

IAEA CONFIRMS IRAN HAS HALTED URANIUM ENRICHMENT TO 20%

Today, the IAEA has confirmed that Iran has discontinued enrichment of uranium to 20%, and has complied with the additional steps required at the beginning of the historic agreement between Iran and the P5+1 group of nations. By implementing the interim agreement, Iran has triggered the start of the six month period for negotiation of a final agreement that will be aimed at providing verifiable assurance that Iran does not seek to develop a nuclear weapon.

Fredrik Dahl reports:

Iran has halted its most sensitive nuclear activity under a ground-breaking deal with world powers, a confidential U.N. atomic agency report reviewed by Reuters on Monday showed, paving the way for the easing of some Western sanctions.

Western states were expected to ease sanctions later on Monday after the United Nations nuclear watchdog confirmed Iran is meeting its end of the bargain under a November 24 interim accord to resolve a decade-old dispute over its nuclear program.

Thomas Erdbrink has more:

Inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency, the United Nations' nuclear watchdog, arrived in Tehran two days ago to begin validating the deal, Ali Akbar Salehi, the head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, said in a statement reported by the state-financed broadcaster Press TV.

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In Washington, the State Department said in a statement on Monday: "Today, the International Atomic Energy Agency provided a report on the current status of Iran's nuclear activities, focused on the steps Iran has committed to take by or on the first day of implementation of the joint plan of action. The United States, our P5+1 partners, and the E.U. are now studying this report. We will have further public comment after all parties have had the opportunity to review the report."

The Washington Post reports that Iran confirms it has halted the most sensitive activities:

Ali Akbar Salehi, the head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization and a former foreign minister, said in an interview on state television Monday that the deal with world powers over Iran's nuclear activities was a victory for the Islamic republic.

Speaking of Western powers, and the United States in particular, Salehi said: "We know that they have power and do not wish us well. They wanted to put pressure on us with sanctions, but we were able to manage the situation well."

Salehi, who holds a doctorate in nuclear engineering from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, said Iran does not need to continue the 20 percent sensitive uranium enrichment program to maintain what he said are his country's peaceful nuclear activities. The deal allows Iran to continue enriching uranium to 5 percent.

"Now the iceberg of sanctions is crumbling while our centrifuges are still also working. This is our greatest achievement," he said.

Returning to Dahl's report, we have more details on the report that was filed today by the IAEA (it is only two pages and can be read here):

The IAEA said Tehran had begun the dilution process and that enrichment of uranium to 20 percent had been stopped at the two facilities where such work is done.

"The Agency confirms that, as of 20 January 2014, Iran ... has ceased enriching uranium above 5 percent U-235 at the two cascades at the Pilot Fuel Enrichment Plant (PFEP) and four cascades at the Fordow Fuel Enrichment Plant (FFEP) previously used for this purpose," its report to member states said.

It was referring to Iran's two enrichment plants, at Natanz and Fordow. Cascades are linked networks of centrifuge machines that spin uranium gas to increase the concentration of U-235, the isotope used in nuclear fission chain reactions, which is found in nature at concentrations of less than 1 percent.

Iran now stands to reap about \$7 billion in sanctions relief that will phase in over the coming six months, provided that negotiations continue and that Iran continues to adhere to the terms of the interim agreement.

War mongers and backers of Israel are distinctly unhappy, but at least for now, peaceful negotiations have taken major steps toward making the world a safer place.