Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom
Statement on the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT)
for the Fifth Article XIV Conference on Facilitating Entry Into Force

September 2007

The Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) is the oldest women’s peace organization in the world, established in 1915 to oppose the war raging in Europe. It has been working ever since to study, make known, and abolish the causes of war, and for total and universal disarmament.

Women have organized to oppose nuclear weapon testing since it began. For example, women collected and tested their children’s teeth for iodine 131 contamination as an important awareness raising action. Nuclear weapons are weapons of terror, weapons of a genocidal, ecocidal, and suicidal nature. Their abolition is fundamental to the security and prosperity of humanity. Security, for citizens and for nations, cannot exist when the threat of nuclear annihilation is maintained through government policies and defense industry priorities; when money is used to further develop technologies of destruction rather than education, health, employment, and the environment. As with militarism in general, nuclear weapon testing represents an ultimate injustice to people around the world. Furthermore, the effects of nuclear testing, such as cancer, birth defects, and environmental degradation, have been felt primarily by indigenous people, as most of the nuclear test sites are situated on their lands.

The entry into force of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) would constitute an important step towards the nuclear free world envisioned by the vast majority of the world’s citizens. The cessation of all nuclear test explosions would constrain the development and improvement of nuclear weapons. 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.

With minor exceptions, the problems of the CTBT lie not with its provisions, but with the refusal of key governments to implement them.

There was universal condemnation of the October 2006 nuclear test by the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) in October 2006. Yet, the US, the UK, Russia, and possibly China have continued conducting subcritical tests to maintain and upgrade their nuclear arsenals. The nuclear weapon states, in particular the US and the UK, have also continued with or introduced plans to modernize or extend the lifetime of their nuclear arsenals. These actions violate the spirit of the CTBT.

It is unfortunate that the CTBT does not expressly forbid qualitative improvements to nuclear weapons through subcritical testing and experimentation. Its stated ultimate objective, however, is the prevention of further nuclear weapon modernization and subsequent arms races. WILPF calls upon the nuclear weapon states to cease subcritical testing immediately. A special emphasis should be put on the UK and Russia, who have ratified the CTBT, yet undermine its efficacy by
Continuing to conduct these tests. In addition, the US and the UK should be condemned for their nuclear weapon modernization and extension programmes, which also weaken the CTBT.

WILPF totally opposes the US-India deal which undermines the CTBT and violates the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The deal also contradicts the US' condemnation of India's nuclear weapon tests in 1998, for which economic sanctions were imposed. The proposed deal does not require a commitment from India that it will refrain from nuclear testing in the future. WILPF opposes specially tailored safeguard agreements for India, and exceptions for certain countries, as undermining multilateralism and the standards it has established. Both the US and India need to make legally-binding commitments to core non-proliferation and disarmament standards, including the CTBT.

Every signature and ratification of the CTBT increases its strength and normalizes its provisions, which contributes greatly to international security. WILPF calls on those who have already ratified the Treaty to use their influence to encourage those standing outside the treaty to sign and ratify. We appreciate the comments of the UK's Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Margaret Beckett, at the Carnegie Conference in June 2007, wherein she expressed interest in the US ratifying the CTBT as an impetus to its entry into force. We encourage the UK as a close ally of the US to continue pressuring for US ratification of the CTBT immediately. We also urge the UK to maintain a more consistent policy on nuclear disarmament—it is difficult to accept its support of the CTBT at face value while it continues subcritical testing of nuclear weapons and has decided to renew its Trident nuclear submarine system.

WILPF also urges China, Colombia, DPRK, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Iran, Israel, Pakistan, and the US to sign and ratify. Every state has more to gain by ratifying the Treaty than by remaining outside of the international cooperative security regime.

It has been more than a decade since the CTBT was opened for signature—it is well past time for the Treaty to enter into force. In the meantime, it is imperative that the voluntary moratorium on nuclear testing remain in place, that the Provisional Technical Secretariat and the CTBTO maintain their efforts to drive the Treaty's entry into force, and that the citizens of the world continue monitoring, questioning, and pressuring their governments to support the strengthening of international treaties and agreements such as the CTBT, with faith that international law will prevail over the absurdity of nuclear militarism.

WILPF believes that through confidence-building measures, the strengthening of verification systems and regimes, and strict adherence to international law, nuclear disarmament is possible. We do not have to reinvent the wheel—we just have to support, use, and reinforce the existing viable and effective tools we have already created through diplomacy and multilateralism.