

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

Ligue Internationale de Femmes pour la Paix et la Liberté

Liga Internacional de Mujeres por la Paz y la Libertad

Consultative Status with UN ECOSOC, UNCTAD and UNESCO; Special Consultative Relations with FAO, ILO, and UNICEF.



WILPF Statement on the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty's Entry Into Force on the occasion of the CTBT's Sixth Article XIV Conference, New York, 24–25 September 2009

Since the first nuclear weapon test in New Mexico, USA in 1945, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) has called for the cessation of all nuclear testing and for an international treaty banning such tests. WILPF welcomed the Partial Test Ban Treaty in 1963 but pushed for more—for a complete ban. In 1996, WILPF was encouraged by the opening for signature of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT).

Unfortunately, thirteen years and 149 ratifications later, the Treaty has not yet entered into force. Three countries—India, Pakistan, and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea—have tested nuclear explosive devices in the interim. Since 1997, the United States has carried out over 20 subcritical nuclear tests at its Nevada Test Site.

It is unfortunate that the CTBT does not expressly forbid qualitative improvements to nuclear weapons through subcritical testing and other means. Its stated objectives, however, are disarmament and the prevention of further nuclear weapon modernization and subsequent arms races. Thus the entry into force of the CTBT would constitute an important step towards an equitable and secure nuclear free world envisioned by the vast majority of the world's citizens and governments. The CTBT provides measures both to determine compliance with the Treaty (ie. to detect nuclear tests) and to remedy any situation of non-compliance. It is thus one of the best tools the international community currently has at its disposal to establish a process of complete nuclear disarmament.

China, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Iran, Israel, Pakistan, and the United States are the nine states preventing the CTBT's entry into force. Their excuses vary, though many suggest, or expect, that US ratification would lead to a ricochet effect for other ratifications. The merits of this analysis are debatable; regardless, all current Washington discourse indicates that the price of US ratification will be high—too high.

A Congressional Research Service report from June 2009[1] explains that when the US Senate ratified the Partial Test Ban Treaty, the Joint Chiefs of Staff conditioned their support for the Treaty on four safeguards: an aggressive nuclear test program; maintaining nuclear weapon laboratories; maintaining the ability to resume atmospheric tests promptly; and improving intelligence and nuclear explosion monitoring capabilities. The report emphasises that safeguards were key to securing Senate ratification of the 1963 Treaty. The report goes on to explain that updated safeguards have been part of CTBT ratification negotiations in the Senate. The report's author notes, "Safeguards could be updated, such as by adding Safeguards for the nuclear weapon production plants and strategic forces, and could be augmented with implementation measures" that enforce the updated safeguards and prevent any erosion of the anti-disarmament scheme behind ratification.

Furthermore, as Greg Mello of the Los Alamos Study Group argues, the opposition in the Senate to ratifying the Treaty is not about preserving the United States' ability to test a nuclear weapon—it has no reason to ever test a nuclear weapon again and if there were such a circumstance, it would be able to withdraw from the Treaty under

its withdrawal clause. Mello writes, “Any ratification deal would be aimed, in part, precisely at negating the Treaty’s disarmament impact ... In this shifting and uncertain scene, the CTBT ratification process will be viewed by many actors—defence ideologues, nuclear contractors, and pork-barrel politicians—as a means to protect the U.S. nuclear establishment against the vicissitudes of time.”[2]

Other governments and international civil society advocates need to be wary of the process underway in the United States toward CTBT ratification and in their advocacy must emphasise core value of the Treaty: that a ban on nuclear weapon testing is intended to prevent the design, development, or modernisation of nuclear weapons. While WILPF welcomes US President Obama’s interest in achieving US ratification, there is such a thing as a price too high. Any deals given in trade for ratification will only serve to undermine the Treaty and cannot be accepted.

Nuclear testing is a message from a government to the world that it is willing to use nuclear weapons. So too is a government’s refusal to ratify the test ban. WILPF calls upon all states that have not yet ratified the CTBT to do so. If the eight other Annex II states ratified the Treaty without waiting for the United States, they would isolate the United States as the sole outlier. WILPF also calls on the US Senate to ratify the Treaty without conditions, without safeguards, and without undermining the Treaty’s goals of preventing the development of new or “better” nuclear weapons. Conditions to sustain existing nuclear forces and infrastructure are not part of the ban on nuclear testing for a reason.

WILPF also calls upon the nuclear weapon possessors to maintain their testing moratoriums and to cease subcritical testing immediately. A special emphasis should be put on the United Kingdom and Russia, who have ratified the CTBT, yet undermine its efficacy by continuing to conduct these tests. In addition, the United States and the United Kingdom should be condemned for their nuclear weapon modernization and extension programmes, which also weaken the CTBT.

For more information about WILPF’s work on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, go to www.reachingcriticalwill.org.

[1] Jonathan Medalia, “Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty: Updated ‘Safeguards’ and Net Assessments,” Congressional Research Service, 3 June 2009, at <http://assets.opencrs.com/rpts/R40612_20090603.pdf>.

[2] Greg Mello, “Obama and CTBT Ratification: Dangerous Distraction,” Reaching Critical Will’s NPT News in Review, 5 May 2009, at <<http://www.reachingcriticalwill.org/legal/npt/NIR2009/No5.pdf>>.