mr. Moujani] the programme for the Rally. He explains that the organisers intend to invite other diplomats, including the Israeli Ambassador and France's Ambassador to the Disarmament Conference, and would like them all, if they accept the invitation, to take part with the representative of Iran in a panel discussion concerning the nuclear question in the Middle East and the world."

To hear and publicise opposing viewpoints on this burning question; to offer the conflicting parties a chance, albeit slim, for finding unlikely common ground; to speak about chemical weapons which have been used against Iran and Vietnam (another invited guest): such were the reasons for these invitations, in 2006 as in 2008. Besides, France maintains diplomatic relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran, through its Embassy in the best part of Paris, and in 2008 we invited some 15 other Ambassadors, but also the French Minister of Foreign Affairs and the British PM (who sent a personal apology) to attend the 3rd Rally. It would be odd if contacts considered legitimate between states were not legitimate but scandalous in the context of a citizens' initiative.

Your article ignores all that and carries on thus:

"This year the mullahs sent to the 3rd edition of these conferences their Ambassador to France Ali Ahani, with an 11-page booklet, which he distributed, concerning the double theme of Iran's respect for the NPT and the nuclear powers' violation of Article VI of the NPT, the article relating to the need to make the NPT evolve towards a general and comprehensive disarmament treaty."

Need one point out that ACDN is implicated neither by the content of this booklet nor by the speech given by the Ambassador. No diplomat ever sends his speech-notes in advance.

War and Peace

"Normally this speech would have displeased ACDN, which is close to the 'Nuclear Phasing-Out' network, and caused the conference to collapse. But that would be misjudging Jean-Marie Matagne the founder of ACDN: he is the author with Michel Rocard of the Open Letter 'Appeal to Europeans: Prevent the war against Iran', which was published on 16 Novembre 2007 by Libération."

Now you get to the point. Your basic grievance lies there, and you hold the culprit: the founder of ACDN, who you think you know. This [former Christian become an unbeliever](#) must somehow have an innate leaning towards the mullahs' regime. This is obviously what pushed him into conspiracy with France's former PM Michel Rocard - and even with an Israeli you omit to mention: Dr Yehuda Atai, editor of the World of Bible and member of the Israeli committee for a Middle East without weapons of mass destruction ...- so that they could issue an appeal to prevent a war against Iran. These criminal manoeuvres got a long way, too, since in your view *"this letter spoke a great deal about respecting article VI of the NPT and of granting 'more time' to the mullahs, so as to 'achieve a global solution for peace and security for all the states and peoples of the Middle East"*.

You were wrong, gentlemen, to use inverted commas for the words **'more time'**. The phrase is not used in our appeal. Why exactly would we have asked for more time? None of the signatories wanted war with Iran. Not yesterday or today or tomorrow. This is because (like you) we are unwilling to confuse the Iranian people with their current leaders and because we don't think (perhaps you do?) that their liberation needs to occur through a foreign war which would strike them as its main victims.

So, no more waiting before making war with Iran, because there should be no question of making war! And no 'more time' for the mullahs to obtain nuclear weapons - which they say they don't want, but we don't have to take their word. What then do we want? What does ACDN want still today? The opening **without delay** of multilateral negotiations to permit **ALL** the parties concerned (including Israelis and Palestinians) to resolve together all the conflicts and insecurity problems that weigh so heavily on the Middle East ... and the world.

We presume, gentlemen, that most of your readers are totally ignorant of this Appeal and of the fact that it gained hundreds of signatures, including those of many NGOs in France and beyond. Your falsified quotations certainly don't give an accurate idea of it. Besides, your readers are most unlikely to consult it, since you mention *only* its appearance in *Libération* on 16 Novembre 2007 (practically unfindable now) and you create no link to [ACDN's site](#) where your readers could find it; you even fail to say that you consulted it there and not in *Libération* - we know you did because you give its original titre from that source: ["Appel aux Européens : Empêcher la guerre contre l'Iran"](#).

This is not the title found in *Libération* on 16 November 2007, where they chose a different heading: *"Europeans, let us prevent war with Iran."*

So you proceed like this: you consult ACDN's website, you find the Appeal which *Libération* published with a different title (as our site says in its intro), you suppress the Israeli signatory, doubtless because it embarrasses you, you quote a short page adding a false phrase of your own invention, you mention none of the arguments found in the Appeal, you fail to say that it received strong support and can still be signed on-line, you erase any signs that can lead your readers to the text, and finally you complete this sleight-of-hand by making me at best a bleating pacifist, at

worst a collaborator (no doubt both, since everyone know there are no worse collaborators than the bleating pacifists).

It is hard to see how those methods can be reconciled with the [journalistic honesty and rigour](#) which IRAN-RESIST elsewhere claims to honour. I invite your readers to read the Appeal to Europeans now, before reading on.

"Collaboration"

Unless your hatred for the *"mullahs' regime"* overrides your love of the Iranian people to the point of clouding your reason, gentlemen, you really ought to have rejoiced at this Appeal. But no, you continue:

*" **Delays and security guarantees** [underlined by IRAN-RESIST] for the mullahs: the lobbyists wear different clothing and speak a different discourse, but in the end they agree on their requests. Naturally the pacifists did not speak about the mullahs' terrorism which is the chief cause of instability in the Middle East.*

"This then explains why the conference went ahead: not an error of judgement on Matagne's part or an excess of anti-Americanism, but an active and continuous collaboration with the mullahs' regime, a collaboration where the fight against proliferation becomes a pretext for lobbying. The mullahs are following the Soviet example: using falsely pacifist or falsely anti-nuclear networks to win the fight for public opinion."

So naivety or excessive anti-Americanism were not enough to stigmatise ACDN. You accuse us of *"active and continuous collaboration with the mullahs' regime"*, *"collaboration"* under the cover of fight against proliferation: that makes us twisted and hardened collaborators, masked agents of the mullahs, *"influence agents"* on the Soviet model. You call us pacifists (a label we do not, however, claim) but false ones. Falsely anti-nuclear to boot. And this is all due to ACDN's president... But what are the facts?

Since its creation in 1996, ACDN has been a member of the League of Teaching, a French federation known for its attachment to secularism and republican values; I have been its administrator in the Charente-Maritime since 2006; this League co-organised the 3rd RID-NBC, and its regional president M. Dadou Kehl spoke at it shortly before the Iranian Ambassador, explaining that secularism as we understand it is not sectarian but is open to general dialogue as a factor in peace.

Your "local sources" seem to have told you nothing of all that. Yet you could have found our views on secularism in the article [" Qui ment ? Qui désinforme ? Qui opprime ? "](#) of 20 May 2006.

Its subtitle is *"Lies and human rights"* and its subject is the new Iranian dress-code. There one reads: *"With laws like this, Iran, while wanting to be modern (even if seeing nuclear technology as a sign of modernity is in our view erroneous), is sinking deeper into archaism, if not into barbarism, when it executes homosexuals for their homosexuality (and this is only one example)."*

Further on are extracts from our letter of 20 March 2006, quoted above, followed by this caution: *"The coming of Mr Moujani, acting ambassador, to the 2nd RID-NBC in Saintes, and the debate held then, both free and courteous, changes nothing in this position. A theocratic state (be it Christian, Muslim, Jewish or other) can only be a source of intolerance, discrimination, repression and violence. Only an open and tolerant secularism (not sectarian in itself) enables people to reconcile respect for national and religious traditions with respect for human rights."*

Is that just window-dressing? Judge for yourself. Here is what was said on 30 March 2006 at the Iranian Embassy (report of Dépret et Matagne accepted by Mr Khalili):

"Mr Moujani is surprised that ACDN's letter raised the question of respect for human rights at the same time as nuclear weapons. What connection is there between the two?"

"M. Matagne replies that certainly they are two distinct questions that can be treated separately, but that there is only one Iranian Government and only one political regime. If an NGO like ACDN expresses a viewpoint which, in some respects, matches that of Iran (for example the concern shared by the whole Abolition 2000 network and 'Mayors for Peace' to see the nuclear powers respect their undertakings under Article VI of the NPT), then it must also be able to express, if need be, its disagreement with other aspects of Iranian policy."

Collaborators of the mullahs, then? There is more. I repeated my crime on 27 March 2008, this time with M. Eric Bastin, the representative of *'Monde sans guerres'* another association that helped to organise the 3rd RID. Between appointments at the Austrian Embassy and the Swedish Embassy, we were received at the Iranian Embassy by Mr Ahani and his colleagues. There, not content to present our pacifistic bleatings by repeating our doubts about the non-military character of Iran's nuclear research (I showed him an article in the previous day's *Le Monde*), not content to confirm our pro-nuclear complicities by reaffirming that civilian nuclear plants are intrinsically dangerous dead-ends, I had the impudence to speak again about human rights in Iran and to protest energetically against the treatment of homosexuals and adulterous women.

Naturally those exchanges occurred in private, and I cannot prove them, apart from the testimony of Eric Bastin who is obviously a pacifistic collaborator too. However, I can say that in Saintes on 9 May 2008, in the presence of 100 people (and not "around 60", as the journalist from Sud Ouest estimated before the session), I invited the Ambassador to reply again to the questions put to him on 27 March. Predictably, his replies were not satisfactory. You indicate this by writing: *"The ambassador failed lamentably in front of this left-wing audience, maintaining that Ahmadinejad had never made remarks hostile to Israel, that in regard to women's rights Iran like France had more progress to make, and that the fate of Iranian homosexuals was not Westerners' business."*

Boycott

It's a pity that the two ADHEOS men (Homosexual Defense Organisation in Saintes), who - like you, doubtless - did not have the chance to talk to the Iranian Ambassador in his Paris office, deprived their supporters of the opportunity that we created: to exercise here their right to denounce the crimes committed in the name of Islamic Sharia and Allah the Merciful. Two days before the RID-NBC, using their roles as city councillors, they appealed in Sud Ouest for our fellow-citizens to boycott the 3rd RID... **a rally co-organised by the city of Saintes and approved by a unanimous decision of the City Council on 5 March 2008!** Ignoring those details, you write: *"We must doubly salute this initiative. First because Jean Rouger, the socialist mayor of Saintes, followed their call, did not go to the conference, and refused to receive in the Town Hall the conference's prestige guest, but also because the call for a boycott put Jean-Marie Matagne in a sticky situation. He had gone ahead with the conference in the name of respecting our people's right to speak, but on these grounds he also had to make a commitment that the Ambassador should reply to all questions about Iran posed by audience members."*

In reality the "prestige guest" which the new mayor refused to see was not the Iranian Ambassador - there was no plan to take him to the Town Hall - it was M. Pol d'Huyvetter, personally representing the Rally's honorary president, Mr Tadatoshi Akiba, who is Mayor of Hiroshima and the chairman of *"Mayors for Peace"*, which links more than 1200 cities [currently 1400] around the world. This man was to present to our Mayor the membership papers for *"Mayors for Peace"*, in order to make official the City Council's resolution of 5 March 2008 (again a unanimous decision). The result was that the Mayor of Saintes snubbed the representative of the Mayor of Hiroshima - luckily a patient man - and flouted two resolutions of the preceding Council which nevertheless remain valid (he has confirmed subsequently and signed on 10 July 2008 our city's membership of *"Mayors for Peace"*). This is nothing world-shattering. But who exactly was "placed in a sticky situation" ?

For three days, despite a boycott which merely deprived some Saintes people from hearing speakers from some twenty nations and joining discussions, the [3rd RID-NBC](#) did take place successfully. For, contrary to your statements, full freedom of speech and access to debate owes nothing to the boycott but is standard practice in the RIDs. In Paris on 27 March we had reminded our Iranian guest of this. You ought to know this, since *Sud Ouest* reported on 8 May 2008 my reply to the boycotters in the following terms:

"I met the Ambassador in Paris. Mr Ali Ahani assured me that he would answer all questions put to him in SAINTES. I invite the two councillors calling for a boycott to come and put questions to the Ambassador."

They did not come. So it is not their doing that the Ambassador *"failed lamentably"* - as you joyfully report, forgetting that boycotts actually prevent debate and unwittingly admitting the discussions we organised served only one cause: that of truth. Recognise that fact now and acknowledge that we are in no way, not even slightly, agents of the mullahs.

Justice and truth

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will continue on every occasion to defend the cause of women, homosexuals, minorities, political opponents and other oppressed people, in Iran as elsewhere. In short, we support justice. We also work for peace and the survival of humanity, threatened by nuclear self-destruction. That is our cause, please respect it as we respect yours. And do us justice.

On behalf of ACDN, Jean-Marie Matagne, president