UN's Atomic Energy Agency Chief Says He Cannot Verify Iran's Program is Peaceful

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By International Atomic Energy Agency Director General Yukiya Amano

International Atomic Energy Agency

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Good afternoon, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am very pleased to be back at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

I imagine that our discussion today is likely to focus on the Agency's nuclear verification work, and on one country in particular. Before getting to that, let me say just a few words about an equally important area of our work – peaceful uses.

Peaceful uses of nuclear technology are one of the three pillars of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, alongside non-proliferation and disarmament.

The IAEA helps to make nuclear science and technology available to generate electricity, improve human and animal health, increase food production – and much more.

People are often surprised at some of the things we do. For example, during the latest Ebola outbreak in West Africa, we supplied affected countries with simple kits so they could diagnose the disease quickly.

I believe that nuclear science and technology have much to contribute to sustainable development. I feel that our mandate could be best understood today as Atoms for Peace and Development.

The United States is the biggest contributor to the IAEA's Technical Cooperation Fund. This Fund helps Member States, especially developing countries, enjoy the considerable benefits of peaceful nuclear technology. The United States also helped to launch the Peaceful Uses Initiative in 2010 to provide additional funds for this purpose.

I hope to see the importance of science and technology explicitly recognised as a central part of the post-2015 development agenda.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I could say much more about the work of the IAEA in areas such as nuclear energy, nuclear safety and nuclear security. But time is short, so I will move on to the subject of safeguards implementation in Iran.

When I became IAEA Director General in December 2009, Iran had already been on the Agency's agenda for seven years.

I am a fairly systematic person and I like to work from first principles. The key point is that the IAEA is committed to resolving the Iran nuclear issue through dialogue. The IAEA, the United Nations and individual Member States all have their parts to play and need to cooperate with each other.

Right from the start, I stressed the fundamental principle that all safeguards agreements between the IAEA and Member States, including Iran, should be implemented fully.

So should other relevant obligations, such as resolutions of the United Nations Security Council.

I felt that spelling out the issues with clarity was an essential first step towards resolving the problems concerning Iran's nuclear activities.

My quarterly reports to the IAEA Board of Governors from 2010 onwards stated that nuclear material declared by Iran was not being diverted from peaceful purposes. But I also stated that Iran was not providing sufficient cooperation to enable the Agency to conclude that all nuclear material in Iran was in peaceful activities. I urged Iran to implement the additional protocol and clarify the issues relating to what have become known as possible military dimensions to its nuclear programme.

In November 2011, I presented a detailed report to our Board of Governors and identified 12 areas of concern.

I stated that information obtained by the Agency indicated that Iran had carried out activities relevant to the development of a nuclear explosive device. The information also indicated that, before the end of 2003, these activities took place under a structured programme, and that some activities might still be ongoing.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In response to my report, the IAEA Board, and the UN Security Council, adopted resolutions asking Iran to cooperate with the Agency to clarify issues relating to possible military dimensions in order to restore international confidence in the exclusively peaceful nature of its nuclear programme.

The main change since my last visit to Carnegie in April 2013 is that a very important dialogue has been taking place between Iran and the so-called P5+1 countries: China, France, Germany, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and the United States. They agreed a Joint Plan of Action in late 2013.

At around the same time, Iran and the IAEA agreed on a Framework for Cooperation. The basic objective was to resolve all outstanding issues, past and present, through strengthened cooperation and a step by step approach.

Where do things stand today?

As far as the Agency's own work to implement safeguards in Iran is concerned, we continue to verify the non-diversion of nuclear material declared by Iran. But we are still not in a position to conclude that all nuclear material in Iran is in peaceful activities.

The Framework for Cooperation worked for the first few months to help improve our understanding of Iran’s nuclear programme. Progress has been very limited in clarifying issues with possible military dimensions.

As far as the Joint Plan of Action between Iran and the six countries is concerned, IAEA inspectors, who are continuously present on the ground in Iran, have been able to verify that Iran is meeting its commitments under that agreement.

The latest round of talks between Iran and the six countries has been taking place in Switzerland, but as the Agency is not a party to those talks, I cannot tell what the outcome will be.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I remain committed to working with Iran to restore international confidence in the peaceful nature of its nuclear programme.

Two things are of special importance for the Agency.

First, with the cooperation of Iran, the Agency needs to clarify issues with possible military dimensions to the satisfaction of our Member States.

We will do all we can to clarify these issues, as requested by the IAEA Board and the UN Security Council. We expect Iran to be as transparent as possible. We will then present an objective, impartial report to our Member States. The IAEA is a technical organisation and our job is to establish the facts, to the best of our ability. It is up to our Member States to determine the appropriate response.

Second, Iran needs to implement the additional protocol so that the Agency can provide credible assurance about the absence of undeclared nuclear material and activities in Iran.

The Agency will continue to play an essential role in the future, including in verifying nuclear-related measures to be implemented by Iran if a comprehensive agreement is reached with the six countries. We will remain the eyes and ears of the international community on nuclear matters in Iran.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I believe that even complex and challenging issues can be resolved if all parties are committed to dialogue – not dialogue for its own sake, but dialogue  aimed at achieving results.

In the case of Iran's nuclear programme, the sustained efforts of the IAEA, the P5+1 countries, the UN Security Council – and, of course, Iran itself – are needed.

All of us must work closely together. We must be steadfast, patient and persistent. The IAEA will do what is necessary on its part to achieve a satisfactory resolution.

Thank you.