

IAEA chief says only few weeks left to revive Iran nuclear deal

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Head of the International Atomic Energy Agency Rafael Grossi. (Photo: AP)

Vienna, January 12 (RHC)-- Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Rafael Grossi says the revival of a 2015 nuclear agreement reached between Iran and major world powers must happen within the coming weeks. "It is clear that we don't have many months ahead of us. We have weeks," Grossi said in an interview for the Reuters Next conference.

His comments came after Iran resumed 20% uranium enrichment and the country's parliament approved a law to counter unilateral sanctions imposed by the United States on Tehran. Iran on January 4 announced the beginning of the process to enrich uranium to 20 percent purity at its Fordow nuclear facility in its latest step to reciprocate the United States' unilateral move to withdraw from the nuclear agreement, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

Since Washington's much-criticized exit, it has been attempting to prevent the remaining signatories – Britain, France, China and Russia plus Germany – from abiding by their commitments and thus kill the historic agreement, which is widely viewed as a fruit of international diplomacy.

Iran remained fully compliant with the JCPOA for an entire year, waiting for the co-signatories to fulfill their end of the bargain by offsetting the impacts of American bans on the Iranian economy.

In response to Washington's unilateral withdrawal from the JCPOA, Tehran has so far rowed back on its nuclear commitments five times in compliance with Articles 26 and 36 of the nuclear deal, but stressed that its retaliatory measures will be reversible as soon as Europe finds practical ways to shield the mutual trade from the U.S. sanctions.

On December 1st, Iranian lawmakers overwhelmingly voted in favor of the “Strategic Action Plan to Lift Sanctions and Safeguard Interests of Iranian People,” which intends to counteract sanctions imposed on Iran after President Donald Trump on May 8, 2018 pulled the United States out of the JCPOA. The bill became law after Iran's Guardian Council ratified it a day later.

According to the law, the Iranian administration is required to suspend more commitments under the nuclear deal. The law tasked the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) with producing and restoring at least 120 kilograms of enriched uranium with a 20-percent purity level every year and also enrichment beyond 20 percent if the country's peaceful nuclear activities demanded.

An Iranian lawmaker said on January 9 that US President-elect Joe Biden's administration, which takes office on January 20, would be given until February 21 to reverse anti-Iran sanctions.

In his interview, Grossi also commented on the law passed by the Iranian Parliament and said, "I must take it seriously because it's the law" and added that he believed the Iranian government intended to implement it. The spokesman for the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, Behrouz Kamalvandi, said earlier that the nuclear body will implement technical aspects of the recently-approved law.

In an interview with the Iranian Parliament's official ICANA news agency, AEOI's spokesman said: “The AEOI will implement the technical part of this law and we are already doing this regardless of how the executive bylaw of this law is drawn up.”

Further in his remarks, the UN nuclear agency chief said Iran was progressing "quite rapidly" in 20 percent enrichment and that based on estimations it would be able to reach about 10 kilograms a month at its facility in Fordow.

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