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Open Letter To Benoît Hamon

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He says he's of the Left. He claims to be green, democratic, humanistic. But he is in favour of atom bombs forever, and refuses (though an elected MP) to put the nuclear question to his fellow-citizens. Hold a referendum? No thanks, not about that!

Presidents come and go, and the French Republic - an advocate of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, a mouthpiece for Human Rights, an opponent of Capital Punishment - continues to polish and brandish these massacre weapons. Politicians put their hearts in their hands, their hands on their hearts, invoking Eternal France and calling on the France of the Heart... yet they continue the business of exporting arms, militarising here, there and elsewhere, and accumulating megatons of lethal bombs.

All the hypocritical deceptions that can be seen in the shrinking fabric of our democracy are rooted in that mighty imposture.

Monsieur le député,
Monsieur le candidat,

Now you are the Socialist Party candidate for the Presidency of the Republic. I am writing to you as candidate and firstly as MP in the name of Action des Citoyens pour le Désarmement Nucléaire (ACDN), whose adherents see themselves chiefly as citizens of France and of the world, independently of their political preferences - but not totally divorced from their electoral choices.

Since March 2016, in liaison with the Parliamentarians for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons, we have been sending you an Appeal for a Referendum, and a Parliamentary Bill to organise a referendum on France's participation in the abolition of nuclear weapons. On several occasions we have sought your signature and that of all MPs and senators, since they are able since the constitutional reform of 2008 to initiate a « shared initiative » referendum (parliament and citizens). Today 112 parliametnarians have responded to our Appeal and signed the Bill. You have not.

Your silence surprised us. We had supposed it was due to some distraction, excessive work, or overloaded parliamentary secretaries... Now that we know your programme, that silence seems on the contrary - but you may correct us about this - to be part of a fundamental choice which you deliberately made: like all previous Presidents of France including François Hollande, you cannot deprive France (i.e. the President, since it is over to him) of nuclear weapons. Even if that means other nuclear-armed nations keeping theirs. Even now, at the very time when there are serious chances of everyone renouncing them!

You are doubtless aware that the UN is convening in New York, in less than two months, an international conference to which all states are invited as well as representatives of civil society - a conference tasked with working out a treaty to ban nuclear weapons with a view to their total elimination. This is the result of resolution L41 adopted on 23 December 2016 by the UN General Assembly. 113 states voted for and 35 against - including France. China abstained and will probably attend, judging by what the Chinese President said in Davos. India and Pakistan who also abstained might do likewise. North Korea will certainly attend, since it voted for. Thus a « rogue state » subject to international sanctions is going to give lessons in humanism and peace to France! And to you too, Monsieur Hamon. France's own strategy of « the weak deterring the strong » incited that dictatorishp to acquire nuclear weapons. Now, France's refusal to negotiate will not encourage North Korea to eliminate them. Yet France proclaims a wish to « struggle against proliferation »...

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Now these negotiations offer an unprecedented opportunity to really build the « world without nuclear weapons » which Obama promised, and to deprive all dictators - even those who gained power by democratic means - of arms to massacre humankind. Alas, Monsieur Hamon, you subscribe to the same belief as the candidates Valls, Fillon and Mme Le Pen in these weapons for crimes against humanity. Only you go further than they.

In 2016 the French defense budget represented 1,77 % of GDP ; the other candidates want to raise that the 2%. But you envisage a budget called "défense-sécurité" calculated at 3%. Simply that. It is true that nuclear weapons are an abyss swallowing over 300 billion euros and you not even close to that figure. You favour (like M. Fillon) excluding this budget from the calcuation of the deficit. You desire that "our European partners should strengthen their logistic and financial support for external operations by France" (as Fillon does). That they should also increase their military expenses. And that they should grant military leadership to France, since she is now the only nation in the EU, you say, to have a « complete military tool » and the only one - after Brexit and the withdrawal of the US umbrella announced by Mr Trump, that can protect Europe through a « deterrent force. »

So if we believe your words, Monsieur Hamon, France will at last harvest the political dividends of the nuclear strike-force. That is all that can be offered by these weapons which are « fundamentally dangerous, militarily ineffective, extraordinarily costly and morally indefensible » as described in 1996 by General Lee Butler, the last chief of the US Strategic Air Command. Yet they cannot even deliver that dividend. They can only increase the world's tensions and insecurity. Our European partners don't want them. If the states still hosting US bombs are trying to get rid of them, it won't be to accept French ones or to give you the task of using French ones in their own supposed defense. Any strategy inspired by them is absurd, immoral, criminal and suicidal. In reality they don't deter anyone from doing anything: they don't stop terrorists from massacring us with lorries or Kalashnikovs, they don't stop the other nuclear powers from retaliating to our bombs - and Presidend Giscard understood that in 1973, preferring an occupation (from which one can recover) to mutual annihilation (which ends it all).

Your policy runs against the « desirable future » you propose and say you will carry. Well, think again: the arms race, the over-weaponed world are not things that make us dream. Your hand which « will not tremble » you say, should be reserved for the lobbies that are poisoning our food, or for shutting down nuclear power-plants that do the same. Apply your hand to those, not to the nuclear button which will kill us all.

The France whose heart you hope to make beat already has a beating heart. According to an IFOP poll commissioned by ACDN in October 2015, three out of four citizens want nuclear arms to be abolished. To the question « Do you want France to negotiate and ratify with all the states concerned a treaty to ban and completely eliminate nuclear weapons, with mutual and international control that is strict and effective? » 74% said YES. And in the same proportion, they wanted to be consulted and even said they were ready (27 % "certainly", 47 % "probably") to support a parliamentary initiative to organise a referendum on that precise question.

The initiative is there. So all you have to do, Honourable MP, is sign the bill stipulating that « on the proposal of one fifth of parliamentarians and after gathering by electronic means the support of one tenth of registered voters, a referendum will be organised without delay over the whole of French territory » on the question quoted above. If you refuse to offer the French people this chance to give their opinion on such a fundamental question, and perhaps to open the path to a world without nuclear weapons, then, Monsieur le Candidat, be aware that your deterrence posture will make the rest of your generous programme into something we don't want to think it is - an imposture.

We will issue you with the same red card we have already issued for the same reason to Mme Le Pen, MM. Fillon et Valls, and we will call on voters to not vote for any of you. Too much is too much. It's a sort of citizen's arrest, in a way.

With our respectful civic greetings,

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For ACDN,
Jean-Marie Matagne, President

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