

The Amherst Unitarian Universalist Social Justice Spotlight
September 2009

*The Social Justice Spotlight is a piece written monthly by individual Social Justice Committee members. This month's Spotlight comes to us from **Chad Johnson**.*

Nuclear weapons control. President Obama has twice this year come out publicly in support of the global abolition of nuclear weapons – in April in Prague and in September at the United Nations Security Council. He did not set a date for the achievement of this goal, but he did lay out steps that need to be taken in the relatively near future. They include inter alia, concluding a new treaty with Russia to further reduce the number of strategic nuclear weapons, negotiating a treaty to ban the production of nuclear fissile materials for weapons purposes, and ratification by the U.S. and other countries of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT).

Last July the General Assembly of the Unitarian Universalist Association adopted a resolution in which it “reaffirms its support for the definitive cessation of nuclear testing, urges the United States Senate to give its advice and consent to ratification of the CTBT and calls upon member congregations to work with their communities and elected officials in support of its ratification.”

In 1999 the U.S. Senate declined to ratify the CTBT, citing two concerns, i.e., whether the treaty would be effectively verifiable and whether future testing might be needed to ensure the reliability of the U.S. nuclear arsenal. Since then there have been developments confirming that these concerns are unfounded. Among those developments demonstrating the verifiability of the treaty are 1) the unsuccessful North Korea nuclear test in 2006 which, despite its small size (0.6 kilotons), was detected by 22 monitoring states; 2) a 2002 study by the National Academy of Sciences which concluded that the monitoring network could detect tests as small as 0.1 kilotons (a fraction of one percent of the Hiroshima bomb); and 3) the requirement of the treaty that any suspected nuclear test be subject to international inspection. Among the reasons why nuclear testing is not needed to ensure the reliability of the U.S. nuclear deterrent are 1) the fact that non-explosive tests currently used are not restricted by the CTBT; 2) continuing reliability programs, e.g., Stockpile Stewardship Program; and 3) the conclusion of studies by retired Joint Chiefs Chairman Shalikashvili (2001) and by the National Academy of Sciences (2002) that confidence in the reliability of the U.S. stockpile was actually higher than when the testing moratorium began in 1994.

Continued rejection of the CTBT by the U.S. would further endanger the already strained non-proliferation regime and cripple U.S. efforts to lead further progress towards nuclear arms control and ultimate abolition.

Your Senators can be reached via the following toll-free number: 1-800-828-0498.