

Iran Non-proliferation Alert

8 March 2012



IKV Pax Christi works for peace, reconciliation and justice in the world. We join with people in conflict areas to work on a peaceful and democratic society. We enlist the aid of people in the Netherlands who, like IKV Pax Christi, want to work for political solutions to crises and armed conflicts. One of our projects focuses on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. The European Union, as a key actor in global non-proliferation and disarmament discussions, and charged with facilitating dialogue with Iran over its nuclear programme, bears a specific responsibility to encourage a peaceful negotiated solution based on mutual trust and respect for all parties. This alert is being sent as the next round of negotiations between the United States, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Russia and China and is being prepared by the EU High Representative.

Key Recommendations:

- The current sanctions levied by the European Union against Iran for its nuclear programme should be lifted in a systematic way in exchange for visible progress by Iran on ratifying and implementing an Additional Protocol and allowing access to any questionable sites in the country by International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors.
- The European Parliament has a responsibility to promote peaceful non-proliferation activities and should call on the Council of Ministers to take a pragmatic and reasoned approach towards Iran's nuclear programme aimed at dialogue, ratification of an Additional protocol and lifting sanctions.
- The only way to sustainably ensure a nuclear free Iran, is to make nuclear weapons illegal, for everyone. A positive contribution to that goal is to continue supporting efforts towards the creation of a zone free of nuclear and all other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East.

Iran's nuclear programme

The November 2011 IAEA report on Iran's nuclear programme is remarkably detailed in its explanations of IAEA-concerns. The report convincingly shows that before 2003, Iran had such a programme. It explains how after 2002 Iran cancelled the programme and cooperated with the IAEA to resolve all kinds of issues and outstanding questions.

In the past several years, despite increasing sanctions, the Iranian civilian nuclear programme has advanced. Iran has now mastered the technology to be able to operate its civilian nuclear programmes with little outside support. This level of technological progress is now similar to those of numerous other states including Brazil, Germany and Japan.

The latest IAEA Board of Governors meeting on 5 March 2012, heard from the agency that there is no conclusive and convincing proof that Iran is developing a nuclear weapon. At the same time the IAEA is unable to provide credible assurance about the absence of undeclared nuclear material and activities in Iran. The Agency is unable therefore to conclude that all nuclear material in Iran is in peaceful activities. Additional investigation is necessary and a process for this is being negotiated between the IAEA and Iran. As the role of the European External Action Service, and the EU High Representative in particular is to facilitate negotiations with Iran, **a process should be established that progressively lifts sanctions in return for IAEA access to questionable sites, with the goal of a full lifting of sanctions in exchange for the ratification and full implementation of the Additional Protocol.**

Moving towards a more pragmatic approach

Currently the only way identified in the relevant resolutions to remove sanctions is for Iran to stop all of its uranium enrichment processes. As there is no internationally legally binding prohibition on uranium enrichment- even to weapons grade (over 90%)- it is extremely unlikely for Iran to halt all of its peaceful enrichment processes.

There are some suggestions for another course of action. Iran could temporarily halt its enrichment of uranium to 20% (the level needed for the medical isotope production at the Tehran Research Reactor) in exchange for a partial lifting of sanctions. This suggestion however fails to recognise that the enrichment of uranium is not illegal. By focusing on this as the main option in the coming meeting between the P5 +1 (the United States, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Russia and China) and Iran, chances for success are reduced. Instead, to address concerns about potential overproduction by Iran of Uranium enriched to 20%, a negotiated outcome could include the possibility of the creation of a regional fuel bank. The goal cannot be an end to legal, transparent uranium enrichment. The goal must be increased Iranian transparency and the verification of non-diversion for military purposes by the IAEA. Progressively increasing transparency and providing access to any questionable sites should result in the progressive lifting of sanctions.

Long-term resolution- a Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone in the Middle East

In the long term the only way to guarantee that no state develops nuclear weapons is to make the weapons themselves illegal for all states. The European Parliament recognised this in a 2009 resolution that “*commit[ed] to the aim of eventual total nuclear disarmament, as contained in the proposal for a Nuclear Weapons Convention;*”¹ and connected it to the Middle East with the 10 March 2010 resolution that, inter alia “*Calls for the establishment of nuclear-free zones as a positive step towards a nuclear-free world; takes the view, in this regard, that a nuclear-free zone in the Middle East is of fundamental importance for the achievement of lasting and comprehensive peace in the region; points out that the withdrawal of all tactical warheads in Europe could, in the meantime, set a precedent for further nuclear disarmament;*”² 2012 is a key year for the EU to demonstrate its commitment to this by, inter alia, moving away from coercive sanctions and move towards lasting multilateral agreements. This should include full support for the coming Finland conference on a possible Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone as a way to mitigate long-term concerns about Iranian, Israeli and other nuclear programmes; encouraging the development of a regional security mechanism that takes into consideration the security needs of all states, and; demonstrating the commitment to a secure nuclear free world by reducing the number of European countries with nuclear weapons on their soil from seven to five.

This Iran Non-proliferation Alert is a policy letter published by the Dutch peace organisation IKV Pax Christi
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¹ <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&reference=P6-TA-2009-0333&format=XML&language=EN>

² <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P7-TA-2010-0062+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>