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The Rally at Biscarrosse: a success for the future

- Homepage - News - Communiqués -

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The Rally at Biscarrosse: a success for the future

A national rally has just taken place (22-24 September) at Biscarrosse (south of Bordeaux), calling for a halt to the «M51 » programme for developing new nuclear missiles and also for a French initiative for total, universal and controlled nuclear disarmament - as article VI of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) has required for decades.

France ratified this treaty in 1992. But France, no more than the other nuclear states that signed (USA, Russia, UK, and China), has not made even the slightest diplomatic gesture towards implementing this commitment. On the contrary, she is developing new weapons, such as the M51. France's double message is inciting non-nuclear countries to obtain these arms - Iran for example, and many other states known to have nuclear capability. France's "vertical proliferation" thus serves to encourage the "horizontal proliferation" of these weapons of mass destruction.

For nearly three days the Biscarrosse rally attracted thousands of citizens (perhaps over 10 000) of all ages and all origins, to the gates of the CEL (Centre d'Essais des Landes - Landes Testing Centre) where France is testing devices intended for carrying death to foreign populations while at the same time attracting death onto her own cities.

The rally was organised by a dozen French NGOs belonging to the international « Abolition 2000 » network, as one step in their national campaign to create awareness of the urgent need to undertake nuclear disarmament once and for all.

Its remarkable success is due to several factors: the resources and skills of Greenpeace, which brought together a demonstration and a music festival of high quality; the experience of other NGOs who have long engaged in this struggle for nuclear disarmament, which enabled the rally to avoid the inherent risks of running out of control and to retain its symbolic and nonviolent character; the relatively discreet attitude of the gendarmes; the determined and generous commitment of numerous singers known and loved by the young; the active response of these young people, well beyond the organisers' hopes; and the devoted efforts of numerous volunteer activists.

The only regret is the response of the military authorities: a blunt refusal, obviously on orders from the government, to receive the delegation which had asked to meet the CEL's director. This shows contempt for a citizens' initiative aimed at giving civil society a right to discuss the way in which taxes are diverted to serve policies that are militarily absurd, financially ruinous, morally unjustifiable, illegal and in human terms criminal - contempt which is a serious fault.

Civilian resistance to the secret dictatorship of the nuclear and military-industrial lobbies is only beginning. The vote on the military budget, and the elections of 2007, can be opportunities for establishing other defense policies, much more sensible ones. For its part, ACDN calls on all citizens, who are also voters, to seize these chances for speaking to candidates for the presidential and parliamentary elections, demanding that they clarify their position, and (whatever their views) commit to consulting the French people by referendum. It is the people's right to choose the means by which it will guarantee its security and live in peace.