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Saintes : NO to all massacres and NO to the weapons that prepare them while claiming to prevent them!

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Fine clear weather in Saintes, like the weather in Hiroshima on the morning of 6 August 1945. Fortunately for the people of Saintes, the day bears no other similarity.

By the green banks of the Charente, tourists and locals are drawn to the festivities beginning: the 2nd edition of "Charent-O-Folies", two days of shared pleasures focusing on the river.
<dl class='spip_document_657 spip_documents spip_documents_left' style='float:left;'><a href='https://www.acdn.net/spip/IMG/jpg/dscn0865.jpg' title='JPEG - 2.2 Mb' type="image/jpeg">

Meanwhile up the Cours national, at the Palais de Justice, the mood is different - the smiles here are grave ones. In front of the Monument to the Fallen, a group soon exceeding thirty people prepare to commemorate a tragic event: the obliteration of Hiroshima 71 years ago.
<dl class='spip_document_658 spip_documents spip_documents_left' style='float:left;'><a href='https://www.acdn.net/spip/IMG/jpg/dscn0880.jpg' title='JPEG - 2 Mb' type="image/jpeg">

At 11am the ceremony starts. The president of ACDN first excuses the War Veterans who are unable to attend because of a communication glitch but who will be at the ceremony on August 9.
<dl class='spip_document_659 spip_documents spip_documents_left' style='float:left;'><a href='https://www.acdn.net/spip/IMG/jpg/dscn0888.jpg' title='JPEG - 2.1 Mb' type="image/jpeg">

Guillaume Laporte (aged 17) reads the poignant testimony of Keiji Nakazawa, who was a six-year-old boy heading for school when the uranium bomb nicknamed « Little Boy » exploded over Hiroshima, wounding and killing most of his family and leaving the others with terrible consequences.
<dl class='spip_document_660 spip_documents spip_documents_right' style='float:right;'><a href='https://www.acdn.net/spip/IMG/jpg/dscn0897.jpg' title='JPEG - 1019.4 kb' type="image/jpeg">

Then Christophe Cougnaud read the message, translated from the English, which Mr Kazumi Matsui, the Mayor of

Hiroshima, had sent to ACDN and to the city of Saintes, inviting them to continue to act together for the abolition of nuclear weapons.
<dl class='spip_document_670 spip_documents spip_documents_right' style='float:right;'><a href='https://www.acdn.net/spip/IMG/pdf/message_of_mayor_matsui_to_acdn_the_city_of_saintes_france.pdf' title='PDF - 130.3 kb' type="application/pdf">

<dl class='spip_document_661 spip_documents spip_documents_right' style='float:right;'><a href='https://www.acdn.net/spip/IMG/jpg/dscn0899.jpg' title='JPEG - 1.1 Mb' type="image/jpeg">

In the absence of the Mayor, Marie-Line Cheminade, who had apologised, the vice-mayor represents the city, along with three other councillors. She explains why Saintes joined the "Mayors for Peace" organisation and the « Abolition 2000 » network, and why the city takes part in the annual ceremonies commemorating the atomic bombings of 1945.
<dl class='spip_document_662 spip_documents spip_documents_right' style='float:right;'><a href='https://www.acdn.net/spip/IMG/jpg/dscn0911.jpg' title='JPEG - 709.2 kb' type="image/jpeg">

Guillaume Laporte re-lights the Nuclear Disarmament Flame, lit for the first time in Saintes in 2001 on the occasion of the 1st Nuclear Disarmament Days. It will burn until 9 August.
<dl class='spip_document_671 spip_documents spip_documents_left' style='float:left;'><a href='https://www.acdn.net/spip/IMG/jpg/dscn0893.jpg' title='JPEG - 2.1 Mb' type="image/jpeg">

A minute of silence is observed, in memory of the "dead souls of Hiroshima ».
<dl class='spip_document_663 spip_documents spip_documents_left' style='float:left;'><a href='https://www.acdn.net/spip/IMG/jpg/dscn0905.jpg' title='JPEG - 835.2 kb' type="image/jpeg">

Then Jean-Marie Matagne reads the Appeal for a Referendum on France's participation in the abolition of nuclear weapons, already supported by 75 French parliamentarians who have signed a bill for organising a referendum on this question.

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<dl class='spip_document_667 spip_documents spip_documents_right' style='float:right;'><a href='https://www.acdn.net/spip/IMG/pdf/appel_a_referendum_pour_l_abolition_des_armes_nucleaires-5.pdf' title='PDF - 130.2 kb' type="application/pdf">

<dl class='spip_document_665 spip_documents spip_documents_right' style='float:right;'><a href='https://www.acdn.net/spip/IMG/pdf/proposition_de_loi_organisant_un_referendum-5.pdf' title='PDF - 304 kb' type="application/pdf">

However, this initiative cannot become effective until it wins the signatures of 185 MPs or senators (20% of Parliament) and then the support of 10% of registered voters.

The MPs for Saintes (not present today, apologised) and nearby Rochefort have signed. The president of ACDN exhorts those willing to encourage their own MPs - in this region or others - to sign the Appeal and the Bill, by sending them copies.
<dl class='spip_document_668 spip_documents spip_documents_left' style='float:left;'><a href='https://www.acdn.net/spip/IMG/jpg/dscn0916.jpg' title='JPEG - 495.9 kb' type="image/jpeg">

Aline Bocenno reads a poem by Carole Le Kouddar, a poet of Saintes: "A livable world", and then performs two appropriate songs, Pete Seeger's "Where have all the flowers gone" and Jacques Brel's "Sur la place".
<dl class='spip_document_669 spip_documents spip_documents_left' style='float:left;'><a href='https://www.acdn.net/spip/IMG/jpg/dscn0923.jpg' title='JPEG - 2.1 Mb' type="image/jpeg">

Before dispersing, those who are willing promise to meet on 9 August in the same spot. The ceremony will start at 10.45am and will include extinguishing the Nuclear Disarmament Flame at 11.02am, the moment when a plutonium bomb nicknamed « Fat Man » exploded over Nagasaki. We will honour its victims with a minute of silence, thinking at the same time of a much closer massacre, Oradour-sur-Glane 1944. « Hiroshima, Nagasaki, never again! » Nor Guernica, nor Nanking, nor Dresden, nor Oradour. Nor Auschwitz.



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NO to all massacres and NO to the weapons that prepare them while claiming to prevent them

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Saintes, 9 August 2016

Strangely similar weather, matching what we had last year for the 70th anniversary of the bombings.
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This morning it is raining on Saintes, with an overcast sky like that over Kyushu Island and the Japanese Archipelago on 9 August 1945 - the weather conditions that resulted in Nagasaki being the target of the B29 "Bock's Car" and its plutonium bomb "Fat Man" (See the Story of the bombing of Nagasaki)

Shortly before the ceremony, the rain stops and the cloud cover opens above Saintes, as it did over Nagasaki 71 years ago shortly before Bock's Car, returning from Kokura without having dropped Fat Man, let fall its bomb on Nagasaki.
<dl class='spip_document_674 spip_documents spip_documents_left' style='float:left;'><a
href='https://www.acdn.net/spip/IMG/jpg/dscn0931.jpg' title='JPEG - 2.2 Mb' type="image/jpeg">

The first people to arrive rehearse with Alain Lanatrix the song that they will be invited to sing at the conclusion of the ceremony.
<dl class='spip_document_675 spip_documents spip_documents_left' style='float:left;'><a
href='https://www.acdn.net/spip/IMG/jpg/dscn0936.jpg' title='JPEG - 2 Mb' type="image/jpeg">

<dl class='spip_document_676 spip_documents spip_documents_right' style='float:right;'><a
href='https://www.acdn.net/spip/IMG/jpg/dscn0937.jpg' title='JPEG - 2.2 Mb' type="image/jpeg">

Among them is Ljo, a "citizen of the world" of Japanese origin, who has come 250km from the Lot-et-Garonne region specially to participate in today's ceremony. He has made a white origami crane, which he places under the Nuclear Disarmament Flame.
25 people took part in the ceremony.
<dl class='spip_document_677 spip_documents spip_documents_left' style='float:left;'><a
href='https://www.acdn.net/spip/IMG/jpg/dscn0943.jpg' title='JPEG - 2.2 Mb' type="image/jpeg">

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Ljo explains the significance of this crane. He tells the story of Sadako Sasaki, a girl in Hiroshima aged two and a half who was living two km from ground zero when the bomb exploded. Unlike her family members she seemed to survive unharmed. As a young schoolgirl she became brilliant at sport. But in 1954, without any warning sign, she fell brutally ill with leukemia and had to be hospitalised. To get better, on top of the medicines she was taking, she followed a friend's suggestion and started to fold origami cranes using any pieces of paper she could find. A Japanese legend says indeed that if you make 1000 cranes (a bit like French paper birds) you will have one of your wishes granted. After folding 500 Sadako had a brief remission, but she died in 1955 without having reached 1000. Her friends and schoolmates finished the project after her death. The continued to fold cranes and collected money to set up a statue in her memory, which now stands in the Hiroshima Peace Park with this inscription : « This is our cry. This is our prayer. To build peace on earth. »
<dl class='spip_document_679 spip_documents spip_documents_left' style='float:left;'><a href='https://www.acdn.net/spip/IMG/jpg/dscn0948.jpg' title='JPEG - 2.2 Mb' type="image/jpeg">

<dl class='spip_document_678 spip_documents spip_documents_right' style='float:right;'><a href='https://www.acdn.net/spip/IMG/jpg/dscn0947.jpg' title='JPEG - 2.1 Mb' type="image/jpeg">

Since then, thousands of origami cranes have been folded by children and adults all round the world, as a symbol of peace and nuclear disarmament. At our ceremony Jean-Marie Matagne tells how during international gatherings devoted to this cause, such as the Review Conferences for the Non-Proliferation treaty every five years in New York, the very numerous Japanese participants, including hibakusha, bring thousands of cranes, and also millions of signatures on petitions that have circulated in Japan.
<dl class='spip_document_681 spip_documents spip_documents_left' style='float:left;'><a href='https://www.acdn.net/spip/IMG/jpg/dscn0953.jpg' title='JPEG - 2 Mb' type="image/jpeg">

<dl class='spip_document_680 spip_documents spip_documents_left' style='float:left;'><a href='https://www.acdn.net/spip/IMG/jpg/dscn0952.jpg' title='JPEG - 735.6 kb' type="image/jpeg">

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Marie-Line Cheminade, deputy mayor of Saintes, reads out the message of Mr Tomihisa Taue, Mayor of Nagasaki. Like Mr Kazumi Matsui, he recalls that the abolition of nuclear weapons is our ultimate goal, and that this implies creating a binding judicial instrument to ban these arms, and that negotiations to this end must start without delay. He stresses that now is an exceptional opportunity which must be grasped, notably in the UN via the Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) in Geneva and the General Assembly this autumn. Working together, the world's cities, NGOs and citizens can play an essential role in orienting political decisions to this objective.
<dl class='spip_document_682 spip_documents spip_documents_right' style='float:right;'><a href='https://www.acdn.net/spip/IMG/jpg/dscn0954.jpg' title='JPEG - 608.2 kb' type="image/jpeg">

Georges Mounier, representing several veterans' organisation in Saintes, apologises for absent comrades and stresses that no returned veteran wants war, since all have known its horrors. Disarmament, notably nuclear, and cooperation between peoples and individuals rather than distrust and threat, these are the best ways to preventing war.
<dl class='spip_document_683 spip_documents spip_documents_left' style='float:left;'><a href='https://www.acdn.net/spip/IMG/jpg/dscn0955.jpg' title='JPEG - 2.3 Mb' type="image/jpeg">

Benoît Biteau, regional councillor in the "Nouvelle Aquitaine" region, recalls that the giant companies that participated in the US war effort and the creation of the atom bomb continued to profit from them after World War 2. Some of them, especially chemical firms, invested in the production of pesticides and other chemicals used as weapons of war, (for example Agent Orange in Vietnam, which continues to cause numerous victims in new generations), and they are involved also in waging an agro-alimentary war against everyone.
<dl class='spip_document_685 spip_documents spip_documents_left' style='float:left;'><a href='https://www.acdn.net/spip/IMG/jpg/dscn0956.jpg' title='JPEG - 863.5 kb' type="image/jpeg">

<dl class='spip_document_686 spip_documents spip_documents_left' style='float:left;'><a href='https://www.acdn.net/spip/IMG/jpg/dscn0958.jpg' title='JPEG - 976.4 kb' type="image/jpeg">

It is 11.02. The Nuclear Disarmament Flame is put out, not permanently, by the representative of the League of Human Rights. A minute of silence is observed by the gathering in memory of the victims of « Fat Man ».

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<dl class='spip_document_687 spip_documents spip_documents_left' style='float:left;'><a href='https://www.acdn.net/spip/IMG/jpg/dscn0962.jpg' title='JPEG - 2.2 Mb' type="image/jpeg">

<dl class='spip_document_689 spip_documents spip_documents_left' style='float:left;'><a href='https://www.acdn.net/spip/IMG/jpg/dscn0961.jpg' title='JPEG - 2.2 Mb' type="image/jpeg">

The bomb killed nearly 75,000 people immediately or before the end of the year 1945 and about injured the same number of people.
<dl class='spip_document_690 spip_documents spip_documents_right' style='float:right;'><a href='https://www.acdn.net/spip/IMG/jpg/dscn0971.jpg' title='JPEG - 2.1 Mb' type="image/jpeg">

The participants listen to the terrible testimony of a bomb survivor, before turning to the future and ending on a note of optimism.
 With guitar accompaniment, they sing John Lennon's « Imagine », with the English words to read and with hope in their hearts.



25 people took part in the ceremony in Saintes on 9 August. Not many, certainly. But they point the path to the future.

75 French parliamentarians, elected in dozens of constituencies, have now signed a bill for the organising of a referendum about France participating in the abolition of nuclear weapons. Three French Citizens out of

Four want to Abolish Nuclear Weapons and to be consulted by a referendum on this issue. If we let the people's good sense have a say, if we allow the world's peoples to speak, they will impose their wisdom on states and will rid us of the nuclear scourge.

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Messages from the Mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki