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Nuclear disarmament at last appears in a big French
newspaper!

Disarm to Develop

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On 27 January 2007, 800 000 homes which read every day the regional newspaper "OUEST-France" in western France, from Caen to Cherbourg, Rennes, Brest, and Nantes... were able to read this editorial by François Régis Hutin. He is president and general director of OUEST-France and a member of the World Association of Newspapers (WAN).

Unless the media and the rest of the big French papers (2/3 controlled by the arms merchants) contrive to put a ring of silence around this editorial, it could well MARK A TURNING-POINT IN FRANCE'S PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN.

Disarm to Develop

Translated from French by Peter Low for ACDN

Great fears return periodically in History, but sometimes their causes become hidden and forgotten. We get used to this or that threat or danger, until another incident arises and sounds the alarm.

That is what is happening with nuclear arms. For over 50 years we have got used to them. The nations with them feel protected by their deterrent force. And the disappearance of the Soviet Union reassured us, even though Russia still possesses a fearsome arsenal.

But now two small players, North Korea and Iran, are shaking our confidence, especially because their leaders, located in zones of geopolitical tension, are rather unpredictable. Besides, if they achieve their goals, other states near them or even far away, feeling more or less threatened, will themselves want weapons of the same kind to deter their enemies. What then will become of international security? The possibilities of conflict will not decrease and each crisis will be a case where the atom bomb could be used deliberately by a fragile or irresponsible head of state, or be triggered accidentally on account of inadequate mastery of systems or false information.

All that confronts us again with the question not only of proliferation (and the need to halt it) but of nuclear disarmament.

How can this new proliferation be stopped ? Certainly not by attacking the nations concerned, although that possibility does exist. Periodically there is talk of a preemptive attack against Iran, as if the experiment of the Iraq War was not enough.

As for Japan, which faces North Korea, it is reviewing its attitudes and envisaging changes to its means of defense. Clearly if things carry on this way, one day or other, what everyone fears will take place, with repercussions and consequences that can probably not be controlled. In addition and at the same time, various terrorist groups are certainly trying to obtain the means of using nuclear technology for their criminal actions.

The presidential candidates must declare their positions

In these conditions, everything must be questioned, looked at in new ways, in the search for other solutions - and there is only one: nuclear disarmament.

"Utopian, naive," people will say. Yet that is the goal that Gorbachev and Reagan sought to reach when they met in Reykjavik 20 years ago - they wanted the total elimination of nuclear weapons. Today this necessity seems even more urgent.

Several top US personalities have just reminded us : Henry A. Kissinger, US Secretary of State from 1973 to 1977, G.P. Shultz, US Secretary of State from 1982 to 1989, Sam Nunn, former chair of the US Senate Committee for the armed forces, and W.J. Perry, Secretary of Defense from 1994 to 1997. These men say that **"first and foremost is intensive work with leaders of the countries in possession of nuclear weapons to turn the goal of a world without nuclear weapons into a joint enterprise. Such a joint enterprise... would lend additional weight to efforts already under way to avoid the emergence of a nuclear-armed North Korea and Iran."** Today one can indeed think that such a disarmament process, negotiated with all those possessing or wanting to possess nuclear weapons, is the only way to really stop the proliferation.

These men's programme also involves setting an end-date on the production of nuclear material for military ends, reducing progressively to zero all exchanges of highly enriched uranium, and withdrawing all weapons-grade uranium from all research centres everywhere and rendering it harmless. Consideration must also be given to the proliferation of nuclear wastes from the reactors of nuclear power plants.

Clearly the field is vast, but the stake is very high: to prevent the planet from sinking into chaos. What then is the craziest option? To try to ward off this danger or to let it go on growing?

As a corollary, the considerable sums that would thus be saved could be devoted with huge effectiveness to a large development effort. To disarm so as to develop, that is the chief mission of the world's responsible political leaders. We'll have peace and development or else the risk of annihilation; everyone knows the sensible choice.

That is a fundamental question which we would like to see studied by the various candidates to the French Presidency. In this domain France, with Europe, has certainly an essential role to play.