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26 September: The UN's World Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons

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Why this day? To prevent the final catastrophe. And because 26 September 1983 was the day when the world nearly slid into the 3rd World War, a nuclear one which is still hanging over our heads 35 years later.

In March 1983 Ronald Reagan described the Soviet Union as an "evil empire". On September 1, the Soviets had judged themselves spied on by a South Korean passenger plane which had entered their airspace, and they shot it down with 269 people on board. The tension between East and West thus reached its highest point since the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962. That was the context for this incident.

That night in 1983, near Moscow, Lieutenant-Colonel Stanislav Petrov was on duty at the satellite surveillance centre Serpukhov-15. At 30 minutes past midnight the alert sirens shrieked, announcing without possible doubt several launchings of US nuclear missiles heading for the USSR. Yet Petrov hesitated. Instead of passing on the information as he ought, he took it upon himself to treat it as a false alarm. And that what it later proved to be. Thus a soviet nuclear riposte was narrowly avoided.

About 70 000 nuclear warheads were then in service. Today, as a new whiff of cold war floats about the planet, there are still nearly 15 000 nuclear weapons in existence, of which 2000 are ready for rapid deployment. These bombs can annihilate all humanity several times over. France's nukes, around 300 in number, can cause a billion deaths - and even then would not save us from the same fate.

The world's people, and the French people in particular, cannot tolerate this situation.

According to an IFOP poll conducted in May 2018, 85% of French citizens - of all political persuasions - want "France to participate in the abolition of nuclear weapons and engage with all the other states concerned in negotiations aimed at drawing up, ratifying and implementing a treaty to ban and completely eliminate nuclear and radioactive weapons, under mutual and international control that is strict and effective."

They want their voices to be heard and declare that they are ready (a similar percentage of them) to support a parliamentary bill to organise a referendum on this question.

In order for the referendum to happen, 10% of registered voters have to indicate support (within 9 months and by electronic means) for a bill signed previously by one fifth of parliamentarians, i.e. 185 senators or MPs out of 925. On the eve of the 2017 elections, 126 of these had signed a similar bill.

So it remains only to convince the current senators and MPs to do likewise, and then France will at last be able to open the path to a world without nuclear weapons - something she has been obliged to do since signing the Non-Proliferation Treaty in 1992, but something her leaders still refuse, thus flouting International Law and the French Constitution.

France's nuclear arms policy makes each of us an accomplice and potential victim of crimes against humanity. All of us, irrespective of our politics, can approach our representatives in Parliament urging them to sign the referendum bill. Not one of them was elected to carry out an absurd, exorbitant, illegal and criminal policy.

For more information and documents:

contact@acdn.net

www.acdn.net