

State Department says North Korea launches rocket

By Pete Yost
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WASHINGTON— President Barack Obama said North Korea should refrain from further provocative actions after that nation's government made good on their promise to launch a long-range rocket.

"I urge North Korea to abide fully by the resolutions of the U.N. Security Council," the president said as the council approved an emergency session Sunday to deal with North Korea's rocket launch.

North Korea will not find acceptance in the international community "unless it abandons its pursuit of weapons of mass destruction," Obama said.

Obama called North Korea's latest act a clear violation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1718, which prohibits North Korea from conducting ballistic missile-related activities of any kind. The Security Council adopted the 2006 resolution five days after North Korea conducted a test of a nuclear weapon.

"North Korea has ignored its international obligations, rejected unequivocal calls for restraint and further isolated itself from the community of nations," Obama said.

The president's statement came from Prague, the Czech Republic, where the president was to make a speech Sunday on nuclear proliferation.

The State Department in Washington said North Korea launched a rocket at 10:30 p.m. EDT Saturday.

Obama identified the rocket as a Taepo-dong 2 missile, a three-stage rocket with potential range of more than 4,100 miles.

North Korea says this and all Taepo-dong missiles are space-launch vehicles for satellites, though satellite and missile technologies are considered interchangeable.

The United States will take "appropriate steps to let North Korea know that it cannot threaten the safety and security of other countries with impunity," said State Department spokesman Fred Lash.

"North's Korea's development, deployment and proliferation of missiles, ballistic missile-related materials, equipment and technologies pose a serious threat to the northeast Asia region and to the international community," said Lash.

Rep. Howard Berman, chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, said the launch would raise tensions unnecessarily.

"It is alarming that North Korea carried out this missile launch in direct defiance of the international community," said the California Democrat. "The test is an unnecessary provocation that raises tensions in the region, and I urge the North Koreans to stop using their missile and WMD programs to threaten their neighbors and the rest of the world."

North Korea had informed international authorities that it planned to launch a rocket sometime between Saturday and Wednesday to put a satellite into orbit. In Japan, chief Cabinet spokesman Takeo Kawamura said it was not immediately clear if the rocket was mounted with a satellite as North Korea has claimed.

But the U.S., South Korea, Japan and others suspect it is a cover for testing a long-range missile for the North, which has nuclear weapons. Leaders from those countries had warned Pyongyang not to proceed with the planned rocket launch.

They fear such a test could be a first step toward putting a nuclear warhead on a missile capable of reaching Alaska and beyond.