

## **AJC STATEMENT ON IRAN**

*Background to the document approved January 11, 2010,  
by the National Council/Board of Governors*

The American Jewish Committee's latest Statement on Iran, urging intensified political and economic sanctions, follows months of diplomatic overtures – and one formal negotiating round – mounted by the five permanent UN Security Council members and Germany (the P5+1) to persuade Iran to abide by successive Security Council resolutions, and its own international treaty obligations, and suspend its illicit uranium-enrichment program. These efforts, following years of fruitless engagement undertaken by the United Kingdom, France and Germany, have failed to alter Iranian policy.

Diplomacy backed up by limited economic and political sanctions has been tried by the West – and has largely been deflected by the Iranian regime.

On Oct. 29, 2009, Iran advised the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) that it would not accept the plan, to which its negotiators had earlier agreed in discussions with P5+1 representatives, to send the bulk of its current stockpile of low-enriched uranium out of the country to be processed and then returned in a more highly enriched form crafted solely for peaceful purposes. This reversal of position added further evidence – on top of an already long record of deception and transgression – that Iran was not negotiating in good faith.

The United States, France and the United Kingdom revealed in September 2009 that Iran has been secretly constructing a new enrichment facility, of a scale suited for military purposes, at Qom. Iran failed to notify the IAEA of the new facility until its plans were revealed, in violation of its agreement with the Agency.

The IAEA Board of Governors, in a resolution approved overwhelmingly on Nov. 27, 2009, expressed “serious concern that Iran continues to defy the requirements and obligations contained in relevant IAEA Board of Governors and UN Security Council resolutions.” The resolution further said that “Iran’s declaration of the new facility reduces the level of confidence in the absence of other nuclear facilities under construction and gives rise to questions about whether there are any other nuclear facilities under construction in Iran which have not been declared to the Agency.” Two days later, Iran announced its plans to build ten more uranium-enrichment plants.

Iran appears to be on the verge of nuclear arms capability; it has apparently solved earlier technical problems, accelerated its production of enriched uranium – the key part of a nuclear arms program – and made other significant advances. The IAEA’s former Director-General, Dr. Mohamed ElBaradei, has said that Iran could have a nuclear weapon within six months to a year, unless it is stopped; speaking Nov. 26, 2009, of Iran’s ongoing deceptions and evasions, he advised the IAEA Board of Governors, “We have effectively reached a dead end, unless Iran engages fully with us.”

The IAEA already has found enough, or nearly enough, enriched uranium in Iran to provide, upon further enrichment, the fissile material for its first bomb. In December, *The Times* of London reported, based on a confidential intelligence document, that Iran is developing a key final component of a nuclear bomb. The document, reportedly taken from Iran's most sensitive project, describes a four-year plan to test a neutron initiator, a device that triggers the explosion in a nuclear bomb. If true, it is yet further compelling proof of Iran's nuclear designs.

Iran already has the proven ballistic missile capability to deliver nuclear weapons across the Middle East and beyond. On Dec. 16, Iran announced that it had successfully tested an improved version of its most advanced missile, the two-stage solid-fuel Sejil-2, which is capable of reaching Israel and part of Europe. This recent development, in addition to the acquisition from North Korea of ballistic missiles with a range of up to 3,000 kilometers, heightens the potential threat.

If Iran acquires nuclear weapons capability, it will destabilize and alter the regional and global balance of power. A nuclear Iran will strengthen its armed proxies, notably Hezbollah and Hamas, thus making the prospect of Arab-Israeli peace infinitely more complex. Perhaps most ominously, the acquisition of nuclear weapons capability by Iran will undermine the imperfect but generally successful nuclear non-proliferation regime, creating the circumstances for a regional and international nuclear arms race – in addition to introducing the alarming possibility of the transfer of nuclear material to terrorist organizations.

Iran's defiance of international law in pursuit of nuclear capability is mirrored in its defiance of international norms in the realm of human rights – most visibly and violently in the aftermath of the presidential election of June 2009. The contest was neither free nor fair; numerous accounts describe widespread fraud, including vote tallies larger than the number of registered voters in particular districts. Iranians distraught by the rigged election have attempted to express their outrage in peaceful mass demonstrations, but the regime has brutally repressed these protests, leaving a shocking toll of death and injury.

The violent crackdown against peaceful rallies has been followed by a series of blatant human rights violations, including severe limitations to freedom of expression and freedom of association, arbitrary detention of hundreds of protesters and opposition activists, disappearances of citizens, brutal torture of those detained, and a sharp increase in the use of capital punishment. The conduct of the Iranian regime during and after the election constitutes a gross violation of the basic and universal norms of human rights.

It is against the background of Iran's unrelenting pursuit of nuclear weapons capability and advanced ballistic missile deployment, the continuing defiance of UN Security Council resolutions on its nuclear program, the proven futility of negotiations under existing circumstances, and Iran's ongoing abuses of fundamental human rights that the American Jewish Committee adopts its Jan. 11, 2010, Statement on Iran.