



Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development Office of International Justice and Peace

Background on Nuclear Arms Treaties **April 2010**

...I firmly hope that, during the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference to be held this May in New York, concrete decisions will be made towards progressive disarmament, with a view to freeing our planet from nuclear arms.
-- Pope Benedict XVI, January 1, 2010

Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty

The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) is the cornerstone of global efforts to curb and reverse the spread of nuclear weapons. 198 countries have ratified the treaty, including the five acknowledged nuclear powers: United States, Russia, United Kingdom, France, and China. Only four nations have not: India, Israel, Pakistan and North Korea. The NPT prohibits non-nuclear states from acquiring nuclear weapons (non-proliferation), requires nuclear states to reduce and eliminate nuclear weapons (disarmament), and guarantees access to peaceful nuclear technology (nuclear power). The Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty are important to preserving support for the NPT.

Years ago President Ronald Reagan and General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev called for abolishing all nuclear weapons. More recently, former Secretaries George Shultz, William Perry and Henry Kissinger and Senator Sam Nunn have promoted a nuclear-free world. Last year President Barack Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev committed “our two countries to achieving a nuclear free world.”

New START Treaty

Originally proposed by President Ronald Reagan, the United States and Soviet Union signed the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) in 1991. This treaty limited the number of nuclear warheads and delivery vehicles (missiles and bombers) that each country could deploy to 6,000 warheads and 1,600 delivery vehicles. The treaty also incorporated a solid set of verification measures the two nations could use to monitor each other’s nuclear arsenals and compliance with the treaty.

In 2002, the U.S. and Russia adopted the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT), known as the Moscow Treaty, which would reduce the number of warheads to between 1,700 and 2,200 by the end of 2012. As with previous reductions, an indeterminate number of the weapons “cut” from the arsenals would be stored, not dismantled. Under this “good faith” arrangement there are no verification measures and thousands of tactical (short-range) nuclear weapons are not covered. SORT expires on the date its reductions become mandatory in 2012.

START expired on December 5, 2009 and with it the verification protocols, but both nations have agreed to keep its provisions in effect. On April 8, 2010 Presidents Obama and Medvedev signed the New START Treaty. The New START Treaty: reduces deployed strategic warheads to 1,550, 30 percent below the existing ceiling; limits the United States and Russia to no more than 700 delivery vehicles; and includes new verification requirements. The Treaty needs ratification by the U.S. Senate. Ratification is critical because verification ensures transparency and these reductions in the number of weapons can set the stage for future reductions. The New START Treaty is also important to international efforts to address nonproliferation. With fewer nuclear weapons in the world the likelihood of one falling into terrorist hands is reduced and countries are more likely to cooperate in enforcing nonproliferation demands and safeguarding nuclear materials.

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Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty

Despite U.S. involvement in initiating negotiations for a test ban treaty, in 1999, the U.S. Senate failed to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) that would stop nuclear testing. Some Senators who voted “no” expressed concerns about the ability of the United States to maintain its arsenal in the absence of testing and others were concerned about verifying compliance with the treaty. Prominent scientists have argued that the U.S. can safely maintain its nuclear arsenal without testing and that the ability of the international community to verify compliance is amply demonstrated by detections of tests in North Korea. The Obama Administration supports ratification of this treaty that 151 other nations have ratified (including UK, France, and Russia). Originally, there was hope that the U.S. would ratify the CTBT before the Review Conference on the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in May 2010, but it will likely be next year.

USCCB POSITION

Nuclear war is rejected in Church teaching because the use of nuclear weapons cannot insure noncombatant immunity and their destructive potential and lingering radiation cannot be meaningfully proportionate. Pope Benedict XVI said in a January 2006 statement, “In a nuclear war there would be no victors, only victims.” While possession of a minimal nuclear capability may deter the use of nuclear weapons by others, the Church urges that nuclear deterrence be replaced with concrete measures of disarmament based on dialogue and multilateral negotiations. In its nuclear policy the U.S. should commit to never use nuclear weapons first and to reject use of nuclear weapons to deter non-nuclear threats. The U.S. and other nuclear powers must move away from reliance on nuclear weapons for their security. A global ban is more than a moral ideal; it should be a policy goal.

USCCB successfully advocated cutting funds for the Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator and the Reliable Replacement Warhead, new nuclear weapons programs proposed by the previous Administration. Archbishop Edwin O’Brien delivered a major address on “Nuclear Weapons and Moral Questions” at a July 2009 Deterrence Symposium sponsored by the Strategic Command in Omaha. In a September 2009 letter to the Senate, Bishop Howard Hubbard, Chairman of the USCCB Committee on International Justice and Peace, reiterated “the moral support of the Catholic bishops of our nation for concrete steps to reduce the number of nuclear weapons and to advance nuclear non-proliferation with an ultimate goal of seeking a nuclear-free world.” He noted that “Senate action will be needed to help our nation to secure loose nuclear material, strengthen the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, and support a follow-up to the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START).” The positive example of the U.S. ratifying the New START Treaty and the CTBT will be important to international efforts to address nonproliferation and the successful control of nuclear materials in this age of terrorism. On April 8, 2010 Francis Cardinal George, USCCB President, expressed support for the New START Treaty and urged bipartisan action to ratify it.

The USCCB has urged the Administration and Congress to view arms control treaties not as ends in themselves but as steps along the way to achieving the goal of a mutual, verifiable global ban on nuclear weapons. Much deeper, more irreversible cuts, in both strategic and tactical weapons, are both possible and necessary. The Holy Father said on January 1, 2008: “It is truly necessary for all persons of good will to come together to reach concrete agreements aimed at an effective demilitarization, especially in the area of nuclear arms.”

USCCB has expressed support for the Global Security Priorities Resolution (H.Res.278) introduced by Congressmen McGovern and Lungren. This resolution will link long-term savings derived from reducing our nuclear arsenal to increased support for nuclear nonproliferation efforts and child survival programs.

ACTION REQUESTED

1. Urge members of the Senate to support ratification of the New START Treaty.
2. Urge members of the House to support the Global Security Priorities Resolution (H.Res.278).

For further information: visit www.usccb.org/sdwp/international/nuclear.shtml or contact *Stephen Colecchi*, Director, Office of International Justice and Peace, USCCB, 202-541-3196 (phone), 202-541-3339 (fax), scolecchi@usccb.org.

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