

Ending Nuclear Apartheid

First of all I wish to express my gratitude to the delegates, both governmental and non-governmental, as you take time out of your busy schedule to be here with us today.

I was asked to inform you about the growing movement working towards the abolition of all nuclear weapons in Europe. This is a very difficult task, as Europe is a very diverse continent with many different groups working in very different situations. I only have 4 minutes which makes my task impossible. But I'll do my best, and will focus at the end on some interesting developments in Belgium.

Europe? With Britain, France and Russia we count three of the 5 officially acknowledged NWS. In addition there are an estimated 480 U.S. tactical nuclear weapons deployed on NATO bases in Belgium, Britain, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Turkey. These are the only nuclear weapons deployed outside the territory of a NWS.

For many years multiple organisations have mobilised large numbers of people in Austria, Belgium, Britain, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland to name just a few. All are demanding their government to live up to their disarmament obligations under the NPT Art. VI.

This is a sharp and worrying contrast with Russia where we have to admit that there is very little anti-nuclear movement, as they seem to face serious problems finding the necessary funds to operate.

I am able to stand here today because our movement in Belgium has often been on the forefront and the spotlight for the past couple of years.

Our campaign started in 1997 when hundreds, later thousands of people, inspected the secret NATO nuclear weapons base of Kleine Brogel, in the north-eastern part of Belgium. On this base we suspect the U.S. has deployed 20 nuclear bombs, while Belgian pilots train in their use. However, not only the Belgian public, but also the elected MP's can not get any information and confirmation about the deployment and nuclear exercises with our F-16 pilots. Therefore it was not a surprise to have elected Members of the Belgian Parliament join these Citizens Weapons Inspections, making a parallel with the weapons inspections in Iraq, wondering why we should know about Iraq's programme yet remain ignorant about the deployment of U.S. WMD in Belgium? To this date more than 2,500 people have been arrested during these Inspections. We also inspected NATO headquarters in Belgium, asking for disclosure of the secret plans of NATO's Nuclear Planning Group. With these actions we systematically drew attention to the Advisory Opinion of the ICJ on the illegality of nuclear weapons and the legal obligation to conclude complete nuclear disarmament under NPT Art. VI.

Today we are also in the spotlight because we were able to mobilise a large number of Belgian Mayors to join the Mayors for Peace network, three of which are represented here today: Mr. Bruno De Lille, deputy Mayor of Brussels; Ms. Ingrid Pira, Mayor of Mortsel; and Mr. Patrik Vankrunkelsven, Belgian Senator and Mayor of Laakdal. Today I have the pleasure to announce that out of a total of 589 Belgian Mayors, 221 have already signed up to the goal of the complete elimination of all nuclear weapons by 2020. Indeed, soon we will have one out of every two Belgian mayors become part of this very important 2020 Vision, which is spearheaded by the Mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Furthermore two weeks ago we had the unanimous adoption of a resolution by our Belgian Senators asking for a balanced approach at this 2005 NPT Review Conference. One of the very important and concrete steps suggested by our Belgian Senators is for NATO to withdraw all U.S. nuclear weapons from Europe. This was soon picked up by disarmament campaigners around Europe, and today we have learned that not only the Norwegian Christian Democrats are now also pursuing this goal, but also the German government, as confirmed by Mr. Joschka Fisher, is tuning in to the aspirations of the European people.

How can we condemn others who acquire these genocidal and ecocidal weapons, when we ourselves rely on them for our security?

Mohammed El-Baradei, Director-General of the IAEA, illustrated this very well when he stated: “As long as you continue to have countries dangling a cigarette from their mouth, you cannot tell everybody not to smoke with a high degree of credibility” . How can the EU be taken seriously by the people of the world as long as they allow deployment of U.S. nuclear weapons on their territory? How can the EU receive credibility as long as they tolerate two NWS in their midst?

Today we continue to live in a system of nuclear apartheid, where some seem to take unjustified privileges over others. But as the apartheid regime in South-Africa collapsed thanks to the sustained actions of the grass-roots people and governments, we are confident that with your help we will also bring down the obstacles towards a world free of nuclear weapons. We need European leaders to follow the people and an increasing number of mayors. We want you to start negotiations towards a treaty freeing the world of those horrible nuclear weapons. Not tomorrow, but today. This is what Article VI means. We know Europe has taken leadership in the recent past with the Kyoto Protocol, the International Criminal Court and the Landmines Treaty. Europe will have to take up this new challenge, and lead the world through multilateralism towards the start of negotiations for the long awaited convention banning nuclear weapons.

To end I wish to address our friends from the U.S. Today the U.S. tax-payers will spent another 112 million US dollars on nuclear weapons, adding up to 40 billion by the end of this year. We need the U.S. government to stop deceiving the world. We need the U.S. leaders to stop obstructing the path towards nuclear disarmament. We need to U.S. to invest the tax-payer’s dollars where they really matter: towards the UN Millennium Development goals.

Thank you very much

Pol D’Huyvetter, Campaigner For Mother Earth, Belgium

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