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Letter of 4 July 2007

To the French groups belonging to the "No to the M51 missile" Collective

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Publication date: Monday 17 September 2007

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Since the letter below received no answer, the ACDN committee wrote again to partner groups in the collective on September 4 and September 15.

Although in agreement with the overall objectives of the collective, of which ACDN was a founding member, namely a halt to the M51 programme and the abolition of all nuclear weapons, ACDN does not approve of the collective's new methods of action or its decision-making procedures. In the absence of an agreement about these, since ACDN refuses to be associated with actions and calls to actions based on assumptions it does not share, ACDN has decided to withdraw from the collective and to make public its letter of 4 July. ACDN will not take part in the "Peace & Landes" festival of 22-23 September. ACDN suggests that those who do participate should show their opposition to France's military policies *while remaining within the law.*

To the French groups belonging to the "No to the M51 missile" Collective

Saintes, July 4 2007

Dear friends,

A "citizens' inspection", a kind of provocative action, was done on 19 June 2007 at the Biscarrosse CELM (Missile Launching test Centre) by several groups and certain members of the "No to the M51" Collective. To end any misunderstanding and prevent a repeat of certain dysfunctions, the ACDN committee wishes to explain the position that ACDN took on that occasion and wishes to take in future.

The very particular circumstances of that action forced some ACDN officials to make some rapid decisions, without recourse to normal consultation, in the name of all of ACDN. In conformity with earlier well-known positions (see the minutes of its AGM on 17 June 2006), this decision to abstain was motivated chiefly by the absence of a prior debate in which we could have participated and the lack of information about the precise methods to be used in the action.

We can well understand that people planning a « surprise » want to be discreet and must at times act quickly. But no NGO can undertake to support an action when it has not expressly supported its principles, and is ignorant of its methods, when the action can lead to great risks, notably financial risks, if repression then takes place. A group's officials are duty-bound not to make a hasty commitment to anything or to promise a solidarity that it cannot maintain.

In a press release of 19 June, the national secretary of one of our groups saw fit to adopt the role of "spokesperson of the "No to the M51" Collective, a role taken the next day by someone else. That formula unfortunately gave the impression that all the groups in the collective were involved in or by the Biscarrosse action, which was not the case, at least not for ACDN. Nevertheless we deemed it our duty to publish that text on the ACDN site (even translating it and publishing it in English) so as to help publicise an action that had "the double merit" of attracting "media attention, and therefore public attention, to a very important problem" and of making visible "the opposition of some citizens to the so-called 'nuclear consensus' proclaimed by most of the political elite and the French media".

Publishing that text, however, forced ACDN to clarify that fact that it had not taken part in the action, and to explain at least succinctly what our reasons were: basically, the path chosen, above all spectacular and newsworthy, does not seem to us the most appropriate, and because, even on this path, such an action seems to us to be a two-edged

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sword. On the one hand, "just causing a few hours' delay to a missile test through unwelcome presence on the ground is not sufficient to suspend indefinitely the testing programme. To achieve that would require the abandonment of the programme itself and of the policies it depends on." On the other hand, a "citizens' inspection" done by a few dozen or hundred people strengthens (or at least risks* strengthening) the consensus it combats because it gives the impression that this opposition comes only from a minority of 'activists', extremists who would like, despite the votes of Parliament, to impose their viewpoint on the huge majority of the people as represented by their MPs". ACDN, which for years has been asking for a referendum about nuclear disarmament, obviously does not share this opinion, as we say clearly it what follows:

"Such is not the case. The people have never been consulted on this subject and have not even heard it debated in any election campaigns, including that of 2007. Therefore nobody has a mandate, and nobody can claim to be pursuing defense policies chosen by the French people, or by the majority of voters". Now the question of the legality of French policies (and therefore of actions challenging them) is a complex one, since there is with France and other nuclear states a conflict between national legality and international illegality. On this matter we can only refer you to certain analyses like the one published on our site: Are nuclear weapons authorised by international law?

But from the moral point of view we have no doubt that the policies of the nuclear states, notably France, are not only illegal but also to be condemned totally. Her so-called "nuclear deterrence", based on preparing a crime against humanity and threatening to commit it, deserves utter condemnation. We stated this unambiguously at the start of our text about the action at Biscarosse :

« ACDN has not stopped denouncing the M51 programme and will continue to denounce it as one of the keystones of France's nuclear policies: policies that are not only useless in terms of national defense but dangerous, expensive, illegal under international law, in breach of France's commitments, immoral and criminal - in short, absurd and totally unacceptable» Any action - for example that at Biscarosse- that aims to question these policies therefore seems to us morally legitimate. There is not only a right but even a duty to denounce and combat preparations for crime, any crime but especially a crime against humanity! But the forms that this combat can take are a matter of careful judgement, and considered timing, and nobody may impose on others the form of action he happens to prefer.

We debated this in Saintes on 23 June 2007, and our AGM decided unanimously that ACDN would not be associated with any "citizens' inspection" that was ["disobedient"] - unless for duly motivated and explicit reasons - and that we would inform you of this. Please take note of this. If individuals wish to take part in these "inspections" they will do so in their own names and their own responsibility, like those who attack GM crops, not in the name of ACDN.

Similarly, if groups in the "No to the M51" Collective wish to call for that publicly, they should do so in their own names not in the name of the collective - this will save other groups from having to publicly distance themselves from the actions.

Traditionally, ACDN has given priority to the patient work of analysis, argument, discussion, dialogue, petitioning, and approaches to political figures. The 3rd RID-NBC rally, to take place in Saintes on 9-11 May 2008, forms a part of this approach. You are cordially invited. This does not of course rule out actions aimed at the media (that was the main purpose of my candidacy for the presidency in 2002), nor intervention in the political domain.

Some will recall this: we proposed to the members of Abolition 2000 a joint appeal to the candidates for the presidential and parliamentary elections with a "citizens' questionnaire" about nuclear disarmament. We were not heard, but we went ahead anyway, while the Mouvement de la Paix did the same with their project, launching a "citizens' vote". In the event Nicolas Sarkozy was one of those who replied to our approach. His answer led us to a vigorous discussion which we made public on 18 April 2007. It finished thus:

"With you as president, Monsieur Sarkozy (...) whoever would like to 'take on France' would be exposed 'to an

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immediate sanction'. He would spend a miserable last quarter-hour, even if the French people soon did the same." So many human beings would die by the millions. "Leaving aside all other motives, that is the ultimate reason why we are regretfully calling on our compatriots not under any circumstances to vote for you."

Thus, unlike some other groups whose positions are just as respectable as ours, we have not been afraid to intervene in the electoral debate in an attempt to orientate it. But as soon as Nicolas Sarkozy became "the president of all the French", we took note of the democratic result and we wrote to him requesting an interview.

After our letter dated May 10, an ACDN delegation was received on Friday 29 June at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in the division dealing with nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. There we:

- ▶ underlined the links between proliferation and non-disarmament, and the urgent necessity (now recognized by the British Minister of Foreign Affairs) of beginning a general process of nuclear disarmament, of which France must be a part;
- ▶ suggested that France, as a first sign of willingness to disarm, should suspend her programmes for modernizing her strike force (the M51 and ASMP-A missiles, the new nuclear warheads, the fourth nuclear submarine, the Laser Megajoule, etc.);
- ▶ submitted 120 signatures of members of international NGOs and US parliamentarians supporting this initiative;
- ▶ expressed the wish for a national debate in parliament and a referendum on the effective application by France of article VI of the NPT;
- ▶ submitted 3000 signatures for the banning and elimination of Depleted Uranium weapons;
- ▶ and asked for recognition of the rights of veterans and of victims of nuclear testing, of the Gulf War and of service in ex-Yugoslavia.

All the documents and arguments were to be passed on to the President's office and the cabinet of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The above remarks do not of course exhaust the subject. If others judge it useful, we would be willing to take part in a whole day of reflection about each other's methods, about possible forms of common action and the procedures that would make it possible to harmonise them.

Yours cordially,

Le bureau d'ACDN :

Michel Boccara, vice-president

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To the French groups belonging to the "No to the M51 missile" Collective

Catherine Moreau, secretary

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PS:

() A detail endorsed by the ACDN's AGM of 23 June 2007 on the request of the president.*