

Senators Call on Helms to Allow Vote on CTB Treaty

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WITH TIME RUNNING out for the United States to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) before a special conference is convened to examine ways to bring the accord into force, a bipartisan group of senators in late June urged Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Jesse Helms (R-NC) to finally act on the treaty. Only states that have ratified the treaty can serve as full participants at the conference, likely to be held October 6-8 in Vienna.

In a June 28 letter to Helms, Senators Byron Dorgan (D-ND), James Jeffords (R-VT), Edward Kennedy (D-MA), Patty Murray (D-WA) and Arlen Specter (R-PA) pressed the committee chairman to promptly hold hearings and allow the treaty to come up for a floor vote. "Many nations are waiting for the United States to lead on this important issue before completing ratification in their countries. Failure to act on the [CTB] Treaty will deny the U.S. an active voice at the conference and could severely weaken U.S. non-proliferation efforts, including the effort to bring India and Pakistan into this treaty," the letter said.

Under Article XIV, the CTBT cannot enter into force until it has been signed and ratified by the five major nuclear-weapon states, India, Pakistan, Israel and 36 other states that have nuclear power and/or research reactors. If the CTBT has not come into effect three years after it opened for signature, Article XIV allows a majority of states that have already ratified the treaty to call a special conference to "decide by consensus what measures consistent with international law may be undertaken to accelerate the ratification process in order to facilitate the early entry into force of this Treaty."

This spring, a majority of the ratifying states wrote UN Secretary General Kofi Annan requesting that such a conference be held shortly after the treaty's third anniversary on September 24, 1999. Unless the United States ratifies the CTBT before then, it will only be able to attend the conference as a non-voting "observer."

Although President Clinton signed the CTBT in September 1996 and submitted it for ratification a year later, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee has not conducted a single hearing on the treaty. Senator Helms has repeatedly stated that his committee will not consider the test ban until it has first voted on the 1997 amendments to the ABM Treaty as well as the Kyoto Protocol on climate change, neither of which have yet been submitted by the Clinton administration.

Thus far, the CTBT has been signed by 152 states and ratified by 38 states, and of the 44 states whose ratification is required for the treaty's entry into force, only 19 have ratified. Britain and France are the only two nuclear-weapon-states that have ratified, but Chinese President Jiang Zemin promised June 16 that his government "will soon submit the treaty to the National People's Congress for ratification."

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