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The Abolition of Nuclear Weapons: Letter to President Sarkozy

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Publication date: Sunday 7 February 2010

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Copies to the Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the Minister of Defense.

Saintes, 22 January 2010

SUBJECT : France's commitment to abolish nuclear weapons.

Monsieur le Président,

Since the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) came into force in 1970, the states possessing nuclear weapons, according to Article VI, ought to have negotiated in good faith for the elimination of all their arsenals. The International Court of Justice at The Hague issued a reminder of this obligation when it gave its Advisory Opinion of July 8, 1996. But the nuclear-armed states parties to the NPT have never undertaken any negotiation or even held a smallest meeting with a view to achieving this end.

Because of this, the planet today faces a double danger: the acquisition of nuclear arms by new countries (horizontal proliferation) and the modernisation of nuclear weapons by those who already have them, as France does (vertical proliferation). As a consequence, the danger of nuclear conflict, either deliberate or accidental but in any case catastrophic, weighs permanently on humanity. Presidents Obama and Medvedev have now recognised that their thousands of nuclear weapons, which can be launched in a matter of minutes, do not in the least guarantee the security of their citizens, but that they compromise the security of the whole world. That is why their diplomats are currently negotiating considerable reductions in their arsenals, in the framework of a new disarmament treaty which is intended to follow on from the START Treaty and to form part of a process of total elimination.

The hundreds of nuclear arms that France possesses have the same defects as the Russian, US, Chinese or Israeli ones. They are criminal and suicidal weapons, *"fundamentally dangerous, extraordinarily costly, military ineffective and morally indefensible"*, to quote General Lee Butler, the last chief of *Strategic Air Command*. Contrary to what one might think, the *"Nation's life-insurance"* does not reside anywhere in its nuclear *"strike force."* Theoretically, France could cause nearly a billion deaths. But nobody can wish to become an actor or accomplice of such a crime against humanity, nor to become, in the event of a conflict, the victim of a retaliation. Therefore, to protect the lives of human beings rather than the profits of the arms merchants, **France needs to support a universal and strictly verified process of eliminating nuclear weapons.**

Abolition has become possible. In Prague in April 2009, drawing the lessons of the end of the Cold War, President Obama, in the name of the USA, proposed abolition as an objective for Russia and for the whole of the international community, which welcomed his words favourably, both then and in May 2009 at the preparatory committee for the 8th NPT Review Conference. Later, on 24 September 2009, an exceptional meeting of the UN Security Council adopted unanimously a resolution giving itself the objective of *"a world without nuclear weapons"*. And yet, Monsieur le Président, at no point in your speech to your peers did you say that France, for her part, was ready to commit to this. The forthcoming Review Conference, which takes place in New York in May 2010, needs to be the time to make that commitment, and this will open up a first and crucial step towards the abolition of nuclear weapons and the implementation of a different conception of international security.

For the last 10 years, the NGO community has worked on a Model Convention for the Elimination of Nuclear Arms. The European Parliament, in a vote of 26 April 2009, affirmed its wish for such a convention aimed at eliminating all nuclear weapons by 2020, which is what the *Mayors for Peace* group and the Mayor of Hiroshima are requesting. This Model Convention, tabled as an official UN document by Malaysia and Costa Rica, today has the support of 127

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countries - not including France.

For these reasons we are asking you, Monsieur le Président, and your government, to commit France firmly for the abolition of nuclear arms, to support the Convention within the UN, and to prepare to suspend all French programmes of nuclear weaponry. **If you doubt whether the French people want this, permit us to suggest that you call a referendum about it.**

For ACDN

Jean-Marie Matagne, President