

Bishops urge Senate to ratify START treaty

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U.S. President Barack Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev shake hands after signing the new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty at Prague Castle in Prague, Czech Republic, April 8. The landmark treaty will cut nuclear arsenals in both countries by a bout 30 percent. (CNS/Reuters)

WASHINGTON -- Citing the Catholic Church's concern for the sanctity of human life, the chairman of the U.S. bishops' Committee on International Justice and Peace called on U.S. senators to set aside politics and ratify the new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty.

Bishop Howard J. Hubbard of Albany, N.Y., speaking on behalf of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, urged senators in a Nov. 29 letter to approve the treaty known as START during the lame-duck session in the final weeks of 2010.

Citing earlier statements by both Pope Benedict XVI and the bishops' conference, Bishop Hubbard called ratification of the arms control accord critical "because it is a modest step toward a world with greater respect for human life."

Bishop Hubbard's letter pointed to statements that Pope Benedict and the U.S. bishops have made welcoming the treaty, which was signed April 8 in Prague by U.S. President Barack Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev as well as long-standing support within the church for nuclear arms control.

The treaty would commit the two nations to reducing their strategic arsenals to 1,550 warheads deployed on long-range missiles, bombers and submarines. Under the previous START pact, which expired in December, both countries reduced their strategic arsenals to 2,200 weapons each.

"Nuclear weapons are a grave threat to human life and dignity," the bishop said. "Nuclear war is rejected in church teaching" because it targets innocent civilians, threatens to spew radiation far and wide, and would cause untold devastation.

The bishop added that the treaty would be a step toward further cooperation internationally to limit the spread of nuclear weapons and nuclear material.

"Military experts and former national leaders have come together across party lines to support the new START treaty," Bishop Hubbard wrote. "Leaders from both parties, diplomats and military experts argue that the treaty does not constrain U.S. missile defense and that announced investments in our nation's nuclear weapons infrastructure will keep our nuclear deterrent safe and reliable.

"The U.S. bishops' conference is urging strong bipartisan support for the new START treaty because the treaty makes our nation and world safer by reducing nuclear weapons in a verifiable way. We urge the Senate to take up the new START treaty without delay," he concluded.

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