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## **Bombspotting Edited version**

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On July 8th, 1996, the International Court of Justice declared “that the threat or use of nuclear weapons would generally be contrary to the rules of international law”. This offered peace movements an additional argument and a legal basis for actions of civil disobedience against nuclear weapons. In Belgium, small actions of civil disobedience at NATO's headquarters and Kleine Brogel air force base were the start of a campaign, Bombspotting, raising the issue of nuclear weapons, and the legal duty to disarm.

For many participants, Bombspotting was the first time they took part in direct action. From the outset, the organisers made a big effort to enable people to take an active role in the action without necessarily being involved in the preparation a long time before. We encourage people to get in contact with a regional group, and organise and actively promote NVDA trainings as a preparation to Bombspotting, but we keep participation open to 'the average citizen', not only to 'the professional activist'. This means that at Bombspotting actions, a large structure is set up, involving hundreds of volunteers, to enable people to participate easily and without heavy engagement.

One important way in which we lowered the threshold for people to participate, was setting up local groups. These groups, consisting of people from very different walks of life, brought the theme of nuclear weapons and the call for direct action for nuclear disarmament out of the campaigner's meetings and onto the streets. Local mobilizing efforts were much more effective than the national promotion campaign by the office. Through working with local groups, we ensured that nearly everywhere potentially interested people could have face-to-face contact with people working on the campaign on the grassroots level.

For several years, we invited international activists to participate, but then we were faced with new challenges. How could we help create pressure on governments of NATO member states? This is still under discussion. We are far from a truly international campaign, but there have been efforts and discussions that others might learn from. When you invite internationals to join in, it's easy to overlook basic things - such as food, accommodation, meeting places, transport - that can add to stress. Make sure the international participants have all the information they need to take decisions. Take language problems in account – e.g. when you have a home base telephone number or legal assistance, take care the people doing these tasks can handle different languages. Give the internationals time to accustom themselves and to prepare for the action, both at home and shortly before the action. Run through the different phases of their stay and role in the action from their perspective. What information does s/he need? What could help him/her feel secure and comfortable? Also consider meeting one or a few international guests before to prepare this together.

An excellent example of an instrument designed exactly for this purpose is the “Faslane 365 Resource Pack” ([www.faslane365.org](http://www.faslane365.org)) This booklet gives basic information on the purpose and political context of the year-long Faslane blockade, contains useful information groups need to autonomously prepare for participation, and offers lots of practical advice on mobilisation, tactics, training,... In our experience, a nonviolent direct action training with the international participants has proved very helpful. Trainings are an opportunity to go through action scenario's extensively and to prepare to handle problems and difficulties that might arise. One can have the feeling that participation in actions abroad does not bring your own campaign much further. Moreover, it is time-consuming and might cost a lot of money. On the other hand, going there yourself can

enhance the visibility of your own campaign internationally. It 's very often a very effective way of meeting people that you can work with in the future.

One example: the participation of French Greenpeace activists inspired them to take action against the French development of new nuclear missiles. In September, during the first large demonstration against the M51 missile, about 30 Bombspotters took part in the first Bombspotting-style citizen's inspection at the Centre d'Essaies des Landes near Bordeaux. We gave advice and assistance in the preparation of the action, and Bombspotting NVDA trainers returned a few months after the action to give a 'training for trainers'.

But action abroad can never replace action in your own country. Therefore, again, it is of the utmost importance to think about what you expect from the involvement of internationals and from your own participation abroad.

You can think of ways to increase the significance of the international presence. At the Bombspotting XL action in 2005, where citizen's inspectors targeted four different sites related to nuclear weapons in Belgium, activists were present from all NATO member countries hosting NATO nuclear weapons: UK, US, Italy, Germany, Turkey, the Netherlands, plus activists from other countries, such as Finland, France, Greece, Portugal, Spain. Our press work drew attention specifically to this, and all of the international delegations did their own press work towards their respective countries. When working this way, it is not just a question of inviting internationals, let them participate and that's it. A lot more work is necessary - coordinating press efforts, dividing roles before, during and after the action,...

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