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A Burst of Sunshine in a Stormy Sky : in 2017 the UN will convene negotiations for the banning of nuclear weapons

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On Friday evening, 23 December 2016 in New York, two days before Christmas and despite a late hour, the UN General Assembly in plenary session adopted Resolution L41, which had been passed in committee in 27 October. There were 113 votes in favour, 35 against and 13 abstentions.

This resolution « to advance multilateral nuclear disarmament » convenes in 2017 in New York « a UN conference tasked with negotiating a legally binding instrument to ban nuclear weapons and to lead to their total elimination". The conference will be held "from 27 to 31 March and from 15 June to 7 July, with the participation and contribution of international organisations and representatives of civil society".

On October 27, in the committee concerned with disarmament matters, Resolution L41 had won 123 votes against 38, with 16 abstentions. Out of the 9 states possessing nuclear weapons, 5 voted against: USA, Russia, UK, France (all signatories of the Non-Proliferation Treaty whose sixth article obliges them to negotiate the complete elimination of their nukes) and Israel, not a signatory. Three abstained: China (a signatory of the NPT), India and Pakistan. One voted in favour: North Korea, which exited from the NPT after using its help to procure nuclear weapons and for that reason is currently subject to international sanctions.

Shortly before, the USA had sent to its NATO allies a warning letter, telling them that the effects of a nuclear ban treaty would be huge and that they should above all not « underestimate its potential impact, perhaps even before it enters into force ». These effects would be "severe", as the USA itself admits, even if no nuclear state actually signs. Indeed, the ban treaty could be adopted by the UN by the rule of majority and not by the rule of unanimity. It will stigmatise nuclear weapons and will place the nations that have them outside the pale of humanity.

After 27 October, the USA and France continued to put pressure on their respective allies to vote against Resolution L41 in the plenary session. The USA, top contributor to the UN budget, tried to block the financing of the conference at the time when the budget was examined in the finance commission. The eventually yielded in the face of anger from most non-nuclear states, who no longer accept the double standard and double language of the nuclear states.

This historic UN vote takes the opposite direction from Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump, who have just this week announced their wish to start a new nuclear arms race. The opposite direction also from France's leaders who affirm their wish to keep and develop their nuclear arsenal, encouraged by the head of the French army who has recently declared publicly how necessary it is.

So now it's an arm-wrestle between on the political leaders of certain nuclear states on the one side, including France, and on the other side the governments of most non-nuclear states especially those outside military alliances like NATO. These are supported by public opinion and act in concert with NGOs like the Red Cross and Red Crescent, or those taking part in ICAN (the International Campaign Against Nuclear Weapons), but also some religious authorities (Pope Francis, the World Council of Churches), plus a crowd of mayors (those of the 7000 cities belonging to "Mayors for Peace") and numerous parliamentarians around the world, including many in nuclear states like France.

On 27 October 2016, notably, the European Parliament gave clear majority support to Resolution L41.

On the same day in France over 100 parliamentarians made it known that they support a bill aiming to organise a referendum on the question : « Do you want France to negotiate and ratify with all states concerned a treaty to ban and totally eliminate nuclear weapons, under mutual and international control that is strict and effective?" The

campaign in favour of this referendum is continuing and has some chance of making an impact in the presidential and legislative elections of 2017.*

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* See:

[27 October 2016: the day when the big reversal in history became possible](#)

[101 French MPs and Senators want a referendum for France participating in the abolition of nuclear weapons](#)

[International support to a French referendum on the abolition of nuclear weapons](#)