

China says U.S. must first lift Iran sanctions to return to JCPOA

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Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi

Beijing, June 12 (RHC)-- Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi says the United States should first lift all the sanctions it has imposed on Iran in order to return to the 2015 nuclear deal as negotiations continue in the Austrian capital to revive the agreement, which was abandoned by the US three years after its conclusion.

"To return to the deal, lifting sanctions on Iran first is the natural thing to do," Wang said in an address to the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva on Friday, referring to the nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), signed between Iran and major world powers.

He stressed the need to resolve non-proliferation issues through negotiations and lambasted the US unilateral bullying acts which are the "root cause" of issues pertaining to the Iranian nuclear issue. "As the negotiations for the United States and Iran to resume compliance with the agreement are now in the final sprint, parties concerned need to make a political decision as quickly as possible and redouble diplomatic efforts to bring the JCPOA back on track," the top Chinese diplomat, whose country is a party to the deal, stated.

He once again emphasized that the JCPOA has been endorsed by the UN Security Council Resolution 2231 and is "an important outcome of multilateral diplomacy and a key pillar of the international nuclear non-proliferation regime and peace and stability in the Middle East."

Since April, representatives from Iran and the P4+1 group of countries have been holding talks in Vienna aimed at revitalizing the JCPOA and bringing the U.S. back to compliance.

The US has sent a delegation to Vienna but it is not attending the JCPOA Joint Commission talks directly as Washington is no longer a party to the deal. It has, however, held separate talks with the other parties to the JCPOA. The United States, under former president Donald Trump, left the JCPOA in 2018 and returned the sanctions that had been lifted against Tehran as part of the agreement.

President Joe Biden has said Washington is willing to return to the pact if Tehran first suspends its countermeasures taken in response to US violations and reimposition of sanctions.

Iran says the onus is on the U.S. to revive the deal as it was Washington, not Tehran, that left the internationally recognized accord in defiance of global criticism.

At the end of the fifth round of Vienna talks earlier this month, Iran's top nuclear negotiator said certain important issues still remain to be hammered out by Tehran and its partners in the JCPOA before they can reach an agreement on a potential revival of the accord, stressing that the onus is now on the US and the other co-signatories to make "difficult decisions" for that to happen.

Iran's top nuclear negotiator to the Vienna talks on the JCPOA revival says the US and other parties need to make difficult decisions to reach a final conclusion. "All in all, we made good progress, but there are issues left [unresolved], without which an agreement couldn't be reached, and which have yet to be decided," Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi added.

Elsewhere in his speech, the Chinese foreign minister voiced his country's objection to establish a multilateral dialogue platform for regional security in the Persian Gulf region and build step by step a framework for collective, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security in the Middle East.

"China supports building a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction and stands ready to work toward that end," Wang pointed out.

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell told a UN Security Council meeting on Thursday that non-stop efforts to revive the JCPOA continue unabated in all its aspects, including nuclear activities and the lifting of sanctions.

He added that he is in an active engagement with all the main players in the nuclear issue as the EU delegation leading the negotiations in Vienna is making all-out efforts.

Russian ambassador to international organizations in Vienna Mikhail Ulyanov said on Friday that the next meeting of the JCPOA Joint Commission would start this weekend. "It will mark the beginning of the sixth round of the #ViennaTalks on restoration of the nuclear deal. Will it be the final round? Nobody knows but all negotiators hope so," Ulyanov said in a post on his Twitter account.

Ulyanov, who is the head of the Russian delegation to the Vienna talks, told RIA Novosti that there are several more issues that are of fundamental importance for both Washington and Tehran, adding that it is still difficult to predict the development of the situation.

"The assessments of the prospects sound different; the restrained statements of both the Iranian side and the American side draw attention to themselves. This is due to the fact that there are still a number of issues that are of fundamental importance for these two negotiators," he said.

He noted that it is a "thankless job" to predict how events will develop but emphasized that the sides have an attitude to achieve a successful conclusion of the negotiations. "And how long it will take – we'll see," the top Russian diplomat added.

The 6th session of the JCPOA Joint Commission resumes in a physical format on Saturday in Vienna, the European Union External Action Service said in a press release on Friday. On behalf of EU High Representative Josep Borrell, the meeting would be chaired by the Deputy Secretary General and Political Director of the European External Action Service, Enrique Mora, it added.

According to the press release, representatives of Iran and the P4+1 group of countries -- France, Germany, the United Kingdom, China and Russia – would also attend the JCPOA Joint Commission session.

"Participants will continue their discussions in view of a possible return of the United States to the JCPOA and on how to ensure the full and effective implementation of the JCPOA," it said.

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