**Diplomats criticize Iran's deal with UN atom inspectors**

August 28, 2007

International Herald Tribune

Original Source: *http://www.iht.com/articles/2007/08/28/africa/iran.php*

VIENNA: (Reuters) Iran's deal with United Nations inspectors to resolve questions about its nuclear program will fall short of dispelling suspicions about clandestine efforts to build nuclear weapons, according to diplomats here.

They say the working document is flawed for apparently ruling out future inquiries by inspectors and making no mention of wider-ranging checks that the UN nuclear agency has said are needed to verify that Tehran has no hidden bomb agenda.

It also does not define what Iran must do to resolve open questions and disregards a UN demand for Tehran to suspend uranium enrichment.

Diplomats close to the International Atomic Energy Agency had praised the "understandings" with Iran as a milestone for laying out a timetable for transparency by December, after years of impasse that prompted UN sanctions.

"It's a good work plan with phases and dates to resolve outstanding issues, as requested by the board of governors," a senior agency official said, referring to the 35-country governing board of the atomic energy agency. "Board members should welcome this development."

The Aug. 21 pact, the text of which was made public Monday, said Tehran had resolved the first issue related to the nature of its nuclear work - secret, small-scale experiments with plutonium, the most common ingredient in nuclear bombs.

Details of what Iran did to defuse concerns about the tests may emerge in a new IAEA report due Wednesday, two weeks before a meeting of the atomic agency's governing board.

The report will shed light on Iran's level of cooperation and could influence pending talks among six world powers on harsher sanctions. The United States favors tougher measures but Russia is opposed as long as Tehran's rapprochement with the IAEA proceeds.

Western diplomats, requesting anonymity, criticized the plan's failure to get Iran to reinstate the atomic agency's Additional Protocol, which permits broader, short-notice inspections of sites not declared to be nuclear.

Big powers locked in a standoff with Iran over its refusal to heed UN resolutions demanding that it suspend nuclear activity say there is no way to rule out the risk Tehran might harbor a covert military nuclear facility without the Additional Protocol in place.

The director of the atomic agency, Mohamed ElBaradei, has said the same, and knowledge about Iranian activities has deteriorated as a result.

A clause in the working document saying that, once Iran had cleared up issues listed, there would be "no more remaining issues and ambiguities" raised diplomatic eyebrows.

"There is surprise that the IAEA seems to have forgone the right to ask more questions," said a diplomat from one of the EU states in the sextet of powers, Germany, France and Britain. The other three countries pressing Iran on its nuclear program are Russia, China and the United States.

Iran has insisted that it seeks only an alternative source of electricity, not weapons, from enriched uranium.

"Iran has wised up, realizing that stiffing the IAEA helped lead to unanimous UN sanctions resolutions. The work plan is designed to show cooperation in order to forestall more sanctions," said Mark Fitzpatrick, chief nonproliferation analyst at the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London.

"But there is less here than meets the eye," he said, warning of "serious omissions."

"Iran is holding on to the more political issues for leverage in any future negotiations with the Europeans and Security Council permanent members," Fitzpatrick said.

Critics also faulted the plan's requirement that issues be addressed sequentially and require closure of each before going on to the next. This could drag out the process, especially if Iran blamed more sanctions action for foot-dragging, they said.

Western diplomats said the plan did not stipulate IAEA access to certain Iranian officials, scientists and documents crucial for resolution of thornier issues, including the following:

Particles of highly enriched - or weapons-grade - uranium found on technical university equipment.

Research on an advanced centrifuge able to refine uranium 2 to 3 times faster than the old, unreliable model Iran uses now.

A black-market, bomb-making manual in Iran's possession.

Intelligence about administrative links between uranium processing, high explosives tests and a missile warhead design.

The plan said the atomic agency aimed to resolve the centrifuge matter by November, but set no deadlines for the others.

"Iran's ability to provide a complete solution to open issues is limited due to the fear of incriminating themselves and exposing secret components," another Western diplomat said.

The IAEA report Wednesday will also show how far Iran's enrichment work has come. Progress toward making atomic fuel in usable industrial amounts slowed this summer, possibly due to technical problems, diplomats say. Iran has denied any slowdown.