



Committee on International Justice and Peace

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December 18, 2012

Thomas E. Donilon, National Security Advisor
The White House
Washington, DC 20270

Dear Mr. Donilon:

As chair of the Committee on International Justice and Peace at the United State Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), I write to express deep concern regarding the dangerous situation facing our nation, the international community, and Iran. Our concerns are twofold: first, Iran's resistance to credible restrictions on its enrichment activities under the terms of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty; and second, the possibility of unjustified and unwise military action that could dramatically worsen an already critical situation.

Last year, Pope Benedict XVI insisted on the need for "dialogue" and "joint solutions" regarding Iran. A significant diplomatic resolution must be found in order to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons capabilities while allowing them to enrich uranium for nuclear energy in compliance with international norms. At the same time, many analysts have noted that a preventive military strike on enrichment facilities in Iran, as some have proposed, will lead to broader armed conflict that would likely engulf much of the Middle East. The Catholic Church teaches: "[E]ngaging in a preventive war without clear proof that an attack is imminent cannot fail to raise serious moral and juridical questions." (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 501)

Bold steps must be considered to counter this unfortunate and continually rising tide of aggressive posturing between our own nation and Iran. Preventing military action is paramount. A negotiated solution could provide a framework for resolving tensions.

A peaceful resolution will require direct, sustained negotiations over a considerable period of time. It is the opinion of our Committee that direct talks between the United State and Iran must begin soon, so as to prevent further escalation. Initiating such talks should be done without preconditions and might include extending to Iran some relief from current international sanctions.

Experts have told us that the outline for an agreement has three principal elements. First, Iran's right to enrich uranium should be internationally affirmed in exchange for Iran's commitment to limit enrichment convincingly short of weapons-grade potential as confirmed by verifiable inspections. Second, credible negative security assurances should be provided to Iran by the international community and the U.S. specifically, that no military action will be initiated as long as Iran verifiably complies with its treaty obligations and does not itself initiate attack. Third, Iran should be assured access to international nuclear fuel cycle services at market rates.

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We recognize fully the inevitable and intense opposition that both the substance of such an agreement and even the opening of negotiations may elicit. A diplomatic solution is preferable to military action which could have unpredictable and dramatic repercussions for the region. Such a solution would be highly advantageous to all and should be pursued with good faith and vigor. With this in mind, we urge immediate initiation of direct U.S.-Iran negotiations. The stakes are too high and the threats to human life too great to do less.

Sincerely yours,

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Most Reverend Richard E. Pates
Bishop of Des Moines
Chairman, Committee on International Justice and Peace