



RESPONSE

July 20th, 2015

Iran: Final Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action

Both the South African Government and the Holy See have welcomed the Agreement brokered in Vienna by the P5+1 (The United Kingdom, France, Russia, China, Germany and the United States of America) and Iran curbing Iran's development of nuclear weapons while allowing Iran to continue to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. The Agreement, pending the verification of compliance by Iran in terms of the technical details of the Agreement, will also end the sanctions against Iran allowing it to resume normal trade and unfreezing something like \$4.2b in blocked assets. Sanctions imposed earlier, in the late 1970's, in response to terror attacks will apparently remain in place.

This agreement comes at the end of almost three months intense negotiations and many years of diplomatic activity. It marks an important achievement towards the wider goal of nuclear non-proliferation. The Vatican statement expressed the hope that spirit of the Agreement would extend to other areas as well. It has described the Agreement as 'fruitful.'

Minister Nkoana-Mashabane said in her statement that South Africa looked forward to the resumption of normal bilateral trade relations and welcomed the agreement that the International Atomic and Energy Agency (IAEA) and Iran would together resolve outstanding issues regarding Iran's nuclear programs by the end of 2015. The Minister also stated that together with other Non-Aligned Nations, South Africa had always supported the right of Iran to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. In the month prior to sanctions being imposed in 2012, South Africa purchased oil in the region of 68,000 barrels per day (bpd). At one point Iran was South Africa's biggest oil supplier.

The Agreement lays down conditions for an enforcement mechanism, verification regimes and the re-introduction of sanctions should Iran not comply with the Agreement. Most of the details are very technical such as the dormancy or elimination of 2/3 of its centrifuges, and the reduction of its stockpile of low enriched uranium by 98%. Of importance is the condition that all nuclear facilities including the entire nuclear supply chain be monitored and be accessible to IAEA officials. There is also a stipulation that a complete record of Iran's past nuclear activities be opened for scrutiny.

Many commentators remain sceptical and are suspicious of Iran's desire for hegemony in the area, its links to groups such as Hezbollah and its antipathy to Arab states with strong Sunni connections. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu condemned the Agreement and suggested that under the Agreement Iran would have access to more money to continue a campaign of terror and aggression in the Middle East and around the world. Hardliners in the brokering countries also remain unconvinced of the desirability of such an Agreement. The rhetoric from some quarters in the religious community in Iran also seems to indicate suspicion around the West's role in these negotiations. President Obama on the other hand hailed the Agreement as an opportunity for the world 'to move in a new direction towards a more hopeful world.' For President Obama this, together with

the normalisation of relations with Cuba must constitute milestones in the fulfilment of his pledge to reconcile with longstanding foes in the international arena. For President Rouhani it is a victory for the politics of pragmatism and is in line with his campaign promise, two years ago, to break the noose of isolation which restricted Iran on many levels.

For many, if not most, observers this Agreement will be supported as it confirms the belief that diplomatic solutions can be found when the political will is there. It is a vindication of the principle of dialogue in international affairs. In this case it opens the way for Iran to play a more hands on role in the region. There can be little doubt that Iran is seen as an important ally in the war against Islamic State and there is the hope that Iran will also play a role in preventing any escalation in the Sunni-Shia conflict with all the negative consequences which could follow from such an escalation. At the end of the day any small step towards peace anywhere but especially in such a volatile region should be supported and built upon.

In the 2014 World Day of Peace Message Pope Francis said very tellingly:

‘We cannot however fail to observe that international agreements and national laws – while necessary and greatly to be desired – are not of themselves sufficient to protect humanity from the risk of armed conflict. A conversion of hearts is needed which would permit everyone to recognize in the other a brother or sister to care for, and to work together with, in building a fulfilling life for all. This is the spirit which inspires many initiatives of civil society, including religious organizations, to promote peace. I express my hope that the daily commitment of all will continue to bear fruit and that there will be an effective application in international law of the right to peace, as a fundamental human right and a necessary prerequisite for every other right.’ - See more at: <http://www.paxchristi.net/news/pope-francis-message-world-day-peace-2014/2869#sthash.Qh3BvfbA.dpuf>

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