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Address to the Mayors of France

For a living France in a livable World without nuclear weapons or power-plants

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This letter was sent by e-mail at the beginning of March to the 37 000 French Mayors.

Madame, Monsieur le Maire,

French law permits you, and one of this letter's two signatories, to present as candidate for the Presidency a person who has sought or not sought this office or to present yourself.

Whatever your choice is and whatever the result of the forthcoming election, we wish to draw your attention to three paradoxical aspects of the current situation, and to propose that you work with us, as from now, to obtain three referendums which would enable the French people to choose a living France characterised by democracy, justice and solidarity, and to overcome the multiple crises in the world at present, which are described in the preamble to the Charter for a Livable World which we attach below.

The very broad perspective of this Charter is the context of this letter and its appeal to you.

First paradox: after Fukushima

Most French people name the Fukushima catastrophe as the most serious event of 2011, because of the tsunami and above all because of the nuclear accident that followed it. We can assess its gravity best by noting that the Japanese government envisaged evacuating 35 million people from the Tokyo agglomeration. In March 2011, when the earthquake struck, Japan had 54 nuclear reactors in service; it now has only 2 and will shut down the last at the end of April. "It is quite probable that no nuclear reactor will be restarted even this summer," said recently Yukio Edano, Japan's Minister of the Economy, Commerce and Industry, speaking in parliament. "The possible tensions provoked by demand for energy will not influence our realization that atomic energy is not safe".

The French people are aware that with 58 reactors, the same tragedy could happen in France. The Nuclear Safety Authority (ASN) proves them right : « The catastrophe in the Fukushima Daiichi plant confirms that, despite the precautions taken in conceiving, building and operating nuclear installations, an accident can never be excluded. » (Avis N° 2012-AV-0139 of 3 January 2012).

However, the current presidential election is excluding in advance the only sensible solution to this problem, the one chosen by Germany, Austria, Belgium, Italy, Switzerland and soon Japan. Deaf to the lesson of Fukushima, the two leading candidates, if we are to believe the polls, both oppose any phasing-out of nuclear weapons and nuclear power-plants. François Hollande is promising to close the two old reactors at Fessenheim which Nicolas Sarkozy intends to keep, but both plan to keep the others till they've served for 40 years or more, and to complete the EPR one in Flamanville intended to operate for over 60 years, and to retain the awful MOX processing. So both reject the phasing-out of nuclear power - and any referendum about that. Thus in spite of their other differences we will be condemned to nuclear risks and nuclear wastes... till kingdom come, or catastrophe. The French people have never spoken on the matter. France has not yet had her major accident ; it seems we must wait for that before policies can change.

Second paradox: the atomic bomb

President Obama committed to building a world without nuclear weapons. He began that work by implementing with Russia the new START treaty and he is seriously considering reducing the number of US warheads to the level of France. But that won't cause France to move ! For M. Sarkozy, , "deterrence remains an absolute imperative for

France ; nuclear deterrence is for us the Nation's life-insurance" (aboard the Charles-de-Gaulle, 10 June 2010). As for M. Hollande, he wishes to be « the guarantor of France's nuclear deterrence capacity. That is a specific prerogative of the President of the Republic : I claim it and assume it fully. » (Nouvel Observateur, 22.12.2011)

However, to refuse to negotiate the renunciation of France's strike force in the context of a global process for abolishing nuclear weapons is a serious matter for several reasons. It is to flout Article VI of the Non-Proliferation Treaty which requires the elimination of nuclear arsenals. It is to encourage the very proliferation which France at other times claims to combat and uses to justify wars waged to prevent proliferation (yesterday against Iraq, tomorrow against Iran, and other nations in future). It is to threaten to massacre millions of civilians, and to rest France's defense on the promise of committing a crime against humanity of which French citizens would be accomplices - and probably victims, if there were reprisals. It is to spend millions of euros every year to maintain and modernize weapons which President Giscard Estaing in his memoirs said could not be used, since he would prefer France to be occupied than nuked. These weapons are "fundamentally dangerous, extraordinarily expensive, militarily useless and morally indefensible », according to the former US head of Strategic Forces, General Lee Butler.

But on that matter too, we, France's citizens and taxpayers, will have no chance to speak, no more tomorrow than yesterday. Is that acceptable ? ACDN, for its part, has been calling for a referendum on that subject ever since it was founded in 1996.

Third paradox: the democratic deficit and the referendum

Nearly everyone agrees that French democracy is not in good condition. And now candidate Sarkozy is floating the idea of consulting the people by referendum. We should rejoice, but... He's been president for five years and never tried the smallest referendum ! He has never replied to the precise request from ACDN for a "referendum on the implementation of general and comprehensive nuclear disarmament as required by Article VI of the NPT", a request sent to him on 29 June 2007, with well-known signatures arriving later in support. Worse: with the Lisbon treaty he ignored the French people's response to the referendum that his predecessor had organised on the draft European Constitutional Treaty. More recently he intervened to prevent Greece's government from consulting the Greeks by referendum. The one he is now proposing about the fate of the unemployed is therefore a mere « princely deed », an opportunist proposition which does not democratize the workings of our institutions but would tend to do the opposite.

In the view of François Hollande, "there are referendums which draw people together and others which divide. The one in 2005 on the European constitution divided people, deeply. We must be very careful with this procedure." (Marianne, 17 February 2012). Well, it's a feature of referendums (and of all procedures intended to resolve questions, including elections) that they divide voters into the camps of YES and NO. So it's hard to imagine M. Hollande spontaneously organizing one about anything... especially not on a question that would risk dividing the socialist voters, as occurred in 2005, or risk showing that M. Hollande's choices, for example on nuclear weapons or power-plants, are not those of the majority, or even of his party's supporters.

As for François Bayrou, he has been quick to back the referendum horse and to give it a constitutional content. His proposals - to set up a citizen-initiated referendum, include a dose of proportional representation, and recognise blank votes - point in the right direction. But to say that one could be held in June 2012 is another « princely deed », for the content of such a reform would take more than a few weeks to define, unless M. Bayrou wants it to emerge fully formed from his own head alone.

We certainly need a reform of institutions and above all a change in practices so that civil society can debate and decide on the big problems we face, problems whose resolution the next President of the Republic (whoever is elected) seems to want to reserve for himself.

Three referendums are needed

To unblock the situation democratically, we propose that the French people be consulted during the 2012-2017 term by three referendums (or more). Here are the three, in order of urgency and « feasibility ».

The first referendum should be on a question such as this :

« Are you in favour of France participating with the other states concerned in the complete elimination of nuclear weapons, under a system of mutual and international monitoring that is strict and effective ? »

Simple and easy to organise, that could be done in autumn 2012, at least so as to precede the US presidential election, and the opening of the international conference which the UN is planning about a Middle East without weapons of mass destruction... and so as to prevent, if there is still time, a war involving Iran, Israel and the USA.

The second referendum should be about phasing out nuclear power generation, perhaps with a subsidiary question on the timeframe for phasing out. To this end, there would need to be a serious exit scenario worked out in advance, preferably two at different rates (eg five, ten or twenty years). It would be the task of the ministries concerned (environment, industry, economy) to prepare the scenarios, with input from NGOs and political parties.

The third referendum should be a constitutional one prepared democratically by a wide national debate conducted in part by the political parties in the parliamentary and elective bodies, in part by civil society by means of « citizens' conventions » (reflection groups formed by citizens chosen by lot like juries), colloquia, general gatherings etc. The purpose would be to arrive at a coherent constitutional reform aimed at sorting out questions like : referendum procedures (introducing the citizen-initiated referendum) the number of MPs, the composition of the senate, the cumulation of mandates, gender parity, territorial reform, minority representation, the introduction of a dose of proportionality and a dose of random in representation, the recognition of blank votes... A workshopping of this kind requires time but should result before 2017 in a referendum that would open the way to a peaceful democratic revolution.

We have learnt from the experience of the 2011 Etats Généraux pour un Monde Vivable, a gathering where in three days 150 people of very different horizons developed and agreed by consensus the Charter for a Livable World, with 7 chapters and 105 articles, and so we believe in collective intelligence when the spirit of solidarity prevails over the desire to dominate.

These three referendums don't rule out others, for example on the nation's economic, financial or fiscal policies, or to prepare and take part in a European referendum aimed at refounding Europe democratically. But in our view they are necessary if the citizens of France are to take their destinies into their own hands.

Conclusion : the role of France's Mayors

The mayors, because they are elected by the people where they live, can play a great role in this process. You will be able to work out how. We are simply inviting those of you who share our analysis :

- ▶ if you have presented a presidential candidate, to write asking him or her to commit to the path of the three referendums proposed (or at least one of them) ;
- ▶ if you have not yet done so, to use your right to present in order to spread these proposals ;
- ▶ to read and sign the Charter for a Livable World;
- ▶ to propose that their Town Council discuss affiliating with the Mayors for Peace organization and the international

Abolition 2000 network ;

- ▶ to share our action by contacting us and joining ACDN.

With our cordial greetings, Saintes & Saint Pierre d'Oléron, 2 March 2012

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