

## **PUGWASH CONFERENCES ON SCIENCE AND WORLD AFFAIRS**

### **Statement on the Interim Iran Agreement**

Amb. Jayantha Dhanapala (Sri Lanka), Pugwash President Prof. Paolo Cotta-Ramusino (Italy), Pugwash Secretary General Prof. Saideh Lotfian (Iran), Chair of the Pugwash Council Dr. Steve Miller (USA), Chair of the Pugwash Executive Committee

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The 24 November 2013 interim agreement on the Iran nuclear issue is an historic and long-overdue first step in lessening the tensions in the region and the strains on the nuclear non-proliferation regime. We applaud the leadership and commitment it took on all sides, and acknowledge that much work remains to be done as the parties move forward during this interim period to establish a lasting accord. From its inception during the height of the Cold War, Pugwash has consistently promoted the need for dialogue to resolve outstanding issues in regions where nuclear risks are present. This interim accord shows that it is possible to make progress when parties come together in a spirit of goodwill to find peaceful compromises to challenging problems.

In particular, we welcome Iran's acceptance of increased transparency as part of its effort persuasively to demonstrate its repeatedly asserted claims about the peaceful nature of its nuclear program.

The P5+1 have offered concessions that could (and should) represent the beginning of a process to defuse the confrontation with Iran. Moreover, the agreed Joint Action Plan envisions the comprehensive lifting of all nuclear-related sanctions if a final agreement is achieved. Importantly, all sides have shown respect for the concerns raised by the various negotiating partners.

The only long-term way to solve differences is through such negotiations however difficult they may be. Time and space must be given to allow this process to continue and the posturing of spoilers must not be allowed to derail its progress. It is especially important to reduce the risk of military action that would undermine the security of all states in the region and also jeopardize the future of the nuclear nonproliferation regime.

Further intensive and sustained dialogue will be needed to ensure the opportunity this interim deal provides is maximized. The positive role of the IAEA and the prospect embodied in the Joint Action Plan of a final stage where the "Iranian nuclear programme will be treated in the same manner as that of any non-nuclear weapon state party to the NPT" are key to the final resolution of this issue. Ideas put forward to develop international civil nuclear cooperation should be looked upon positively also by the countries in the neighbourhood of Iran. In this respect much can and should be done on the Track 2 level in which Pugwash has long been active.

The main concern now is related to the path ahead, its trajectory and its timing. A final agreement should be reached soon. To facilitate this, it is important that we multiply opportunities to promote communications and dialogue involving all the countries that directly and indirectly have been concerned about the Iranian nuclear issue.

Consequently, now is the time to solidify the shift from confrontation to cooperation on nuclear issues, ensuring in particular the safety of all nuclear plants in the region and defusing any proliferation risk in the area. In particular, we welcome the Iran Atomic Energy Organization's recent offer to host a nuclear security conference in Iran in early 2014, and stand ready to assist in any way to make this a reality.

Making progress towards the goal of a WMD free zone in the Middle East will also be more important than ever. Convening a conference to discuss a WMD free zone in the Middle East would provide another opportunity to address regional concerns about nuclear weapons and other WMD. Efforts should be prioritized to universalize the various international regimes to control and eliminate weapons of mass destruction from all arsenals.

The handshake between Iranian Foreign Minister Zarif and Secretary of State Kerry bodes well for future progress in bilateral and regional relations. Reports of communications between President Obama and President Rouhani are encouraging and can be the foundation for further progress on normalizing diplomatic relations wherever possible. In particular, the United States and Iran should consider restoring the formal diplomatic relations that were severed 34 years ago.

The regional security demands are great. It will also be important to promote communications and dialogue on the more general security problems that are affecting the entire west Asian and north African region. It is time for all parties to continue the trend for closer cooperation on a wide range of issues - including Syria, Afghanistan, the growth of sectarian violence and other urgent issues.

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