

CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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LETTER DATED 27 MARCH 2009 FROM THE DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE FRENCH REPUBLIC TO THE CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE CONFERENCE CONCERNING THE VISIT TO THE FORMER MILITARY FACILITIES AT PIERRELATTE AND MARCOULE

I have the honour to draw your attention, and that of the Conference on Disarmament, to the visits to the former military facilities at Pierrelatte and Marcoule which France held for the representatives of over 40 countries which are members of this Conference on 16 September 2008 and for over 20 non-governmental experts on 16 March 2009.

These visits honour a pledge which was given by the President of the Republic in a speech on defence policy, nuclear deterrence and disarmament delivered at Cherbourg on 21 March 2008. In that speech, the President of the Republic presented some innovative proposals on disarmament and demonstrated his commitment to transparency by deciding, inter alia, to invite international experts to observe the dismantling of the former military facilities at Pierrelatte and Marcoule, which had been used for the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons.

During the visits, the participants had access to the former uranium enrichment plant at Pierrelatte and, at the Marcoule site, they visited one of three plutonium production reactors being dismantled, together with the military reprocessing plant. They were thus able to see the practical and effective dimensions of the decision taken by France to cease all production of fissile material for its nuclear weapons and to dismantle the production facilities at Pierrelatte and Marcoule.

The visit was an unprecedented demonstration of transparency on the part of a nuclear-weapon State. It was the first time that such a State had opened up its former facilities for the production of fissile material used in nuclear weapons.

The initiative is evidence of France's determination to move forward with ending the production of fissile material for use in nuclear weapons, which, in our view, is a priority for the disarmament process, given the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. As was noted by the international experts who took part in the visit, the dismantlement of our facilities at Pierrelatte and Marcoule is an irreversible process.

This event also sends a signal about France's determination to continue making an active and meaningful contribution, both nationally and internationally, to disarmament. Indeed, it was at the urging of the French presidency of the European Union that Europe was able, for the first time, to develop some ambitious disarmament initiatives. Thus, in the light of the upcoming 2010 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, and on the basis of the proposals made at Cherbourg, Europe presented a plan of action on disarmament, which was endorsed by 27 Heads of State and Government of the European Union in December 2008.

In the plan of action, France and its European Union partners call, inter alia, for the opening, without delay and without preconditions, of negotiations on a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons and the introduction of an immediate moratorium on the production of such material. We also call on all the States concerned to dismantle their fissile material production facilities. France expresses the hope that the international community will join the European Union in supporting and implementing this practical and realistic plan of action.

As the President of the Republic made clear in his speech at Cherbourg, France's commitment to disarmament is not just a matter of making speeches and promises; it is being translated into specific action. France pursues the transparency strategy as a confidence-building measure, as the visits to Pierrelatte and Marcoule again show. We now hope that others will join us on this path. The commitment of all States is needed if progress on disarmament is to be achieved. Trust, transparency and reciprocity are key to moving forward on this issue.

I should be grateful if you could have this letter issued as a document of the Conference on Disarmament.

(Signed): Sophie MOAL-MAKAME
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Deputy Permanent Representative of
France to the Conference on Disarmament
