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Leading Italian politicians join in call for nuclear abolition

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Closely following the call from four prominent British politicians carried in "The Times" (UK) on the 30th of June, today Italy's major daily newspaper, Corriere della Sera, published a groundbreaking Op-ed signed by five leading figures in Italian politics. Their statement adds further momentum to the ongoing international debate on the nuclear issue, underlining the urgent need for a safe and peaceful end to the nuclear age. Already, the Op-ed has invited reponse from the peace community, as Lisa Clark of the Italian NGO Beati i Costruttori di Pace adds: "A group of NGOs and associations responded immediately to the call by the four former Ministers. We welcomed the open letter, but added that if Italy were truly serious about working towards nuclear abolition, there were several actions that could be taken right away...". They hope to have their reply published in Corriere della Sera.

Corriere della Sera, July 24, 2008

By Jennie Corbett

Massimo D'Alema (former Prime Minister and Foreign Minister), Gianfranco Fini (former Foreign Minister and current President of Italian Chamber of Deputies), Giorgio La Malfa (former Minister for European Affairs), Arturo Parisi (former Defence Minister) and Francesco Calogero (Dept. of Physics, University of Rome and formerly Secretary General of Pugwash) joined together in a fresh call for the total elimination of nuclear arms.

Regarding the NGO response and further suggestions for action, Lisa Clark continues: "They mentioned: acting within the IAEA Board and the NSG (Italy is a member of both) to raise doubts over the US-India agreement; acting with other European countries to freeze developments related to NMD in eastern Europe; promoting the NWC and signing up to the Hiroshima-Nagasaki Protocol proposed by the 2020 Vision Campaign. And, last but not least, ensuring the draft legislation submitted to Parliament by over 80,000 citizens aiming at ridding Italy of US nuclear weapons be put quickly on the agenda of the Foreign Affairs Committee." Find the full text of the NGO coalition response, click here

The full text of the Op-ed, translated into English by Ms Lisa Clark, appears below.

Source: 2020visioncampaign.org

For a nuclear weapon free world

Dear Editor, an article published in the Wall Street Journal entitled "A world without nuclear weapons", signed by George Schultz and Henry Kissinger, former Secretaries of State under Republican Presidents Reagan and Nixon, and by Bill Perry and Sam Nunn, the former Defence Secretary under President Clinton and the Democratic chairman of the Senate Defence Committee, in January 2007 opened up an extremely important debate for the future of humanity. In that article, the four American statesmen proposed the total elimination of nuclear weapons. Their argument, taken up again in a second article in January 2008, is that, unless the nuclear-weapon States - and there are now 8 of them - and especially the two main ones, United States and Russia, take the lead in launching a process aimed at their total elimination, it will become increasingly difficult to prevent other countries from acquiring them, with the risk that sooner or later these weapons may be used, and that would have catastrophic consequences for the world.

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The importance of their article lies in the fact that, for the first time, the issue of the complete elimination of nuclear weapons was being addressed, in the United States, by politicians who represent the mainstream of American stategic policy, from both parties, stressing the fact that this is an objective to be pursued in the interests of both the nation and the world. Several very important statements followed their Op-ed. The two US presidential candidates have substantially agreed with this aim, as have the majority of those who, in the past, held positions of major responsibility in the USA in this field. In Russia, there was a positive reaction by Gorbachev and a more cautious, but not negative, reaction by the Government. In Britain, Gordon Brown spoke out favourably; the Defence Minister proposed hosting experts from United States, Russia, England, France and China in the English nuclear labs, in order to establish the methodologies of verification for the elimination of nuclear weapons; recently, the Times carried an article by another bipartisan quartet, including three former Foreign Ministers and a former Secretary General of Nato, expressing agreement. In France, the Defence White Paper indicates that the objective to be pursued is the elimination of nuclear weapons. In Australia, the Government has established a new international Commission of Experts, whose task is to chart the road towards the elimination of all nuclear weapons. There have been innumerable positive reactions among non-governmental groups.

We think it is important that Italy, too, should give indications that go in that same direction. Our joint signatures, like those on the Op-eds in other countries, are evidence of the fact that in both main political camps, and in the scientific community, there is a shared common opinion on the importance of this issue and this aim. We wish to suggest the main steps along this road. The first is the entry into force of the Treaty banning all forms of nuclear testing, including underground tests, thus enshrining into a treaty the current moratorium. The second is to set in motion the stalled negotiations, within the Disarmament Conference in Geneva, on the FMCT, which prohibits the production of highly enriched uranium and of plutonium with the isotope composition necessary for the production of nuclear weapons. Here, too, there is a de facto moratorium, but without any formal agreement and without verification measures. The entry into force of these two Treaties would be appreciated by non-nuclear-weapon States and would prepare a more favourable ground for the periodical Conference of the Non-Proliferation Treaty planned for 2010, strengthening the world's non-proliferation regime, including the monitoring of the actual observance of the commitments - in both letter and spirit - envisaged by the NPT.

We are fully aware that the road that will lead us to the elimination of nuclear weapons is long. It will call for certain political conditions. The first is an actual improvement in the relations between the nuclear superpowers, United States and Russia, who still maintain - despite recent reductions - over nine tenths of all nuclear weapons in the world. This would help the other nuclear weapon States recognized by the NPT - Britain, France and China - to do their part. It is also necessary to reduce the tensions in those parts of the world where the risk of nuclear weapons actually being used is highest, perhaps even by terrorist groups. We refer here to South-east Asia (India and Pakistan) and to the Israeli-Palestinian-Arab problem in the Middle East. In both these contexts, moves by the nuclear weapons States indicating that they are progressing towards a nuclear weapons free world would undoubtedly have a positive effect. Italy and Europe can and must do what they can to promote the path towards the total elimination of nuclear weapons. It is clear that this final result will be achieved only with the commitment of the major protagonists, United States and Russia, and of the other nuclear weapon States. But the spread of a new way of thinking - of a new "shared wisdom" - is a fundamental step along this path, and Italy too must contribute. It is necessary that on these fundamental issues for the very survival of humanity, despite our legitimate - indeed necessary - political differences, we join together in recognizing a superior, common interest.

[-] Massimo D'Alema, former Prime Minister (1998-2000) and Foreign Minister (2006-2008)
[-] Gianfranco Fini, former Foreign Minister (2004-2006) and current President of Chamber of Deputies, Italian Parliament
[-] Giorgio La Malfa, former Minister for European Affairs (2005-2006)
[-] Arturo Parisi, former Defence Minister (2006-2008)
[-] Francesco Calogero, Department of Physics, University of Rome, from 1989 to 1997 Secretary General of Pugwash (Nobel Peace Prize, 1995)

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