

Raoul Follereau

**PETITIONS
TO
STATESMEN**

On the occasion of the "International Year for peace" the manifesto "Atom Bomb or Charity? ", issued by Raoul Follereau in 1949, was published. Following this publication many people asked us if they could get his messages to heads of States.

So here they are – 1944, 1954, 1955, 1959, 1962, 1964 – tokens of his persistent fidelity to this wish :

convert deadly weapons into lifegiving relief.

Although the heads of states they were addressed to did not reply, these letters nevertheless impressed public opinion and created a considerable stir because of their logic, their clear judgment, their originality.

How daring it was to ask the states for the value of two bombers in order to treat all the lepers in the world ! And yet how easy it might have been, and might still be.

These letters, which go far beyond the cause of lepers, are still actual and Raoul Follereau would certainly sign them today.

1944

to M. FRANKLIN ROOSEVELT,
president of the USA

One day this war will be over. It will end, like all other wars, where it should have begun – in Peace.

On that day I would suggest to all of you, today's and yesterday's allies, today's and tomorrow's enemies, that you prolong the fighting for a day. On paper, that is to say.

The money that has let you go on killing for so many years could easily be made to last for one more day, couldn't it ?

The war budgets would not be closed until twenty-four hours after hostilities had ended. The war would go on costing money for a day and a night but would do no damage.

The hundreds of millions saved at death's expense could be put into a common fund and all could co-operate in the reconstruction of some of the things that are the property, safeguard and honour of humanity and that war has destroyed by the way, as it were, without even noticing or intending.

That would give the opportunity of a first peaceful contact between nations who, since they have not managed to wipe one another out, will tomorrow find themselves obliged to get along with one another.

And for your own people, after so many years of hopelessness, bloodshed and despair, it will be a first sign of hope.

But my request went unheard in the chaos of war.

1954

to GENERAL EISENHOWER,
president of the USA
and to M. MALENKOV,
Chairman of the Council of the Soviet Union

Presidents,
Gentlemen in Power,

Will you read this letter ? If it ever reaches you, I think you will. Even if you do not answer it to me, you will have to answer it in the depths of you own hearts.
For you both have a heart, hidden though it may be beneath a soldier's or a proletarian's uniform.
But definitely beating.
Do you ever take time off to listen to it ? If you do, I pray that it will remind you of the hundreds of millions of other hearts all over the world that often beat more quickly because of you... for, because of you, they may stop beating altogether.
I am a man of goodwill. Like you. But I have explored other domains of suffering. I still believe in goodwill. And that is why I am writing to you.
You, Gentlemen, are the two most powerful men in the world. I know that that does not mean much; the powerful are rarely free to do anything but harm.
But what I am going to ask you to do is very little... Almost nothing...
Give me one aeroplane, each of you, one aeroplane, one of your bombers.
Because I have heard that each of these war-machines costs about five milliard francs...
Now, I have estimated that with the price of two of these death-dealing machines *all the lepers in the world* could be treated.
One plane less on either side would not change the balance of power...
You could both go on sleeping peacefully.
I would sleep considerably better.
And millions of poor people would sleep for the first time...

You are the demi-gods of our century.
In former times demi-gods were feared and worshipped from afar. I do not remember whether people loved them; they were too remote...
It is the same with you. You are so remote that you may never read this letter.
And yet I am sure that you are good, and that you do really want peace and happiness for everyone... But you are too remote. And too remote from each other.
Do you not think, that this would be a good opportunity to "do something"?
Ten million people do not represent the sum total of those in need, but they represent quite a considerable amount of need.
Two bombers ! And we would have all the medicaments necessary to treat them. Two aeroplanes – when all you want is that they should rust in their hangars and never be brought out again.
They won't altogether solve the problem ? I know. But just give me those two planes, and we'll be on the way to solving it.
And what hope will be born in the hearts of millions of needy people, not only the lepers...

At the moment, however, I alone am hoping.
But I'm hoping so hard that you will hear me, that finally you will hear me...
If it is pleasing to God,
to the God in whom only one of you believes, but who loves you both.

1955

to OUR LORDS
OF WAR AND PEACE

Gentlemen in Power,

This time I address my letter to you all. To you, the Lords of war and peace.

I feel great confidence in writing to you. The world has seen you on its screens, and it has seen you smiling : so it is beginning to hope.

We are sure that each of you — taken separately — is a man of goodwill. But when you were all together in the past you immediately looked less reassuring...

But, thanks be to God ! you are all now agreed on the necessity of reaching an agreement : that in itself is enough nowadays to make millions rejoice.

So it seemed to me that this was an opportune moment to ask a favour of you, a great amnesty :

A favour on behalf of millions of innocent people condemned to suffering and death.

I mean, the lepers.

Afflicted with disease much less contagious than tuberculosis, they are, for the most part, victims of a type of social excommunication that causes them as much, and sometimes even greater, suffering than the actual illness.

They can now be effectively treated and often cured, and yet too many of them are condemned to “leprosy in perpetuity”.

On 20 September 1952, I sent a request to the United Nations Organization. I asked for the closing down of “leper-prisons, leper-cemeteries and mass leper-graves for the living”. I also asked that a Lepers’ Charter should be drawn up which would make it obligatory for civilized countries to treat their sick, and to guarantee them a return to life and liberty as soon as they were found to be non contagious.

I have never received a reply. I wrote again. A waste of time.

The French parliament voted unanimously for a motion approving

this request and asked that it be entered on the agenda for the next meeting. Nothing was done.

You, gentlemen, who have the power, to whom should I turn now ?

Presidents, secretaries, commissars, counsellors, delegates, attachés, I don’t know which official to try next. Can you find out, you who are so powerful ? ...

For three years lepers have been dying in their thousands when they could have been treated and perhaps saved...

Doesn’t that thought prevent someone in the UNO from sleeping at night ?

I have been told that “the matter is doubtless under consideration...”

What sort of consideration ? And who is considering it ?

In the meantime, death is not “considering”. It threatens millions of people who, with a little less “consideration” and a bit more courage and charity, can still be rescued from misery and despair.

I wrote a letter to the President of the USA and to the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union.

It was exactly a year ago.

The letter was respectful and polite. Some must have thought : naïve as well.

I received no reply. Neither from one nor the other.

... I think it must have been the only time when they both thought alike.

And yet, I was not very demanding. I said to my two illustrious correspondents :

“Give me a plane, each of you, one of your bombers. The latest model, of course.

I want them because I have been told that each costs five milliard francs.

Now, I have estimated that with the price of two of these death-dealing machines all the lepers in the world could be treated”. I understand now from their silence how clumsy my request must have seemed. Two bombers, indeed ! You can’t play games with things like that ! Their entourage of generals must have shrugged their shoulders...

I am not offended.

But I will not give up.

And now, since the world is in the mood for loving its neighbour, I have returned, incorrigibly, "to the charge".

This time, my idea is simpler... and it is so very simple...

Gentlemen, you who have the power; statisticians — a pitiless race — have told us that the budget for armaments in the three great countries of the world (United States, Russia, Great Britain) had reached the sum of 750 milliard dollars in the year 1954.

For those of us who buy our bread with francs that makes **two hundred and sixty-two thousand milliard**... Not a sou less.

It is an impressive figure, you know.

And then I began to reflect.

Experts say that there are now two and a half milliard people on the earth. That must be less than a milliard families. With the money that is spent on guns, planes and bombs, one could have given each of them an income of 262'000 francs last year.

262'000 francs income ! Nobody would have felt the poorer for it. But there would be no more poverty today.

And then if there was not so much misery, the chances of war would be reduced, you know...

My suggestion is absurd ? I could admit it cheerfully.

But you must prove it to me first.

Gentlemen, you who have the power, lords of war and peace, will you never agree to set aside the thousandth part of what you have squandered over the years for death, hatred and destruction to heal the poor and feed and educate them ?

It is man who asks this question, every man of every race. Whether you remain silent or not, he will either rejoice over your action, or note your indifference : there is no way of escaping his judgment. But I am sure that you will answer. I can tell it from the way you smile in your photographs.

And you will unanimously come to the aid of the lonely, of those without hands to applaud and without voices to shout...

Bossuet said : "Cursed be any knowledge that does not lead to love."

If it were to win the "Fight against Leprosy", this century, tainted as it is by your atom bombs, could be rehabilitated.

Then history would consider you with its Great Men...

1959

to GENERAL EISENHOWER,
president of the United States
and to Mr KHRUSHCHEV,

Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union

Presidents,

At last you have met each other. The masters of the world are finally going to talk in person. People everywhere are at once hopeful and fearful. We know that there is almost nothing you cannot do for human happiness, but — inevitably — we think first and foremost of the disaster that could result from a disagreement.

But we know also that your hearts work like our own, and only really want to work for the peace of the world.

It is because I am convinced of your good intentions that I am writing to you.

I am an ordinary man, such as you might find in your own countries. A man who would like to be able to go to sleep at nights knowing that everyone else is content.

That is what gives me strength and faith.

And authorizes me to write to you.

Gentlemen, you who represent the two great powers, are you willing to save 15 million men ? The most abandoned and pitiful of all, who are so wretched and so alone that they have no idea to which political party they belong.

Fifteen million innocent people infected with an illness that the World Health Organization has just declared to be only slightly contagious and perfectly curable, and who are yet only too often condemned to a most horrible death : the lepers.

Would you, *together*, sign a reprieve for 15 million men ?

Would you be willing that your *first* point of agreement should be to deliver 15 million men imprisoned by ignorance, selfishness and cowardice, those three leprosy more catching than leprosy and more difficult to cure ?

You can do it. With one word. By giving up, each of you, one of those machines of which you have so many that no one would even notice if one were to disappear from your vast hangars.

Each of you could give us one plane a bomber.

One of those machines that is both a technical masterpiece and the terror of your civilians.

For the price of these instruments of death, we could buy enough medicine to treat and often to cure all the lepers in the world.

What does it matter to you if there is one less plane in the USSR and one less in the USA ! The balance would not be disturbed...

But if the report of your meeting announced that : "The two great powers have allied themselves in order to win the 'Fight against Leprosy' ", believe me, the 15 million lepers would not be the only ones who would rejoice. And it would cost you each no more than a bomber. To win such a great victory !

... Don't you feel like thanking me ?

It is death to go on with the arms race. And we shall all die with you. For nothing. Because of you. And neither of you wants to go on killing. You just haven't found any other way of behaving. It would only be a tiny step towards disarmament if you were each to give up a bomber.

But that could be just the start...

And you might feel so happy about it that you would be inspired to continue... Until the last bomb and the last leper...

That is all I have to say. And if I have had the audacity to say it, it is because I am sure that there are millions, here and everywhere, among your people and ours, who will be glad that I have done so.

And now, act in accordance with your consciences and hearts I shall go on hoping.

I am confident that this letter will reach you all.

Even if you do not reply to me, you will have to reply to it in your hearts.

It is to your hearts that I am writing.

I am a man of goodwill and for thirty years I have fought a difficult battle and experienced both cruelty and fraternal love in it.

Now I am almost an old man, but one who still believes in goodness.

This is why I am writing to you. To you and all the other Heads of State, to ask a favour, a great amnesty : a favour for 15 million innocent men who have been condemned to the worst possible death : the lepers. I have a right to speak for them : I have spent all my life caring for them.

They are infected with an illness that was once accursed and hopeless, today they can be cured. Two million of them have already been cured and delivered from the wretchedness that oppressed them : that is the proof that it can be done.

Millions more, however, remain without treatment, help or love : the "Fight against Leprosy" is not over.

Then, stupefied and horrified, as all men worthy of the name must be, by the fabulous sums spent on armaments, I made a calculation. If all the powers, large and small, had in 1962 given 100 francs to the treatment of leprosy for every million they squandered on preparations for war, all the lepers in the world could have been treated.

A million for killing : a hundred francs for curing. It is so simple and seems such a negligible proportion that one cannot imagine any country refusing.

Will you set an example, and give some, perhaps, a lesson ?

The gesture that I have proposed, whatever the material results, has supreme symbolic value. It would pave the way for that transformation of instruments of death into tools for rebuilding life on which depends the very salvation of humanity.

While certain people defy each other or play bowls in the stratosphere, the world rushes with the speed of an avalanche towards the greatest disaster of history.

The undernourished in 1938 made up 35 % of the world's population. They account for two-thirds of the population today. In ten years they will represent three-quarters of it.

If our human conscience is not stirred by a great wave of love at some time during this century, man's starvation will hasten the end of the world.

ONE MILLION for killing : ONE HUNDRED francs for curing.
Will you listen to my appeal ?

A country does not become great by being powerful or rich, but when it is capable of extending love.

If you will undertake, on an equal footing with the greatest world powers, this gesture of human solidarity – or show them what their duty is by undertaking it – you will be proclaiming that no one on this earth – individuals, nations or countries – has the right to be happy alone.

History will judge then which were the great countries.

1964

to U-THANT,
secretary general of United Nation Organization

(...)

But there's no reason to keep quiet just because people don't hear men, is there? Or am I to think that these words : hunger, poverty, fraternity don't exist in any of the languages used at international conferences ?

And now I am making another attempt – no doubt the last – to appeal to the conscience of the great powers and to the hearts of all nations.

(...)

This is my request and it is exactly the same as the one I expressed twenty years ago :

Let all the members of UNO agree that every year, on the occasion of a World Peace Day, they will set aside what they have spent *in one day on armaments* to go to a common fund for the relief of famine, slums and endemic diseases which are decimating mankind. One day of war for Peace... Perhaps you will think that I don't ask enough.

But this first transformation of the instruments of death into tools for rebuilding life would be a glorious gesture, and could assure the the salvation of a humanity that stands by, its hands tied and its mouth stopped, helplessly watching its own suicide.

(...)

This would be a method. A modest one, to be sure. But it would open a little door for hope.

Disarm in order to love.

That's what I should like to hear you say in the UN for me. Because I am sure that millions of people who belong to the member-nations would be glad to know that it had been said.

Let every country decide according to the promptings of its conscience.

Whether they respond or whether they remain indifferent to this last appeal, it will be remembered in the future. And no one will escape judgment.

For my part, I shall go on hoping.

On the some day Raoul Follereau wrote to the secretary general of United Nations Organization, he addressed an appeal to the young in which he suggested they should support his request to UNO.

*The campaign **One day of war won for peace** was launched. Within five years **three million** young people from 125 countries answered enthusiastically, showering the office of secretary general of the United Nations eith their petition cards :*

We young people from fourteen to twenty agree with the appeal "One day won for peace" addressed by Raoul Follereau to the Organization of United Nations, and, when the time comes, we engage ourselves to use our civil and political rights to insure its success."

So it was that on the 9th of December 1969 the General Assembly of UNO accepted the proposal by 92 votes and 7 abstentions and advised the member-nations to study the means of putting it into practice in their own countries:

Today these young people are between thirty-five and forty, many of them have remained faithful to their pledges and are still strong links in the love chain created by Raoul Follereau, a chain which, for him meant the greatest asset to peace.

Well, what has happened since 1969 ? What have they been doing ? What have we been doing ?

Of course some people have been made aware of the problem and have committed themselves; important realizations have been brought off in accordance with Raoul Follereau's suggestions. But a gulf still lies between men because egoism reigns supreme and, instead of serving the general interest, money serves personal interests.

*There is yet so much to do.
Hunger, poverty, injustice prevail in the world.*

Raoul Follereau's voice still sounds in our ears. We must not silence it, we must remember and remain faithful to his action.

Young people today as well as in 1969 have generous hearts ready to be roused by his message, to catch its meaning; for it is the message of a man of goodwill, acting up to his principles :

Love one another.

You may get this book free of charge at the following address :

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