



Press Availability at UN Headquarters

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

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(1:05 p.m. EDT)

SECRETARY RICE: Good afternoon. I would just like to make a few remarks and then I'll be happy to take questions concerning the achievement today of a Statement of Principles by the six parties to the six-party talks on denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. This agreement to principles is a good first step on the way, we hope, to a fully denuclearized, verifiably denuclearized, Korean Peninsula.

I will note that the North Koreans made clear their intention to abandon their nuclear weapons program and other existing nuclear programs. This is also a good step.

I want to thank the Chinese for hosting the meeting and for their active role and also to thank Ambassador Chris Hill and his counterparts for the hard work that they put into this. It is only a first step, however. We now will turn to implementing agreements, implementing language, where we will have to tackle, I am sure, quite difficult issues of verification of the dismantlement of North Korean nuclear weapons programs and other nuclear programs. But it is a good first step and I am happy to take a few questions.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, what assurances do you have that North Korea is really intending on implementing this agreement? Could they be biding for time? I mean, how do you think that this is going to go and what do you see about the future of U.S.-North Korean relations?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, we are planning -- the six parties will plan to reconvene again, probably within a couple of months, and we have to at every stage test the dedication or the commitment of the North Koreans to indeed carry through with the obligation that they have now taken in this Statement of Principles to abandon their nuclear weapons program, to abandon their other nuclear programs, and to do so verifiably. And the proof, so to speak, is going to be in the pudding. We are going to now have to have a very clear roadmap for verification, a very clear roadmap for dismantlement, because that is the core issue here. And we look forward to working on it.

As to relations between the United States and North Korea, I would just remind everyone that this is a six-party agreement, that this is not an agreement between the United States and North Korea but rather an agreement between North Korea and all of its neighbors. We look forward to improvements in relations between all of the neighbors if indeed we do make progress on the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

QUESTION: Russia is saying that it would like to delay referring Iran to the Security Council. What is the U.S. view on this?

SECRETARY RICE: I'm quite certain that at some point in time Iran is going to be referred to the Security Council, particularly if Iran continues to demonstrate that it is not prepared to give the international community assurances that it is not going to try to build a civil nuclear -- try to build a nuclear weapons program under cover of civil nuclear power.

I think there was broad disappointment at the Iranian speech and the fact that there seemed to be very little recognition that there are real concerns about what Iran has been doing over the last 15 years.

Now, the timing of any such referral, of course, is a matter for diplomacy and we will look to talk to people about that. But I don't think there is any disagreement, and in fact I've met with all my counterparts who are engaged in this -- I don't think there is any disagreement that there are serious concerns about the Iranian nuclear activities, that those concerns have got to be answered, and that Iran must be prevented from gaining the technology and the technological know-how that would potentially lead to a nuclear weapon in a very volatile region.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary.

SECRETARY RICE: Yes, Anne.

QUESTION: Does the fact that North Korea in this statement preserves sort a theoretical future right to a civilian nuclear program concern you at all, and is that at odds with your previous position on whether or not they could get a reactor now?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the question of whether the North Koreans will have peaceful nuclear uses, of course, doesn't come into being at this point in time. North Korea is not in compliance with the Nonproliferation Treaty. North Korea is not under IAEA safeguards and they have not dismantled what was clearly a clandestine, and then later declared, military program.

So this issue about peaceful nuclear uses is down the road, and I think if you read the document you will see that what is agreed to here is that at an appropriate time we are prepared to discuss -- discuss -- a light-water reactor. And if you read the accompanying statements of several of the participants, you will see that there is a clarity about the need for North Korea to dismantle, get back into the NPT, get IAEA safeguards, and then discuss a light-water reactor. So I think this issue is some time in the future.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, you didn't want to discuss it up until now. I mean, does "discuss" mean --

SECRETARY RICE: When the North Koreans have dismantled their nuclear weapons and other nuclear programs verifiably and are indeed nuclear-free, when they are back in the NPT, when they have gotten into IAEA safeguards, I suppose we can discuss anything.

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

SECRETARY RICE: I suppose we can discuss anything. But I would just have you take note of the fact that the North Koreans asserted their right to peaceful nuclear uses. All that is done here is that we've taken note of that assertion and then a number of the states have made very clear what the sequence is here. The sequence is dismantling, NPT, IAEA safeguards, and then we can discuss. Because I don't think there's anyone who is prepared to try to go back to a circumstance under which we're



debating sequences.

QUESTION: You could not find anything in the President of Iran initiative -- he had more than eight parts -- to accept? You don't accept anything, especially the nuclear-free Middle East? Why you don't ask Israel to freeze?

SECRETARY RICE: My concern about the Iranian program is the concern of the international community, that the Iranians have -- were caught engaging in activities that they did not report. There is a lot of concern about what else they are doing. They need to -- they owe the IAEA answers. They were in negotiations with the European Union. They unilaterally walked out of those negotiations. It's time for Iran to get back to those negotiations and to take note of and try to respond to the legitimate concerns of the international community.

Yes.

QUESTION: Part of the Iranian President's speech on Saturday that specifically deals with the idea of inviting foreign companies to actually take part in enriching uranium in Iran, are you saying we categorically reject that or you say we want to keep it but we want more?

And one more on Lebanon, if I may. You met the Lebanese Prime Minister at the same time as the Lebanese President was addressing the General Assembly. Do we infer from that that as far as your Administration is concerned, President Lahoud is a thing of the past?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, first on Iran. I am not going to get into trying to comment on each and every line in the speech of the Iranian President, just to say that I think people found it disappointing that Iran has not addressed the concerns of the international community. There is a way for them to do that. They are in negotiations with the EU-3. We have backed those negotiations. Those negotiations need to begin again and Iran should stop its nuclear activities that people are concerned about.

In terms of Lebanon, you know that I was in Beirut. I met with all the members of the government. But the Prime Minister of Lebanon was in a session with the international friends of Lebanon who are in favor of a new Lebanon, a Lebanon that is, in fact, free of foreign interference and influence, a Lebanon that is able to comply with its international obligations and a Lebanon that is able to make the reforms -- economic and political -- that need to be made. And I think it was a wonderful gathering of people who support this new Lebanon and that the Prime Minister was there was very important.

Charlie, you have the last question.

QUESTION: Back on North Korea --

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

QUESTION: Back on North --

SECRETARY RICE: Excuse me. This gentleman has the question. Yes.

QUESTION: Back on North Korea. Do you see the U.S. giving in on anything to get the agreement that was reached, the agreement on principles?

SECRETARY RICE: I'm sorry. Can you repeat that?

QUESTION: Do you see the U.S. having given in on any point to get the agreed principles?

SECRETARY RICE: I think the agreed principles serve our interest. And in fact, I think if you go back and look at the June 2004 proposal, most of the elements that are in the principles were in the June 2004 proposal. The sticking point of light-water reactor for North Korea I think was handled in a way that is wholly appropriate, which is that let's get about the business first of dismantlement and NPT and IAEA safeguards. This is, until then, not a question for the agenda. But when you have verifiable denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and the North Koreans are nuclear-free, then I think we can probably discuss just about anything.

Thank you very much.

QUESTION: Why do you think now that they've finally decided to do it? Even in the beginning of the week you saw that they started off with their usual rhetoric.

SECRETARY RICE: Right.

QUESTION: What do you think turned the corner here?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the message is that the international community has a legitimate interest in the health and viability of the nonproliferation regime and that there are multiple ways to deal with states about which there are questions. And I think that the EU-3 has a very good -- has tried very hard to give the Iranians a way to deal with the questions about their program. In the case of North Korea, of course, it was the regional states, but that there has been progress there, I think people should take account of.

I can't get inside the North Korean psyche about this. The only thing I can say is that we have long said and long believed that the key here was not to engage in a process by which this could become an issue -- the North Korean nuclear program -- between the United States and North Korea, but rather in which it was clear that this was an interest in which China, Japan, South Korea and Russia also had concerns and had interests. And by the structure of this, I think not only have we gotten the North Koreans to what is a pretty comprehensive pledge, but I just want to emphasize again, it is at this point just a pledge. But not only have we gotten them into a comprehensive pledge, but it is now in the context where they've made that pledge not just to the United States but to all their neighbors.

Thank you very much.

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