



Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development
Office of International Justice and Peace

Background on Iran
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As for the most recent developments in negotiations on Iran's nuclear programme, my Delegation would like to reiterate that the Holy See is firmly convinced that the present difficulties can and must be overcome through diplomatic channels, making use of all the means that diplomacy has at its disposal, and considers it necessary to overcome the various obstacles which objectively impede mutual trust.

-- Archbishop Dominique Mamberti, Secretary for Relations with States, September 16, 2013

BACKGROUND

U.S.-Iran relations have been strained for decades. In recent years, tensions regarding Iran's nuclear program brought sweeping international sanctions and talk of military intervention. Although supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei denounced nuclear weapons, saying Iran is "not seeking nuclear weapons because the Islamic Republic of Iran considers possession of nuclear weapons a sin...and believes that holding such weapons is useless, harmful and dangerous," most Western countries continued to harbor doubts about Iran's nuclear intentions. The June 2013 election of Iranian President Rouhani created an opening for renewed diplomatic efforts to address the Iranian nuclear program. Making use of this opportunity, the P5+1 (United States, Russia, United Kingdom, France, China and Germany) entered into negotiations with Iran regarding its nuclear program and international sanctions.

An interim agreement, announced in November 2013, went into effect on January 20, 2014 in which Iran and the P5+1 countries achieved certain initial goals -- some sanctions relief for Iran in exchange for limits on their nuclear program. These limits include Iran agreeing to not install or start up new centrifuges or build new enrichment facilities, stop enriching uranium beyond 5% and dilute existing uranium that is already enriched at 20%. All of this is to be verified by International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors. The accord provides a six-month period for further negotiations and confidence building measures. The goal is to reach a more comprehensive agreement that would settle the crucial questions related to nuclear enrichment and nuclear non-proliferation.

Israel and members of Congress have voiced concern about the easing of sanctions as part of the interim 6-month agreement. Despite assurances from the Obama Administration that sanctions relief will end and tougher sanctions enacted if Iran does not fulfil the terms of the interim accord, some members of Congress insist that strengthening sanctions now will serve as an "insurance policy" to ensure Iran cooperates. A Senate bill (S. 1881) that is gaining support would impose new sanctions on Iran if a final nuclear agreement is not reached or if Iran does not follow through on its agreements. Iranian officials have already threatened to end negotiations if new sanctions are enacted at any point during negotiations. Some analysts have warned that imposing new, even conditional sanctions now would violate the interim agreement and will make negotiations for a comprehensive agreement more difficult. If negotiations fail, there is a risk that Iran will pursue nuclear weapons more aggressively.

Sanctions on Iran have been in place for years and have had a crippling effect on that nation's economy. U.S. sanctions on Iran date back to the 1979 seizure of the American Embassy in Tehran when President

Carter froze about \$12 billion in Iranian assets. Over the years, U.S. sanctions on Iran grew progressively tougher. Beginning in 2006, the United Nations adopted a series of resolutions imposing sanctions based on IAEA reports of Iranian noncompliance with provisions of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and reports of Iran having restarted its uranium enrichment program. In July 2012, a European Union ban on new contracts for the purchase of Iranian crude oil and petroleum products and phase out of existing contracts went into effect. Around the same time, a number of countries reduced their imports of Iranian oil, significantly impacting Iran's economy. The sanctions relief offered as part of the interim agreement is an important incentive to keep Iran at the negotiating table.

USCCB POSITION

The Church's position on nuclear non-proliferation is clear. Nuclear weapons violate the just war norms of proportionality and discrimination in the use of force. People have a right to security. The prospect of Iran (or any non-nuclear power) developing nuclear weapons is unacceptable. The USCCB has repeatedly indicated our strong objection to Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons as it would further destabilize that volatile region and undermine nonproliferation efforts. Iran's lack of transparency and cooperation with International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors is troubling. The United States should pursue efforts to ensure Iran's compliance with obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

How the United States goes about securing Iran's compliance is an important question for both moral and practical reasons. The longstanding position of the Holy See and the Bishops' Conference is to support what Pope Benedict XVI called "dialogue" and "joint solutions" regarding Iran. In his January 13, 2014 address to the diplomatic corps, Pope Francis said, "I note with satisfaction the significant progress made in the dialogue between Iran and the Group of 5+1 on the nuclear issue." Accordingly, the USCCB strongly advocates that the conflict with Iran be resolved through diplomatic efforts and non-violent pressures rather than military means. "[E]ngaging in a preventive war without clear proof that an attack is imminent cannot fail to raise serious moral and juridical questions" (*Compendium*, no. 501). On a practical note, many Israeli and American military personnel believe that a military strike may not be able to disable Iran's nuclear program completely and would invite retaliation, potentially drawing the United States into a war in Israel's defense. A militarized approach could have unpredictable and dramatic repercussions for the region.

The USCCB continues to look for ways to support a climate for successful negotiations with Iran in which all parties can build mutual confidence and trust in order to work towards a final accord that enhances genuine peace. In recent letters to Secretary of State Kerry and to key Members of Congress, USCCB's Committee on International Justice and Peace has commended the Administration for entering into substantive negotiations with Iran over its nuclear program and welcomed the interim agreement that allows for continued dialogue with Iran on this crucial issue. These recent efforts of engagement are encouraging and afford the possibility of a significant diplomatic breakthrough. The USCCB recognizes that a peaceful resolution will require sustained negotiations over a period of time and calls for patience and avoidance of any measures that might jeopardize the prospects for a diplomatic solution. Therefore, we strongly urge that Members of Congress do not take any actions, such as passing legislation to impose new or conditional sanctions on Iran, which could undermine the negotiation process.

RESOURCES: Visit <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/war-and-peace/nuclear-weapons/index.cfm> <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/global-issues/middle-east/iran/index.cfm> Contact: *Stephen Colecchi*, Director, USCCB Office of International Justice and Peace, 202-541-3160, scolecchi@usccb.org.