Report on the 2009 Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty Conference
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The biennial Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) Article XIV Conference on 24–25 September 2009 was held amidst a focus of international attention spurred by the UN Security Council Summit on nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament. In his opening remarks to the CTBT Conference, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon expressed the need to seize the new momentum towards a world free of nuclear weapons, saying, “Let us make history by making the need for this conference history.”

The Conference is held to help facilitate the Treaty’s entry into force. Opened for signature in 1996, the CTBT still awaits nine essential ratifications before it enters into force. The nine holdouts, the so-called “Annex II” states for their listing in Annex II of the Treaty, are China, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Iran, Israel, Pakistan, and the United States.

Statements by non-ratifying states
For the first time in thirteen years, the US delegation attended the Conference, led by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. She explained that the administration would work towards US ratification of the Treaty and urged other Annex II states to move forward with ratification as well.

Several other non-ratifying states spoke. China’s delegation said it is “the Treaty’s consistent supporter and abides by its commitment to moratorium on nuclear test.” Indonesia’s delegation, while remaining cognisant of its indispensable role in ratifying the Treaty, held “firm the view that the qualitative development of all nuclear weapons must stop, and therefore seek universal adherence to the CTBT, first and foremost, by all Nuclear Weapon States.” [Emphasis added]

Israel’s ambassador reiterated his government’s “unequivocal support” for the Treaty but said that the CTBT verification regime and International Data Center needs to be completed and tested to a greater degree, “necessary for entry into force”. He also indicated that Israel’s ratification is at least partially contingent on its admittance to the CTBTO’s Middle East and South Asia regional grouping or its Executive Council—which has been blocked so far by other CTBTO states.

Egypt’s ambassador explained that while Egypt was among the first states to sign the CTBT, its existence was in part motivated by the adoption of the NPT 1995 Review and Extension Conference package that included the resolution on establishing a nuclear weapon free zone in the Middle East. He indicated that the implementation of this resolution would “open the doors for a new horizon to the CTBT.”

Moving toward entry into force
While numerous States warmly welcomed and stated they were encouraged by the participation of United States in both the CTBT Conference and the UNSC Special Session, the representative of Ireland also notably urged states, “not to wait for the US to act but to show leadership themselves in moving to a world where the testing of nuclear devices is unacceptable.” Indeed, 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. Governments should in fact be wary of the
process leading to US ratification of the Treaty and take note of some of internal dynamics at
play. All current Washington discourse indicates that the price of US ratification will be high—
too high.

During the Conference, several delegations pointed to the value of the CTBT in halting the
modernization of existing nuclear weapons, as well as serving a valuable role in the prevention
of the qualitative development of new weapons and delivery systems. Indeed, this is a core value
and intent of the Treaty. However, the deals being discussed in the US Senate point towards the
possible exchange of CTBT ratification for modernization of the US nuclear arsenal and
sustaining related infrastructure indefinitely.

In its statement to the CTBT Conference, WILPF called on all Annex II states to ratify the
Treaty, but cautioned that there is such a thing as a price too high for ratification. Any deals
given in trade for ratification will only serve to undermine the Treaty and cannot be accepted.

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. The Treaty should thus be ratified without undermining the Treaty’s goals
of preventing the development of new or “better” nuclear weapons.