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Statement by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Washington, DC

May 31, 2006

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The pursuit by the Iranian regime of nuclear weapons represents a direct threat to the entire international community, including to the United States and to the Persian Gulf region. In defiance of repeated calls from the IAEA Board of Governors and from the Security Council, the Iranian government has accelerated its nuclear program while continuing to conceal its activities from international inspectors.

Working with our international partners, the United States is making every effort to achieve a successful diplomatic outcome, but the international community has made clear that the Iranian regime must not acquire nuclear weapons. The vital interests of the United States, of our friends and allies in the region, and of the entire international community are at risk, and the United States will act accordingly to protect those common interests.

Today, the Iranian regime can decide on one of two paths – one of two fundamentally different futures for its people and for its relationship with the international community.

The Iranian government's choices are clear. The negative choice is for the regime to maintain its current course, pursuing nuclear weapons in defiance of the international community and its international obligations.

If the regime does so, it will incur only great costs.

We and our European partners agree that path will lead to international isolation and progressively stronger political and economic sanctions.

The positive and constructive choice is for the Iranian regime to alter its present course and cooperate in resolving the nuclear issue, beginning by immediately resuming suspension of all enrichment-related and reprocessing activities, as well as full cooperation with the IAEA and returning to implementation of the Additional Protocol providing greater access for the IAEA.

This path would lead to the real benefit and longer-term security of the Iranian people, the region, and the world as a whole.

The Iranian people believe they have the right to civil nuclear energy. We acknowledge that right. Yet the international agreements Iran has signed make clear that Iran's exercise of that right must conform with its commitments. In view of its previous violations of its commitments and the secret nuclear program it undertook, the Iranian regime must persuasively demonstrate that it has permanently abandoned its quest for nuclear weapons.

The benefits of this second path for the Iranian people would go beyond civil nuclear energy, and could include progressively greater economic cooperation.

The United States will actively support these benefits both publicly and privately. Furthermore, President Bush has consistently emphasized that the United States is committed to a diplomatic solution to the nuclear challenge posed by the Iranian regime.

We are agreed with our European partners on the essential elements of a package containing both the benefits if Iran makes the right choice, and the costs if it does not. We hope that in the coming days the Iranian government will thoroughly consider this proposal.

Our British, French and German partners have rightly required that Iran fully and verifiably suspend its enrichment and reprocessing activities before the sides can return to negotiations. This is the condition that has been established by the IAEA Board of Governors and by the UN Security Council.

The United States is willing to exert strong leadership to give diplomacy its very best chance to succeed.

Thus, to underscore our commitment to a diplomatic solution and to enhance the prospects for success, as soon as Iran fully and verifiably suspends its enrichment and reprocessing activities, the United States will come to the table with our EU-3 colleagues and meet with Iran's representatives.

This morning US representatives have conveyed my statement to Iran through the good offices of the Swiss government, and through Iran's representative to the United Nations.

Given the benefits of this positive path for the Iranian people, regional security, and the nuclear nonproliferation regime, we urge Iran to make this choice for peace -- to abandon its ambition for nuclear weapons.

President Bush wants a new and positive relationship between the American people and the people of Iran -- a

beneficial relationship of increased contacts in education, cultural exchange, sports, travel, trade, and investment. The nuclear issue is not the only obstacle standing in the way of improved relations.

The Iranian government supports terror, is involved in violence in Iraq, and is undercutting the restoration of full sovereignty in Lebanon under UN Security Council Resolution 1559. These policies are out of step with the international community and are barriers to a positive relationship between the Iranian people and the people of the United States and the rest of the world.

Iran can and should be a responsible state, not the leading state sponsor of terror. The United States is ready to join the EU-3 to press these and other issues with the Iranian government in addition to our work to resolve the nuclear danger.

At the same time, we will continue to work with our international partners to end the proliferation trade globally, to bar all proliferators from international financial resources, and to end support for terror. We also intend to work with our friends and allies to strengthen their defensive capacity, counterproliferation and counterterrorism efforts, and energy security capabilities.

Those measures present no threat to a peaceful Iran with a transparent, purely civil nuclear energy program, but provide essential protection for the United States, our friends and allies if the Iranian regime chooses the wrong path.

If the Iranian regime believes that it will benefit from the possession of nuclear weapons, it is mistaken. The United States will be steadfast in defense of our forces, and steadfast in defense of our friends and allies who wish to work together for common security.

The Iranian people have a proud past, and merit a great future. We believe the Iranian people want a future of freedom and human rights—the right to vote, to run for office, to express their views without fear, and to pursue political causes. We would welcome the progress, prosperity, and freedom of the Iranian people.

The United States looks forward to a new relationship between our peoples that advances these goals. We sincerely hope that the Iranian regime will choose to make that future possible.

END



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