



Witnesses of These Things: Ecumenical Engagement in a New Era

2010 Centennial Ecumenical Gathering and General Assembly of the
National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA
and Church World Service

A CALL TO RATIFY THE NEW STRATEGIC ARMS REDUCTION TREATY (START II)

“Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, declared that He had come to bring ‘abundant life’ to humanity. Nuclear weapons, which have the capacity to destroy entire cities and nations, and indeed, all life on earth, represent the diametric opposite of this. In fact, the only thing that they are capable of producing is ‘abundant death.’ The time has arrived to eliminate all of them, before they eliminate all of us.”

-2009 General Assembly of the National Council of Churches and Church World Service

The first START treaty was proposed by President Ronald Reagan in 1982, and ratified by the United States and Russia in 1991. The treaty bars its signatories from deploying more than 6,000 nuclear warheads atop a total of 1,600 ICBMs, submarine-launched ballistic missiles, and bombers. It resulted in the removal of about 80 percent of all strategic nuclear weapons in existence at the time of its ratification. It has been supported by politicians, Democrat and Republican alike, diplomats and members of the Armed Forces.

This initial START treaty expired in December of 2009, which means that a new agreement is needed in order to maintain momentum in nuclear weapons reduction. The Obama Administration and the government of President Medvedev of Russia have agreed to terms for START II, terms that would further reduce the number of deployed nuclear weapons; but the treaty has since been stalled in the United States Senate.

Over the past six months, people of faith have consistently called for the ratification of a START II agreement. In an action alert in May, the US Conference of Catholic Bishops stated, “Ratification of the New START Treaty is critical because verification ensures transparency and these reductions in the number of weapons can set the stage for future reductions. The New START Treaty is also important to international efforts to address nonproliferation...”

Similarly, the National Council of Churches, in a statement authored by its Ecumenical Peace Coordinator, Jordan Blevins, declared that “the United States, through the new START treaty has an opportunity to join the global community and take a step in the direction of nuclear disarmament. As churches and people of faith, we can take action by praying for continued movement toward nuclear disarmament and a more peaceful world and by writing to our Senators, encouraging them to publicly support and vote in favor of the START treaty.”

We, the delegates to the 2010 General Assembly of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA and Church World Service, gathered in the presence of numerous ecumenical partners, now raise our collective voice, saying to the US Senate: Approve the START II treaty without delay!

We add that, while START II is important, it is not enough. We live in a time when the tide is turning worldwide in the direction of complete nuclear disarmament. More than half the world’s nations now live in regions classified by the United Nations as Nuclear Weapon Free Zones, and many cities within the United States have declared themselves nuclear free zones as well. The United States as a whole has the chance to contribute to this global movement by shrinking the largest nuclear arsenal in the world--toward the goal of their total elimination.

As the Senate re-convenes following the elections, ratifying the START II treaty must be a top priority. Now is the time to move beyond the Capitol Hill gridlock, and take another step toward a more peaceful world.