

Transcript of the IAEA Director General's Remarks at the Joint Press Conference with the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, 4 October 2009

Good afternoon, and let me welcome the members of the media to this press conference. I came here to discuss a broad range of issues with Dr. Ali Akbar Salehi, the head of the Atomic Energy Commission of Iran, and also with President Ahmadinejad. I am not a newcomer to Tehran. I have been coming here often to see how we can move forward with our cooperation in the area of verification, safety, technical cooperation. We have a broad range of activities here in the Islamic Republic of Iran. This time I came here, again to continue our dialogue on these issues, but specifically to discuss the issue of verification in the new facility under construction in Qom. We were informed over a week ago by the Iranian authorities that there is a facility being constructed, a pilot enrichment plant, under construction in Qom. It is, as I indicated to the Iranian authorities, important for us to send our inspectors to do a comprehensive verification of that facility to assure ourselves that it is a facility that is built for peaceful purposes; that we understand its relationship to Iran's nuclear program, its capacity and many other, technical questions that our inspectors would be interested in getting answers to. I am pleased to say that in consultation with Dr. Salehi, we agreed that our inspectors will come here on the 25th of October to do the inspection and to go to Qom. And I hope and I trust that Iran will be as transparent with our inspectors' team as possible, for us to be able to assess our verification at that facility as early as possible.

The other issue, as Dr. Salehi mentioned, is this project we have been working on for a number of months. Iran has requested cooperation by the Agency in securing fuel for the Tehran research reactor. I have been in consultation with a number of suppliers and I was pleased to see that there is a positive response to the Iranian request. That reactor is working to produce medical isotopes for treatment of cancer patients; it is a humanitarian purpose, and I was very pleased to see a positive response on the part of the number of prospective suppliers. To this end, we propose that Iran provides its LEU. It would be enriched; it would be then turned into fuel (fabrication) and then brought back here to Iran for use in the research facilities. We will have a meeting to that end to discuss the technical details and hopefully hammer out an agreement, as early as possible. We will have that meeting in Vienna, on the 19th of October, with the participation of the United States, Russia and France, and of course the Agency will act as a convenor of this meeting.

I am pleased; this is a positive development. I have always been of the view that the Iranian nuclear issue is an issue that can only be resolved through dialogue, through diplomacy. I have been saying for a number of years that we need transparency on the part of Iran, we need cooperation on the part of the international community. I feel that we are at a critical moment. I see that we are shifting gears, from confrontation into transparency and cooperation. I continue, of course, to call on Iran to be as transparent as possible. I indicated that because Iran has a comprehensive programme, has a fuel cycle, sensitive fuel cycle activities, it would help the Agency to have Iran subscribing, again, to our regulations that allow us to be informed of the construction of nuclear facilities as early as possible. It also would be of great help to us to have Iran reapply the Additional Protocol, which would give us the authority for more information, access to more locations. That would enable the Agency to start to provide assurances, not only about declared nuclear activities in Iran, but also about possible nuclear, undeclared activities in Iran. I believe we are on the right track. I believe that we have to continue to work together -- the Agency, Iran and the rest of the international community -- to move in the right direction, to assure the international community about Iran's nuclear programme, to open the dialogue about the broad range of issues that we need to address between Iran and the international community. As you have seen, there was a Six-Parties talk that has taken place in Geneva last week. The reaction from both sides has been quite positive. President Obama said "This is a constructive beginning." President Ahmadinejad said that he expresses satisfaction with the initial results. So it is a critical moment; it is a moment when all of the parties should put their heads together, should start to build confidence and trust. This is the way we need to go both on the nuclear issue and on the broad range of issues that Iran and the international community need to work out, so that hopefully we reach a point when Iran is fully integrated with the international community.

Questions (awaiting translation from Farsi)

Thank you very much for your kind words and I hope it is not, definitely, my last visit to Iran -- definitely not as a private citizen. Iran is an ancient civilization and I would be very happy to come here as many times as I can. On the fuel issue, we are still working on the details. Dr. Salehi will be coming to Vienna, as I mentioned, on the 19th of October. We'll have the meeting there with the Americans, the Russians and the French, and we will work out and hammer out the new deal. The fuel in the Tehran reactor is still available for a year and a half, so we have time to do it. The idea is that once we have the agreement, we should accelerate the new core for the fuel for the reactor as early as possible. On the visit to Qom, this in accordance with the Safeguards Agreement that when a country builds a reactor, the Agency has to come and do design information verification. That is what we will be doing when we come to Qom on the 25th of October.

I should add maybe a couple of things. One is that you should not confuse the Six-Parties talks with the Agency process. Our process is completely independent. What we are doing here is on the one part, a verification under the NPT, and (it) is Technical Cooperation, again under the Agency's Statute. And I should say that for the international community now to be able to say to Iran, we are ready to accept your LEU, enrich it to the 20% required for the research reactor, convert it into fuel, is an act of good faith, is an act of cooperation. And I hope that would open the way, as I mentioned, to a broader discussion on many of the outstanding issues between Iran and the international community.

Question from Aljazeera (awaiting translation from Arabic)

I will answer in English only. Agency regulations require, with all countries, without exception, that they should inform the IAEA on the day they decided to construct a nuclear facility. Iran has joined that regulation in 2002, then in 2007 decided they will go back from that arrangement or regulation and decided to apply the old regulation, which says that 6 months before the nuclear material is introduced, they should inform the Agency. We disagree with that interpretation by Iran; our legal interpretation, in the Agency, is that Iran should have informed us the day they decided to construct that facility. That is the Agency's view; that is the regulation that is applied to all parties of the NPT, without exception. Iran takes a different view, but the Agency view (is) as I explained.

Question from Press TV reporter - What is the guarantee for the future and the future of the region that the countries will be free of nuclear weapons of mass destruction?

Well as you know, I have always taken the view that the world would only be safe when we have a world free from nuclear weapons. And also, that the region of the Middle East can only see regional stability and regional security when it is established as a nuclear-weapon-free zone. Unfortunately on the last issue, a Middle East free from nuclear weapons, we haven't yet made much progress. There is still a major difference between Israel on the one side and the Arab and other parties, Arab countries and Iran on the other side. I should tell you, however, that all countries, including Israel, agree that the long-term goal should be a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East. How to go about it is one issue, and that we are still discussing, and I hope that we should be able to make progress in the near term. Because there is no stability, in my view, there is no enduring security in the Middle East without having the Middle East free from all inhumane weapons, nuclear weapons, chemical or biological weapons.

On a world free from nuclear weapons: unfortunately the weapons states did not really make good on their commitment for 30 years under the NPT. Fortunately, however, recently, Barack Obama has taken an initiative to work through concrete steps toward a world free from nuclear weapons. They are negotiating now, the US and Russia, negotiating an agreement to cut their nuclear arsenal by one third by the end of the year. There has been a Security Council (meeting) at the summit level last week where I took part, which adopted a resolution that affirms the goal of a nuclear-weapon-free world, through concrete steps, including the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, through a treaty which prohibits production of nuclear material for weapon purposes. This was the first time when I had a glimmer of hope that we are on the right track, that we should focus on abolishing nuclear weapons, not only in one region but in the entire globe. The risk of proliferation of nuclear weapons, the risk of nuclear weapons falling into the hands of extremist groups, is the number one security threat we are facing today in our world.

Question (inaudible)

Let me tell you first that my conscience is no different from my role as a Director General. I have always assumed my role in full...conscience. Iran, of course, has mastered enrichment technology. There are, however, still some questions about the intentions of Iran, and that is why we are working with Iran and working with the international community to provide assurance that Iran's nuclear programme is exclusively for peaceful purposes. The measures I mentioned today, the fuel project I mentioned, the verification in Qom, are all part of this process to reach a point when we, the international community, through the Agency, can feel that their concern has been alleviated. Iran has a very impressive, scientific base. Iran has acquired, is running a research reactor; is about to run a power reactor; they have fuel cycle activity. Iran has the technology. The key of course, is to reconcile these activities with the concerns of the international community, and that is what we are putting our focus on right now.

I should say again, for those of you who follow the Iranian nuclear issue: there are two aspects. There is the past and the present activity, and that's where we are trying, through verification, to clarify remaining concerns, and why I also said if Iran were to apply the Additional Protocol, that would help us a lot in providing clarity and assurance about possible undeclared activities. There are concerns about Iran's future intentions, and that is, as I have always said, not an issue of verification; it's an issue of building trust. That's why we have now the Six-Party talks. I am happy that it is at least moving in the right direction. That is why I am very pleased with the fuel project, because underlining the fuel project is confidence building and building trust. That is something that we need to continue to build on.

Question regarding news reports by the Associated Press (mostly inaudible)

As I have said many times, and I continue to say today, the Agency has no concrete proof there is an ongoing weapons programme in Iran. There are allegations that Iran has conducted weaponization studies; however, these are issues which we are still looking into. And we are looking to Iran to help us clarify. We are looking to those suppliers of information to help us on the question of authenticity, because that is really a major issue. It is not an issue that involves nuclear material; it's a question of allegations, paper work studies, and of course the key issue there is authenticity. We are seeking clarification from Iran; we are seeking clarification from the supplier of the information. But we don't have any information that nuclear material has been used. We don't have any information that any components of nuclear weapons have been manufactured. That is why I continue to say that we are concerned but we are not in any way panicking about the Iranian nuclear programme. However, we need to continue to work with Iran to clarify these issues. This is an issue that has to do with war and peace, and the Agency has to work on the basis of fact and facts only.

On the other question that the Agency has information that has been withheld, and that there is information which has (not) been shared with the Board: this is maybe for the hundredth time that I have been saying and the Agency has been saying that this is totally baseless, totally groundless. All information that we have received that has been vetted, assessed in accordance with our standard practices, has been shared with the Board. If any country has more information that they would like to share with us or with the Board, they are welcome to do that. But we stand by our statement that all information that has been corroborated, assessed, critically assessed, has been shared with the Board and on the basis of that I make my statement that we have no concrete evidence that Iran has an ongoing programme. There are concerns by the international community and we are working on these. But there is a difference between concern and a statement that Iran has an ongoing weapons programme. As to the pressure, I think our record throughout the years -- including before the Iraq war, when we made it very clear that we had not seen any evidence that Iraq had revived its nuclear weapons programme, despite a lot of allegations and assumptions -- I think that our record speaks for itself.

Thank you very much.

I should just add one sentence also, that in clarifying the so-called studies about weaponization, I need to make it very clear that we are not in any way interested in the conventional military capability of Iran, or its missile programme. All we wanted is to exclude that it is nuclear-related, and I need to make that very clear. We are not, in any way, trying to get into Iran's conventional military capabilities.

Thank you very much.