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The Hiroshima Flame: impressive progress through France

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The Hiroshima Flame for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons, associated by consent of the city and mayor of Hiroshima with the World March for Peace and Nonviolence, progressed from 6 to 12 November through France as planned. Here is its story.

Then the Flame and the World March travelled together, crossing Spain, West Africa and then the Atlantic.

The **Hiroshima Flame** followed its planned route from Paris to Perpignan, with stops at Saintes and Saint-Pierre d'Oléron - two towns participating in the *"Abolition 2000"* and the *"Mayors for Peace"* networks, which seek to abolish nuclear weapons. Later stops were at Bordeaux, Agen, Cahors, Toulouse and Carcassonne.

Brought from Brussels to Saintes on 6 November, the Hiroshima Flame was relit by a child. The next day it was used to relight the **Nuclear Disarmament Flame,** the second flame on the globe (after that of Hiroshima) to be lit for nuclear abolition, first in 2001 during Saintes's first Nuclear Disarmament Days.

On 14 November, on the way back to Saintes, this Nuclear Disarmament Flame, now linked with the Hiroshima Flame, was presented in the city of Montpellier, another city belonging to *"Mayors for Peace"*, in the presence of the Mayor and some hundreds of people. Representatives from the plateau of Larzac also welcomed it to take it to this major centre of resistance against militarism.

This peaceful trip occurred sometimes in difficult conditions caused by persistent rain, and also unfortunately by a campaign of denigration and defamation unworthy of its perpetrators, yet it created opportunities for remarkable and sometimes very moving events, and encounters of great human warmth. Wherever possible there were marches, ceremonies, film screenings, meetings, discussion, artistic and musical events, and broadcasts.

In Saintes, for example, World War Two veterans greeted the flame's procession at the Monument to the Dead, and the fire was passed from the Hiroshima Flame to the Nuclear Disarmament Flame by an 84-year-old former Resistance member. War veterans sloped their flags and all present observed silence in memory of the victims of all wars.

In Toulouse on 11 November, 200 motorbikers with white armbands came from the whole region despite heavy rain to salute the March for Peace at Capitole Square and to give their support.

In Saint Pierre d'Oléron, Toulouse and Perpignan **(See the video)** there were choirs and fanfares sounding forth joyfully.

On 13 November the team that accompanied the Flame across SW France joined in Barcelona with the core team of the World March for Peace and Nonviolence, which had set out from Wellington (New Zealand) on 2 October 2009, and had just been in Rome and Berlin where Nobel Prizewinners had welcomed the team-members.

This symbolic march was the first of its kind in human history. It used all available means of transport: walking, cycling, motorbikes, cars, trains, boats and planes, in order to mobilise the people in the countries it travelled through in support of peaceable solutions to problems - nonviolent, cooperative solutions to the problems which the peoples

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of the planet need to solve.
(See the video featuring Pierre Hennico)

The vision and preparation for this March came from *"World Without Wars"*, a component of the International Humanist Movement, yet a group that opened the march without conditions to anyone who wished to participate. About 2000 movements or NGOs took part in tangible ways. The March was supported by three world networks dedicated to the abolition of nuclear weapons: *"Abolition 2000",* which groups over 2000 NGOs and municipalities worldwide, *"Mayors for Peace"* which currently links 3241 cities in 134 countries, and the *Parliamentary Network for Nuclear Disarmament and Nonproliferation (PNND)*, which groups 640 MPs of diverse parties and numerous nations. It was also supported by over 1000 international personalities, including 9 heads of state.

In Barcelona **(see the video)** a thousand marchers - that's the police estimate - marched for peace, nonviolence and nuclear disarmament, in an enthusiastic mood, from University Square to the Arch of Triumph, at the foot of which a great meeting was held with an international crowd including a sizeable French delegation.

Rafael de la Rubia, the founder of *Mundo Sin Guerras (World Without Wars)* and initiator of the World March, explained the meaning of this march, and then all the members of the core team (some twenty people) introduced themselves individually. One of them was Alexandre Mora, a PM in Costa-Rica, a member of PNND, and chairman of the Latin American Human Rights Commission, reminded all present that his nation (after experiencing a civil war) abolished its army 58 years ago and has lived in peace ever since.

As for France, whose nuclear forces would be capable, judging from Hiroshima, of killing nearly a billion people... Jean-Marie Matagne, the president of l'*Action des Citoyens pour le Désarmement Nucléaire (ACDN)* and Eric Bastin, spokesperson of *Monde sans guerres et sans violence,* emphasized that their country needs to associate herself with much greater conviction with the nuclear abolition process initiated by President Obama, and is required to do so by the unanimous resolution of the Security Council on 24 September. To the team of international marchers the two Frenchmen handed over the torch that had travelled through France, so that it can continue further on the March which ends on 2 January in Argentina at the foot of the Andes, in the Park of Nonviolence where 80,000 people are expected.

The Hiroshima Flame will then set off to New York, where a great demonstration for the aboilition of nuclear weapons will take place in May 2010... on the occasion of the 8th Review Conference for the Non-Proliferation Treaty, which will be decisive for the process of nuclear disarmament and the future of humanity.

Already, a group from the core team of marchers has been received in New York, on 1 December, by the UN General Secretary, Mr Ban Ki-Moon.

See the VIDEOS

In Perpignan (TV FR3) (1 min. 43)

In Barcelona: demonstration (Video ACDN/MSG) (5 min. 08)

At the Middle of the World March for Peace: story in French from Pierre Hennico (Video ACDN/MSG) (10 min. 55)

World March Team Received by the UNSG

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To learn more about the World March

PRESS CLIPPINGS

SUD OUEST | Sat. 7 Nov. 2009

THE HIROSHIMA FLAME. It carries the hope of a future world free of nuclear weapons.

A symbol, a hope.

Adam, aged three and a half, relights the Hiroshima Flame (PHOTO D. P.)

Last evening Adam, the grandson of Françoise Bleynie, a city councillor of the opposition group, relit the Hiroshima Flame in the courtyard of the Saintonge building. This symbolic action was done by a little boy representing future generations. The 80 activists and sympathisers present all wish one thing: to bequeath to their children and grandchildren a world at peace, without weapons.

That is still far distant, given the nuclear threat weighing heavily over us. Eric Bastin, spokesperson of "World Without Wars" reminded the gathering that 25 000 warheads are still possessed by the nuclear-armed states. Enough to explode the whole planet more than once!

Jean-Marie Matagne, the president of "Action des citoyens pour le déarmement nucléaire (ACDN)" added that 5000 of those warheads could be activated very quickly. And yet he has some hope for international disarmament, in the wake of the recent declarations made by US president Barack Obama on 25 September to the UN Security Council.

There is still an absolute need to mobilise ordinary people. Hence the World March for Peace and of the Hiroshima Flame, which are travelling together from Saintes to Barcelona in Spain.

Centering on the torch which Eric Bastin has brought from Brussels, various actions are planned for today (see below). Margarita Sola, first deputy to the mayor of Saintes, Philippe Fonteneau, deputy to the mayor of Saint-Pierre-d'Oléron, and Catherine Quéré, MP, all brought their support last evening to Jean-Marie Matagne for his work in "awakening consciences".

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SUD OUEST Sun.8 Nov. 2009

SAINTES. A hundred people yesterday took part in the March for Peace.

A few steps for a world at peace.

The march progressed through Saintes yesterday (PHOTO D. F.)

For this whole week, life in Saintes has been placed under the sign of nuclear disarmament, in actions coordinated by ACDN. The city has been a crossroads for the World March for Peace and the Hiroshima Flame, which had been lit in Hiroshima after its bombing in 1945. "It must not be definitively extinguished until the last nuclear weapons is

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destroyed", according to yesterday's speech by Jean-Marie Matagne, the president of ACDN. Yesterday was the high-point of these days with their diverse activities. Early afternoon, some hundred people took part in the march for peace from the Prairie de la Palu to the Palace of Justice. As a prelude, the Hiroshima Flame was relit, symbolically, between the Hiroshima Tree and the Nagasaki Tree, which are both growing on that island of greenery.

A young musician from Colombia, Edwin Florez, was given this honour. "I am very proud to do this," he said. "This flame is a strong symbol for me, and part of my project which is to work for peace through music. The idea is that a young person given an instrument is not going to take up a weapon."

The flame of Saintes

Symbols and emotion were also very evident at the end of the march. Beside the Monument to the Dead, a second flame was rekindled, Saintes's own disarmament flame, lit originally in 2001. "It's the second flame in the world, after that of Hiroshima", explained Jean-Marie Matagne.

For this occasion, ACDN had included in the ceremony the city's associations of war veterans. The task of relighting the flame went to one of them, Henri Hué, who had joined the Résistance in 1943 at the age of 18. "I hope that our leaders, influenced by citizens' actions like this, will become fully aware of the danger they are causing to our planet, and above all that they end up living in peace with one another and with the earth," said Jean-Marie Matagne in conclusion.

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Have you some advice on this report? Did you take part in one stage of the Flame or of the March? Send us your opinion, testimony, photos, videos... contact@acdn.net

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