

Inter-generational Forum on Peace, Climate Action and Nuclear Disarmament

Presentation of Philippe Rio

Mayor of Grigny and President of the French branch of Mayors for Peace

Good morning to all of you,

First of all, I would like to thank the Basel Peace Forum teams for inviting me.

I represent the French branch of "Mayors for Peace", a global network of local authorities whose secretariat is based in Hiroshima, Japan, and which is dedicated to the dissemination of the culture of peace, and historically, since its inception 40 years ago, to the elimination of nuclear weapons. Our network is supported by more than 8,228 member communities in 166 countries and regions of the world, representing over one billion citizens.

Our programmes of activities are in line with the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with a particular focus on Goal 16 (Promote peaceful, inclusive and equitable societies) and Goal 17 (Strengthen partnerships and networks to achieve these goals). Obviously, they also resonate with the 8 pillars of UNESCO's Culture of Peace. Furthermore, in order to promote a programme of action on a European scale, the European member cities have joined forces and decided to create a "European Chapter" in 2019, the presidency of which is currently held by the Mayor of Granollers in Spain. I warmly welcome her!

We are all driven by a common desire at the heart of these Mayors For Peace networks: the certainty that city diplomacy and municipalism are two decisive keys to winning Peace! Mayors and local decision-makers are closest to the issues of their inhabitants and can make the choice to spread the culture of peace and ensure the security of their constituents. Moreover, at the local level, we are faced with problems that are often the result of global and worldwide issues.

To take the two examples given on this panel, which are often linked, such as climate change and armed conflicts. In both cases, it is the citizens who are affected in the first instance, either through direct effects (bombings and humanitarian disasters, destruction and deterioration of infrastructures and the environment, logistical and transport problems, etc.), or through indirect effects, in the short and long term (health problems, increased poverty and famine, displacement of populations, etc.) or, for populations that are further away from the conflicts, through major economic effects, as we are seeing with the current crisis.

This is why we, as a city, have to stand up and find solutions to protect our populations. In Grigny, for example, we are taking action to lower energy prices, we have drawn up a plan to fight poverty, we are fighting against inter-neighbourhood violence, which is a real scourge in our area, and we are working with all the services to spread the culture of peace in the city, especially among young people.

To do this, we develop complete programmes based on major international events such as 26 September (International Day for the total elimination of nuclear weapons) or the International Day of Peace on 21 September. This year we will also take advantage of this to organise a "LIVE PEACE" concert as part of a new international programme combining Peace and Music. So, yes, it is also locally, in their city, that young people get involved in the projects, work and advocacy that we are carrying out; the commitment of young people to their neighbourhoods, to well-being (for ecology and disarmament but also in sport, culture, social issues...) and human rights (for true equality between men and women, against discrimination and racism...), brings a strong dynamic to society. It is obvious.

Young people are always the solution and not the problem, whatever the subject, and they have an incredible capacity for action. It is up to us, decision-makers and elected representatives, to accompany the youth, the movement for peace and freedom.

Finally, I would like to point out that in two days' time we will celebrate the second anniversary of the entry into force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). An indispensable instrument to contribute to global nuclear disarmament, which implements international law prohibiting the threat or use of nuclear weapons [as affirmed by the International Court of Justice and the UN Human Rights Committee]. As of September 2022, 91 states have signed the treaty, 68 have ratified it, but no nuclear weapon state has done so. No nuclear weapon country wished to be an observer country at the first meeting of States Parties and is not interested in dialogue. I have written to the President of the French Republic, Emmanuel MACRON, on this subject on Thursday!

The issue of nuclear weapons is intimately linked to the multiple crises we are facing! The invasion of Ukraine (a non-nuclear power) by Russia (a nuclear power) has revealed this fully: leading to an energy crisis for the European continent, accompanied by price rises; and for many other countries, such as in Africa, a serious food crisis.

This invasion also revealed that nuclear deterrence is not about protection but about being on the offensive and does not allow for conflict resolution. Moreover, the possession of nuclear weapons alone carries a high risk of accidental or terrorist use. The use of a single warhead would cause such humanitarian and environmental disasters that reconstruction would take decades, and would affect the health of people and their descendants for life. In the Mayor For Peace network we know this only too well and that is why we are committed to raising awareness of the history of humanity and of these issues.

Without forgetting that the public money allocated to their detention and renovation could be used to finance public services such as education and health, which are essential to our societies. I know that young and old will share this observation!

Thank you for your attention.