



LWVUS Position

October 2010

Statement of Position on Arms Control, As Announced by National Board, December 1983 and updated by the 2010 Convention. (Paragraph numbering inserted for purposes of discussion at Unit meetings and are not present in the League's published position paper.)

#1 The League of Women Voters of the United States believes that arms control measures are essential to reduce the risk of war and increase global stability. Toward that end, the U.S. government should give the highest level of importance to arms control efforts that:

- Limit or reduce the quantity of weapons;
- Limit proliferation and prohibit first use of nuclear weapons;
- Prohibit first use and possession of chemical, biological and radiological weapons;
- Prohibit explosive testing of nuclear weapons;
- Reduce tensions in order to prevent situations in which weapons might be used.

#2 While these objectives should receive the highest level of attention, the U.S. government also should negotiate measures that inhibit the development and improvement of weapons, particularly nuclear weapons that increase incentives to attack first in a period of crisis.

#3 As a goal of international negotiations, the League supports the worldwide elimination of nuclear weapons.

#4 The League of Women Voters recognizes that peace in an interdependent world is a product of cooperation among nations and therefore strongly favors multilateral negotiations. Leadership by the United States in advancing arms control measures through negotiations and periodic review is encouraged.

#5 Given the potential for worldwide proliferation of nuclear technology, efforts involving all countries are essential to limit the
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spread of nuclear weapons and to protect commonly held nuclear weapons-free regions such as the seabed and outer space.

Multilateral efforts are appropriate as well to achieve bans on the possession of chemical, biological and radiological weapons; and to achieve limitations on the transfer or trade of all weapons.

#6 The League of Women Voters also supports bilateral arms control efforts which may be especially appropriate in negotiations to limit, safeguard and reduce quantities of weapons. The League believes that unilateral initiatives are not the most appropriate means to achieve arms control.

#7 The League does not support tying progress in arms control to other issues. The League believes that arms control is too important in and of itself and too crucial to all nations to be linked to other foreign and military policy goals.

#8 The League of Women Voters believes that arms control measures should be evaluated in terms of the following factors:

#9 **EQUITY.** The terms should be mutually beneficial, and each nation's security and interests should be adequately protected, as should the security of all nations. Equity does not necessarily require equality in numbers of weapons but may be achieved through a relative balance in capabilities.

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#10 **VERIFIABILITY.** Each party should be able to ensure that other parties comply with the terms of the agreement, whether using national technical means (such as satellites, seismic sensors and electronic monitors) or on-site inspection. The League recognizes the role that multilateral and international institutions can play in assisting verification efforts and believes it is extremely important to ensure compliance, acknowledging that absolute certainty is unattainable.

#11 Equity and verifiability are critical in efforts to limit and reduce quantities of weapons and to prohibit the possession and spread of nuclear weapons.

#12 **CONFIDENCE-BUILDING.** Each party should be assured of the political or military intentions of other parties. Fostering confidence is vital in efforts to stem the development and proliferation of weapons and prohibit their first use; and to reduce tensions.

#13 **WIDESPREAD AGREEMENT.** All appropriate parties should participate in and approve the results of the negotiating process. However, the League recognizes that, in specific cases, progress can be achieved even though some key parties do not participate.

#14 **ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION.** The quality of the earth's environment should be protected from the effects of weapons testing or use. Environmental protection has special significance in negotiations regarding all weapons of mass destruction as well as conventional weapons that have residual effects.

#15 **CONTINUITY.** Negotiations should build on past agreements and should be directed toward future negotiations whenever feasible. Innovative thinking and new approaches should, however, be encouraged when appropriate.

FURTHER GUIDELINES

#16 League support of arms control measures includes actions on proposals, negotiations and agreements.

#17 The League supports efforts to achieve quantitative limits or reductions that focus on

nuclear warheads, non-nuclear weapons of mass destruction, missiles and other delivery systems, antiballistic missiles, conventional weapons or troop levels.

#18 The League advocates limits on the spread or proliferation of weapons, nuclear technology, and fissile materials. The League opposes the proliferation of weapons, nuclear technology and fissile materials to non-state actors or to commonly held areas such as the seabed or outer space. The League supports establishing effective international monitoring, accounting and control of such transfers.

#19 The League's pursuit of bans on the possession or use of weapons may apply to existing weapons or those not yet developed.

#20 The League seeks to reduce tensions through better means of communication, exchange of information or prior notification of military tests and maneuvers in order to avoid the risks of miscalculation or accident. Other League-supported measures to reduce tensions and create a climate of trust among nations include scientific and cultural exchanges, conflict resolution training, and strengthening the United Nations and its supporting agencies. Efforts are encouraged to mediate regional issues and arrive at negotiated settlements to minimize arms build-ups and avoid conflicts. The United States should keep lines of communication open.

#21 The League supports efforts to inhibit the development and improvement of weapons through qualitative limits, including limits on testing of weapons. These constraints may be selective or comprehensive in their application.

#22 Efforts to improve the arms control regime of international laws, oversight bodies and verification modalities are also supported, and U.S. engagement and leadership in this regard is encouraged. The League supports diligence by the United States in meeting the terms of ratified arms control agreements and in reviewing their effectiveness over time.