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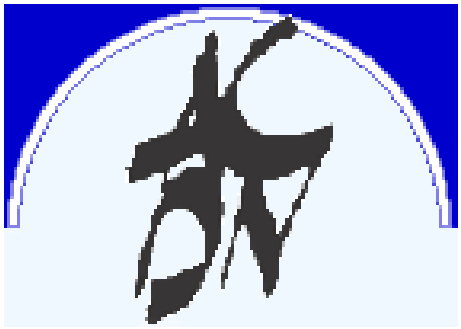

Letter to President Jacques Chirac, 6 April 2003

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from Jean-Marie Matagne, Action des Citoyens pour le Désarmement Nucléaire (ACDN)

Saintes, 2003-04-06

Monsieur le Président,

The Red Cross has expressed horror at the number of civilian victims at Nasiriyah south of Baghdad (in the US sector). There are hundreds seriously wounded and the Hilla hospital is overflowing - a "detail of history" which the International Red Cross workers on the spot say has horrified them.

Another "detail" of the current war is actually a catastrophe for centuries to come: the repeated use in Iraq of Depleted Uranium weapons.

France, as a defender of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, must demand the immediate end to all crimes committed in Iraq in the name of "democracy".

Like the other "democratic states" in the 1980s, France failed to denounce the Crime against Humanity which Saddam Hussein (then an ally of the West) committed at Halabja: the gassing of 5000 Kurds by means of several Mirage F1 jets. Later, France took the initiative of hosting the Paris Conference on the banning of chemical weapons. But that was too late to deter Baghdad from new defiance of international law - Iraq invaded Kuwait (after Iran), and continued to develop weapons of mass destruction - defiance which has led to two Gulf Wars. The lesson for us is clear: collective crimes must be denounced as soon as they come to our attention, even if the culprits are our allies (or our own troops). Political and diplomatic "realism" must not be the same thing as cynicism, either for large or small nation states.

Today, France must report the Nasiriyah War Crime to the United Nations and to other international bodies, or at least express her "grave concern" for this crime which bears some parallels with the 1944 massacre at Oradour in France. Already the British military, untroubled by "strategic" or "tactical" considerations, have denounced the brutal methods and the indiscriminate toll of their US allies, having observed this in southern Iraq. Can we do any less?

In the "War of Liberation" which they claim they are waging, the Americans must not behave like the evil dictators of past and present, or else they will become unacceptable allies and will incite terrorists to mass atrocities that will make 11 September 2001 appear just a modest foretaste.

All the more reason for France to do all she can to stop the Crime against Humanity currently under way: the use of Depleted Uranium munitions by the forces of the US and UK, as has been admitted at least at Bassora and is almost certainly occurring in other battle-zones. Since the 1991 Gulf War, the various components of Depleted Uranium have caused a humanitarian catastrophe which Western leaders have systematically underestimated or denied (France is included, since the French soldiers suffering from "Gulf War syndrome" have been denied their rights, as were the veterans of French nuclear testing). Billions of radioactive particles created by Depleted Uranium impacts will transform Iraq into a land forever uninhabitable, and will be dispersed over all the Northern Hemisphere where they will add to background radiation and increase the "anonymous" statistics of cancer victims. What's the point of launching a "Nationwide Campaign against Cancer" if we fail to intervene in time to stop the expansion of a major cause of cancer?

In addition, France must announce its intention to honour the undertaking the five nuclear-weapons states in the

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Non-proliferation Treaty made on 19 May 2000, when they promised to eliminate their nuclear arms - weapons whose use would constitute another crime against humanity.

Mister President, you are a humanist. In the name of France you must act!

Copy to Prime minister J-P Raffarin

This letter did not receive any answer.

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