

Nagasaki Day Rally, August 9

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80 years after Hiroshima and Nagasaki: time for nuclear disarmament

Dear all,

I have been deeply moved by all the experiences of the Hibakusha, by all the pictures I saw over the last days. Pieces of skin burning, melting away. Eyes popping out of their sockets. Children suddenly starting to spit blood days later, dying a horrible death. Terrible diseases that continue to plague the affected families for generations. The testimonies of the Hibakusha, the survivors of the criminal American atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, still make our blood run cold. Eighty years later, however, a dangerous arms race is bringing us dangerously close to a nuclear disaster once again.

With nearly 12,500 nuclear warheads in the world, there are already 100 times enough to destroy every civilization on Earth. Total madness. Yet the nuclear-armed states are investing more and more in modernizing and expanding their arsenals, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). Even in Belgium, we have seen how the United States is modernizing its nuclear weapons on a large scale. And while the West imposes sanctions on Iran's civilian nuclear program, its Israeli ally, which has bombed seven countries in just over a decade, is secretly maintaining an impressive nuclear arsenal.

The idea that these weapons will never be used is an irresponsible gamble. Recent confrontations between Pakistan and India show that the possession of nuclear weapons does not prevent war. NATO and Russia do not even rule out being the first to use nuclear weapons. They call it preventive. Russia recently lowered the threshold for the use of nuclear weapons. The shocking list of nuclear incidents that were narrowly averted during the Cold War shows how a stupid miscalculation can lead to a nuclear catastrophe. With the ongoing automation of decision-making processes, such as artificial intelligence, this is truer today than ever before.

Thinking we can ever be protected is just plainly delusional. The abandoned US projects for a comprehensive missile shield, or more recently, the holes that Iranian missiles punched in

Israel's Iron Dome system, show that even the most extravagant missile defense projects will be a financial windfall for arms manufacturers' shareholders, but will never guarantee absolute protection against nuclear weapons. Worse still, such projects are a powerful catalyst for an unlimited arms race. After all, every country wants to be able to break through the other's "shield" at any time.

US president Trump used NATO to arbitrarily impose his 5% norm. We in Europe – but also Asian countries - should spend 5% of our GDP on arms, destroy our school system, the hospitals, the public infrastructure, our pensions... and give that money to U.S. arms corporations. Why? What for? Not because we spend too little on arms. NATO countries already vastly outspend Russia and China on defense. Even without the United States, the Europeans have two times as many fighter jets, three times as many tanks, and four times as many warships as Russia. No, this so-called rearmament is not about defense. It is about warmongering, bombing and attacking other countries. Trump wants to focus on China, considered an economic rival to U.S. hegemony and launch a new Cold War, arms race included.

Fortunately, there is a real alternative. During the Cold War, the European peoples were well aware of this. They mobilised. In the midst of a dangerous nuclear stand-off, they pushed their countries to use diplomacy to defuse tensions. The Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, known as the Helsinki Process, promoted arms control, partly under pressure from the peace movement. Because no one is safe, until we all are. In today's unstable world, Europe must promote nuclear disarmament and cooperation more than ever. This means not only that all European countries, including Belgium, must sign the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, but also that we must break with the arms race that Donald Trump and NATO want to impose. Let us instead be a voice for peace and human security. Let us mobilise, like the peace movement has done time and again. People don't want war. We will overcome. Never again Hiroshima. Never again Nagasaki.