



Comments on the Recent IAEA NPT Safeguards Report and Joint Iran/IAEA Statement

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March 6, 2023

The latest International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) report, NPT Safeguards Agreement with the Islamic Republic of Iran, on the implementation of Iran's safeguards agreements was issued on March 4, 2023, following Director General Rafael Grossi's return from meetings with top Iranian officials in Tehran, including its President, Foreign Minister, and head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI). This latest quarterly safeguards report, as earlier IAEA reports during the last two years, highlights Iran's refusal to cooperate with the IAEA in rectifying the inspectors' findings that Iran has undeclared nuclear material and related equipment, a violation of its comprehensive safeguards agreement; findings that date back to 2019, but all part of an investigation that has been on-going for almost two decades. As has happened before, this report contains promises from Iran to resolve these safeguards issues. This time the promises and commitments are outlined briefly in the form of a Joint Statement between the IAEA and the AEOI. The March 4th statement, formalized in Tehran over the weekend, is vague on details, but several of them were filled in by Grossi at a press conference in Vienna on Saturday after his return from Tehran. According to Grossi, Iran agreed to allow inspectors' access to certain key places, individuals, and materials associated with resolving this safeguards violation.

In addition to commitments to address the undeclared nuclear material issues, the joint statement, as explained by Grossi on Saturday, also included Iran's commitment to reinstall cameras and other monitoring devices associated with the JCPOA, aimed at providing monitoring of centrifuge rotor and bellows manufacturing and assembly, heavy water production, and production of uranium ore concentrate. These commitments are not made verbatim in the joint statement, which alludes to discussions, but these are the Iranian commitments laid out by Grossi at the Saturday press conference. Grossi said on Saturday that meetings with Iran on reestablishing the monitoring equipment would take place in a "few days."

Grossi also stated at the Saturday press conference that the IAEA expects Iranian cooperation in determining how Iran produced 83.7 percent enriched uranium at Fordow. This enrichment action, which many believe was deliberate, is "inconsistent with the enrichment level of HEU produced" at the Fordow enrichment plant, according to the recent safeguards report. While

no one is accusing Iran of accumulating stocks of near 84 percent HEU, many suspect Iran was carrying out experiments aimed at practicing the achievement of enrichment levels near 90 percent.

In his press conference and Monday's oral statement to the Board of Governors, Grossi made clear he expected Iran to carry forward these commitments quickly, raising expectations that the important monitoring equipment could be reinstalled soon and inspectors will finally make progress on understanding the nature, status, and purpose of Iran's undeclared nuclear material.

But will this time be different?

Grossi is clearly optimistic about Iran fulfilling its commitments in the Joint Statement and to him personally. However, the only way to judge these collections of Iranian promises and commitments is through concrete Iranian actions. Too many times, grand joint IAEA statements, roadmaps, and agreements have yielded little, merely serving to buy time for Iran and cause delay in international condemnation and countermeasures.

The Board needs to take action at its current meeting this week in Vienna to support the IAEA inspectors and hold Iran accountable. The Board of Governors needs to establish a process to evaluate Iran's progress in meeting the goals stated by Grossi. It should pass a resolution, or at least a chairman's statement, that provides what the Joint Statement is missing, namely clear expectations, a timeframe, and consequences if Iran fails to meet the commitments, including providing the requisite access and technically credible explanations.

This resolution should include a timeline for action that extends from today until the next board of governors meeting in June. Of note, Grossi's open resistance to roadmaps and deadlines should be seen as resistance to put pressure on the IAEA, not as resistance to holding Iran accountable and setting deadlines for Iran to cooperate and meet its obligations, something the IAEA inspectors are very well able to determine at any point. The time has long passed for tolerating the pattern of Iran making major promises right before a board meeting, aimed at deflecting board condemnation, followed by lack of follow through by Iran. Unless Iran meets all of these commitments leading to meaningful progress, and does not cherry-pick its compliance, the Board should make clear that a referral to the UN Security Council will follow in June.