

A Dream For Many Decades

Report on the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty

Summary:

International pressure to bring the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty into force, a dream for many decades, increased when States Parties to the Treaty pledged they would “spare no effort” to achieve full ratification. The fourth conference on Facilitating the Entry into Force of the CTBT, held in New York September 21-23, 2005, adopted by consensus a Final Declaration specifying 12 measures to speed up completion of the ratification process. But 11 States whose ratification is necessary for CTBT entry-into-force, are still holding out, despite the fact that 176 countries have signed and 125 have ratified. The chief hold-out is the United States, the only country to have rejected ratification. An NGO Statement, on behalf of 33 non-governmental organizations, criticized U.S. government opposition to the Treaty, and said no single government “should be allowed to stand in the way of the historical opportunity to permanently end the scourge of nuclear testing, an indispensable step toward eliminating nuclear weapons threats and preventing nuclear war.”

1. The Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, shutting off all nuclear testing, was opened for signature in 1996. Annex II of the Treaty specified that 44 States were required to ratify it before entry-into-force could be achieved. All Annex II countries have signed, except for India, North Korea and Pakistan. Eight others have signed but not ratified: China, Columbia, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Israel, the United States and Vietnam. Thus the world awaits the ratification of these eleven.

2. The fourth conference to push for entry-into-force, chaired by Foreign Minister Alexander Downes of Australia, heard repeated appeals to the eleven not to block the treaty and prevent the rest of the world from moving forward. Sweden noted: “The two nuclear weapons States, which have not yet ratified the Treaty, the U.S.A. and China, have a special responsibility.”

3. China's statement, given by Ambassador Zhang Yishan, repeated the information provided to the last CTBT meeting in 2003, namely that the ratification process is before the National People's Congress and that China is cooperating fully in the CTBT's monitoring and verification work. "China has all along advocated a complete prohibition and thorough destruction of nuclear weapons and early realization of a nuclear weapon-free world."

4. Although 90 States participated in the Conference, the U.S. did not attend.

5. A single NGO statement, given by Darryl Kimball, Executive Director of the Arms Control Association, on behalf of 33 groups, said that the CTBT was a critical building block in nuclear disarmament. However, it must be recognized that technical advances in nuclear weapons research meant that a ban on nuclear test explosions by itself would not be enough. He called for a halt on all qualitative improvements to their nuclear arsenals. He said that top leaders of States committed to the CTBT must press their counterparts in the eleven. "We are particularly dismayed with the policies of the Bush Administration, which is not even seeking Senate approval for ratification, and that of China, which ... has failed to take any further action toward ratification since the last Article XIV Conference." He added: "We therefore urge the governments represented at this conference to actively urge – at the highest level – the U.S. Administration to join the list of responsible and civilized States and reconsider its opposition to the Treaty."

6. Though universality of the Treaty is, for the time being, blocked, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty Organization reported that two-thirds of the verification system has been built. So far 217 of the 321 monitoring stations provided for in the Treaty have been built (115 in the last two years). "Continuous testing and evaluation of the verification system will prove to the remaining skeptics that the CTBT is equipped with a robust verification system capable of detecting nuclear test explosions and all other nuclear explosions everywhere. ..." The Conference Declaration affirmed that the verification regime will be "unprecedented in its global reach."

7. The potential of civil and scientific applications of the CTBT Verification system are only starting to be explored. For example, in the wake of the tsunami catastrophe of 2004, the CTBTO is testing the

usefulness of the International Monitoring System data for tsunami warning. The establishment of an effective tsunami early warning system may be one of the humanitarian benefits of the CTBT.

8. Twelve measures adopted by the conference include the possibility of a voluntary trust fund to support an outreach programme for promoting the Treaty. Regional seminars were suggested along with legal assistance to speed up the ratification process. Various forms of increased cooperation among States and the CTBTO apparatus were recommended.

9. The work of veteran Netherlands diplomat Jacep Ramaker as CTBT Special Representative was extended to continue lobbying the hold-out States.