



Committee on International Justice and Peace

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November 9, 2017

The Honorable Bob Corker, Chairman
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Ben Cardin, Ranking Member
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Corker and Cardin:

As Chair of the Committee on International Justice and Peace of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, I urge you to oppose H.R. 1698, the Iran Ballistic Missiles and International Sanctions Enforcement Act.

Last month, President Trump refused to certify Iran's compliance with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), a 2015 multilateral agreement that has restrained Iranian nuclear activities. Objective reports indicate that Iran is complying with the agreement. Experts tell us that key components of the agreement will remain in place indefinitely, including on-site inspections.

Both the Holy See and our Committee welcomed the agreement as well as the efforts made by the international community to ensure Iran's compliance with its provisions. In our view, the alternative to a diplomatic accord leads toward armed conflict and greater regional and global instability. Jeopardizing the JCPOA would seriously undercut diplomacy and dialogue as tools for avoiding armed conflict.

The passage of H.R. 1698 threatens to undermine the JCPOA, marginalize vital U.S. alliances and weaken the global coalition promoting nuclear nonproliferation. This legislation violates the terms of the JCPOA, damaging the credibility of the United States in negotiations with other states such as North Korea. Breaching the JCPOA would also aggravate geopolitical tensions with key allies, Great Britain, France and Germany, and with China and Russia, both of whom have common interests in restraining North Korea's program.

More immediately, the imposition of sanctions that violate the agreement may empower hardline elements of Iranian leadership, undermining an initiative that enjoys wide support among ordinary Iranians who want their nation to become reintegrated into the international community. Given all these considerations, a renegotiation of the JCPOA would be impossible.

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While unrelated Iranian activities in the region are indeed worrisome, our country must consider whether the urgency of those particular threats outweighs the severe long- and short-term risks likely to be incurred by a unilateral U.S. withdrawal from the JCPOA.

As the United States has demonstrated countless times, dialogue among nations is an essential pillar of peace. I invite you, therefore, to reflect on the JCPOA as the culmination of thirteen years of dialogue involving six nations and Iran, and to work to ensure the integrity of the indispensable tradition of pursuing peace through sincere and honest dialogue.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Oscar Cantú". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "O" and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Most Reverend Oscar Cantú
Bishop of Las Cruces
Chair, Committee on International Justice and Peace