

Dear Ambassador¹,

RE: The situation with Iran and the upcoming emergency meeting of the IAEA Board of Governors.

Greenpeace is extremely concerned at the increase in the tension between Iran and some other countries over Iran's nuclear programme. We recognise that the current situation of mistrust and increasing tension is dangerous; at this juncture all States need to demonstrate true statesmanship and courage to work for a reduction of tension and rhetoric.

As you know, Greenpeace has consistently voiced its opposition to and campaigns against the development and possession of nuclear weapons and nuclear power. We assert that nuclear power is never peaceful due to the devastating health and environmental impact, and has led to weapons programmes in too many countries. Therefore, we believe the international community is right to put pressure on Iran to abandon all nuclear ambitions. However, we also believe that all responses to Iran's latest actions must be peaceful, diplomatic, fair and international. Furthermore, nuclear weapon states need also to address their own programmes as well as those countries operating such programmes outside of the current global framework.

Greenpeace believes that referral to the UN Security Council works in completely the opposite direction, exacerbating an already tense situation, which could result in restriction or even expulsion of IAEA inspectors. Such a move would be counter-productive to the international community's stated intentions and is potentially dangerous. Rather than report the situation to the Security Council, we urge you to intensify the activities of the IAEA inspectors, and demonstrate further commitments and enthusiasm for negotiations that will work to undermine negative and unhelpful rhetoric.

Several States have opposed referring Iran to the Security Council, fearing, on the one hand that it is an unnecessary escalation in the diplomatic standoff, and on the other, it will result in accusations of hypocrisy because the last time a country was referred to the Security Council by the IAEA Board in February 2003 and earlier in 1994, absolutely nothing happened. Some states have wished to avoid sanctions that would suspend economically advantageous nuclear or other cooperation with Iran. Other states are justifiably nervous about a repetition of the Iraq situation where a resolution was retroactively interpreted to justify force. These are all good reasons for the Board to further delay referral to the Council.

¹ On January 17th, this letter was sent to 35 Ambassadors of Member States of the IAEA Board of Governors: Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Belarus, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, China, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, Egypt, France, Germany, Ghana, Greece, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Republic of, Libya, Norway, Portugal, Russian Federation, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Syria, United Kingdom, United States, Venezuela and Yemen.

The Permanent Members of the Security Council need to examine their own role in providing no incentives to states that would encourage them to adhere to their non-proliferation obligations. They demonstrate an unwillingness to even begin the process of eliminating their nuclear arsenals or diminishing the role of nuclear weapons in their security policies, which they have promised to do on several occasions. While it is essential that Iran do more to convince the international community of its peaceful intentions, it is equally important to emphasise that more must be done by the nuclear weapon states to convince the international community of their disarmament intentions.

Diplomatic efforts aimed at a peaceful solution to this situation should be re-doubled with intensified efforts to address the root causes of security concerns in the region as a whole. One key effort would be to restart the peace processes in the Middle East. Another way of addressing regional security would be to put some clear political weight and drive behind establishing the Middle East Nuclear Free Zone. There is much that certain powerful Security Council members seeking the relief of “doing something” can do in helping to build real security, which would not invite further bloodshed and sabre rattling in the region.

Article IV of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) that claims nuclear energy as an "inalienable right" is an historical and political mistake; the real legitimate right is to clean and safe energy and nuclear energy is neither. In addition to the use of military reactors to create the materials used in the weapons of the five nuclear weapon states, Pakistan and Israel, the world has witnessed the acquisition of nuclear weapons capabilities through so-called peaceful civilian nuclear programmes in India, North Korea and Iraq. The NPT needs to be changed for all and not selectively on a case-by-case basis.

Ambassador, you no doubt share our concerns about statements and rumours regarding military strikes on Iran's nuclear installations. Any military strike on Iran would be reckless and dangerous both politically and physically and would strengthen the hand of hard liners in Iran. The use of force would dangerously escalate tension in the Middle East, a volatile region that cannot afford to descend further into cycles of armed violence and retribution. Everyone would lose, in particular the people of the Middle East and Iran specifically.

Bombing nuclear facilities is particularly dangerous, as it has the potential to disperse radioactive materials into the environment. Any attack on nuclear facilities would be an irresponsible and irrational act. Consider what happened when Israel bombed Osirak. It certainly delayed Iraq's programme, but it also put it underground. Osirak had been under IAEA safeguards and was monitored; the subsequent activities were not. Many members of the international community were surprised by how far that programme had come in the nine years after the bombing of Osirak. It is justified to say that Iraq was emboldened to devote even more human and economic resources to the programme, and became more determined to rebuild after the military strike. The use of violence begets violence and in this case the threat or use of force would trigger a political psychology that would justify the drive for offensive defence, unite the population so strongly behind anti-western sentiments, which would eliminate any dialogue and further jeopardize security in the Middle East.

Ambassador, Greenpeace along with others in the non-governmental community is eager to support diplomatic initiatives and processes that would ensure that Iran abandons any nuclear ambitions peacefully; we are campaigning vigorously for all nuclear states to abandon both their weapons and programmes. We clearly have a shared common goal in eliminating the threat of nuclear weapons from the planet. The situation with Iran presents an opportunity for us to move forward towards that goal as it highlights many of the key problems and blockages towards a political process, which eliminates nuclear weapons from around the globe. We look forward to an opportunity to exchange views and ideas with you towards this goal.

Sincerely

Felicity Hill
Political Adviser on Nuclear and Disarmament Issues

CC. UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan
IAEA Director-General ElBaradei