

Chairman of USCCB committee praises US Senate for ratifying arms pact

WASHINGTON - The chairman of the U.S. bishops' Committee on International Justice and Peace praised the Senate for ratifying a new arms control treaty with Russia Dec. 22, saying it was important that senators "joined across party lines" to support the New START treaty.

"The Holy See and our bishops' conference have long supported efforts to promote nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation based on the church's moral concern for indiscriminate and disproportionate weapons," said Bishop Howard J. Hubbard of Albany, N.Y.

The Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty was signed April 8 in Prague by U.S. President Barack Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev. The accord was ratified by the Senate in a 71-26 vote, and it still must be approved by Russia's lawmakers.

It calls for both countries to reduce their strategic arsenals - weapons deployed on long-range missiles, bombers and submarines - to 1,550 each. Under the previous START pact, which expired in December 2009, both countries reduced their strategic arsenals to 2,200 weapons each.

Sen. John Kerry, D-Mass., who as chairman of the Committee on Foreign Relations steered the pact through the Senate, said ratification "makes a statement about the United States of America as a whole, not just the president."

"It says we're a country in which, even in contentious times, where 100 senators have a responsibility, 71 of them came together ... and articulated the direction the U.S. wants to go with respect to nuclear weapons," Kerry added.

Other prominent Democrats who supported ratification included Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., chairwoman of the Select Committee on Intelligence. All 56 Democratic senators voted for it, as did 13 Republicans and the chamber's two

Independents.

In the days leading up to the vote, Bishop Hubbard twice called on senators to ratify the New START pact, saying it was an urgent matter and would send “a clear and moral message to the world.”

He outlined the church’s long support for nuclear arms reduction, extending back to the Cold War. He said the U.S. bishops, as well as Pope Benedict XVI, have maintained that the reduction and eventual elimination of nuclear weapons is required in order to hold up the dignity of human life.

“Pope Benedict XVI has asserted that in nuclear war, there will be no victors, only victims,” Bishop Hubbard said.

Joining the bishop in a nationwide telephone news conference Dec. 7, the Rev. Leith Anderson, president of the National Association of Evangelicals, also urged the Senate to act by the end of the 2010 rather than to delay a decision until the new Congress convenes in January.