

US Nuclear arms in Europe have to return to sender

Ludo De Brabander – Nagasaki 9 august 2021

Vrede, Belgium

Dear Ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak at this important 2021 World Conference against A and H Bombs. I'll focus on the US nuclear bombs deployed in Belgium, the nuclear sharing policy of NATO in Europe and how the peace movement is mobilising to promote a nuclear arms free Belgium in a nuclear arms free Europe.

Belgium is one of the five European countries with US nuclear bombs on its soil. In today's light it might be interesting to briefly outline how those weapons of mass destruction got in my country and why it is so difficult to get rid of them.

In 1962 a governmental law was voted to allow the free passage of NATO troops through Belgian territory as well as their stationing. At the time, a Belgian Member of Parliament wanted to add an article to exclude nuclear weapons under the provisions of the law. But the government convinced the initiator of the amendment to withdraw it assuring him and other MP's that the deployment of nuclear arms would be of course only happen under parliamentary authorization. A year later, the US deployed secretly and with governmental approval nuclear gravity bombs on Belgian territory without any parliamentary debate or permission. The incident illustrates how democracy is inferior to military interests and strategies of the US and NATO.

Until today, the government maintains a policy of ambiguity, neither confirming nor denying the presence of nuclear bombs in Belgium, blocking any normal parliamentary debate.

However, it is no secret that about 150 US B61 nuclear bombs have been deployed in five European countries as part of NATO's nuclear sharing policy. Belgian fighter jets are responsible for employing these nuclear bombs in wartime - as it is the case for Germany, Italy and the Netherlands- which is in breach with the Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT) that prohibits the transfer to or control over nuclear weapons by non-nuclear weapon states. These bombs will soon be replaced by new B61-12 nuclear bombs as part of a \$ 10 billion US modernization program. Because of their precision and low yield options these nuclear weapons are considered 'usable', lowering the threshold for a nuclear war. This all happens without any official statement or public debate.

Various surveys show that the majority of the Belgian population does not want nuclear bombs in Belgium. According to a recent survey last year, 77% of the population wants Belgium to join the TPNW (even if the US were to exert pressure, 66% are still in favour). This is also the case for Germany, Italy and the Netherlands that all host US nuclear arms. The Belgian population's anti-nuclear weapons position was also translated cautiously into the governmental coalition agreement that was approved at the end of last summer noting that "Belgium will play a proactive role in the 2021 NPT Review Conference and, together with European NATO allies, will explore how to strengthen the multilateral non- proliferation framework and how the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons can give new impetus to multilateral nuclear disarmament."

Nevertheless, Belgium voted against a resolution in the General Assembly of the United Nations last December to welcome the TPNW and asking countries to accede. All NATO member states rejected the resolution. NATO is openly campaigning against the TPNW and a global nuclear disarmament regime claiming that it undermines the Non proliferation Treaty. At the latest NATO Summit, June 14th the

NATO refuses to commit itself to nuclear disarmament and declared: "NATO's nuclear deterrence posture also relies on United States' nuclear weapons forward-deployed in Europe and the capabilities and infrastructure provided by Allies concerned. (...) The Alliance reaffirms the imperative to ensure the broadest possible participation by Allies concerned in the agreed nuclear burden-sharing arrangements to demonstrate Alliance unity and resolve."

The pressure from the US and NATO to maintain the nuclear deterrent is huge. The Belgian government is divided over the issue. Greens and Social Democrats want Belgium to remove the nuclear bombs and sign the TPNW, but the Liberals and Christian Democrats want us to remain loyal to NATO's 'nuclear sharing'-policy. According to the Greens and Social Democrats, Belgium will play a proactive role at the next NPT review conference postponed to the beginning of 2022 and pledge to work within NATO for a new policy on nuclear weapons. But it looks like these parties don't want to get the government into trouble over nuclear weapons.

The peace movement is campaigning to pressure the government to be serious about nuclear disarmament and to sign the TPNW with much local support. Last year, 150 mayors asked the government to sign the TPNW. This summer we launched an official petition under the right of petition law to amend the 1962 law so that the deployment of nuclear weapons in Belgium will at least need a parliamentary consent. The Belgian peace movement participates actively in the new European "nuclear free Europe" campaign against NATO's nuclear sharing policy and for the removal of all nuclear weapons in Europe. In Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands and Italy, there will be actions near military bases with US nuclear weapons next September. Simultaneously, a European bicycle tour will cycle during three weeks from the military nuclear base in Büchel to the nuclear bases in Volkel (NL) and Kleine Brogel (B), to show the unified position and strength of the European peace movement. Remember

how similar campaigns against the deployment of nuclear missiles in Europe in the eighties resulted in a mass movement bringing million's of people into the streets. Our first goal is to get the nuclear arms back on the political agenda, to have an open public debate and to raise awareness among other movements (trade unions, the climate movement, women and youth movement) about the planetary threat of nuclear weapons and the need to act. To recall the iconic slogan of Greenpeace: "No time to waste!"