



Rome, June 23 2006

Prime Minister Romano Prodi
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Thanks, but no thanks

An open letter to the Italian government

We, U.S. Citizens for Peace & Justice - Rome, are writing this letter to ask that the Italian government rethink certain types of "aid" provided to our country. We consider this "aid" contrary to the interests of both the Italian people and those of the United States. Some of this "aid" is the result of past choices and previous governments. We therefore urge the new Prodi government to break with the past and change course.

We begin by asking that the Italian government rethink the presence of a number of nuclear bombs belonging to the United States, at present 90, stored at the military bases of Aviano (Pordenone) and Ghedi Torre (Brescia). This presence constitutes a violation of the spirit of the Non-Proliferation Treaty on the part of both the United States, a nuclear state, and of Italy, a non-nuclear state, both of which are signatories. The Treaty is therefore made less effective by this flagrant violation. To say nothing of the grave risks to which Italy is exposed. Storing these nuclear weapons on Italian soil does nothing to guarantee security; on the contrary, it puts Italy at risk of a nuclear accident with the consequent environmental damage, while at the same time creating a potential target for terrorists. In a survey last year in the United States, 66% of the respondents replied that no country, including the U.S., should have nuclear weapons. We ask that the Italian government request the removal and dismantling of the nuclear weapons present on its soil.

Another case of "aid" that we consider neither in the best interests of the two peoples, nor in those of the international community, is the hospitality given to U.S. military bases. The presence of more than 20 U.S. military installations with more than 16,000 U.S. military personnel makes Italy an indirect tool of the policy of preventive war, which many experts as well as global public opinion consider to be the cause of a more dangerous world. Recent surveys in the United States confirm that the majority (60% to 69%) now considers our country on the wrong path, and a strong factor in this shift is due to global war. We therefore ask that

the Italian government not support these policies and that it endeavor to achieve the closing of the U.S. military bases and their reconversion to civilian use.

But it's not just hospitality that Italy gives to the United States for the bases. Italian taxpayers cover 37% of the operating costs, to say nothing of the numerous discounts and free services provided to military personnel. Many of these agreements were made long ago and remain under the cover of State Secrets. We ask that the Italian government make public the details of these agreements in order to allow an evaluation of the true benefits by means of an open debate.

As revealed in the recent Council of Europe report on illegal detentions and the use of secret flights for unlawful inter-state transfers, the USAF base at Aviano was also used to transfer Abu Omar to Egypt, where he was jailed and tortured following his kidnapping in Milan. This is, according to the report, the best-documented case of "extraordinary rendition," thanks to the work of the Italian magistrates who have also requested the extradition of 22 CIA agents involved in the case. We ask the new government to do that which the former refused: to forward the extradition request to the U.S. government.

We also ask that there be internal inquiries as well as collaboration with international investigations, thus setting a strong example for other European nations by ensuring that Italy will no longer be complicit in illegal detentions and torture.

Lastly, the most well-known case of "aid" has been that of deploying troops to Afghanistan and Iraq. In both countries, countless innocent civilians have been killed; many U.S. and Italian soldiers have died, and even more have been injured; the two countries have been destroyed, and hundreds of billions of dollars have been spent without improving the lives of the people. In both countries there have been grave cases of torture (Abu Ghraib in Iraq and Bagram in Afghanistan). In both countries, daily life has been made impossible by the violence and lack of security. In Italy these are referred to as missions of peace, when they actually have little to do with peace.

It's time to withdraw the troops. We ask that the Italian government bring its soldiers home. We ask the Italian government that it withdraw its support for these U.S. wars and occupation, and that it instead support the people of Iraq and Afghanistan with cooperation programs entrusted to the NGOs who have worked in these countries for years.

It is clear that Italy is not alone in its "aid" to our country. With more than 700 military installations outside the U.S., in more than 130 countries; with more than 400 U.S. nuclear weapons stored in Europe; and with more than 1,000 secret flights involving 14 European countries, it is evident that our country "benefits" from the complicity of many nations and governments.

By taking the opportunity to change course, Italy could contribute to redirecting military spending towards objectives of peace, thus establishing an important precedent and providing our country and others with true support.

U.S. Citizens for Peace and Justice, Rome