

Videotaped Remarks on the Observance of Nowruz

March 20, 2014

Dorood. As you and your families gather around the Nowruz table, I want to extend my best wishes on this new spring and new year. As always, this holiday is a chance to give gratitude for your blessings and to reflect on our hopes for the year ahead.

As I have every year as President, I want to take this opportunity to speak directly to the people and leaders of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Since taking office, I've offered the Iranian Government an opportunity: If it meets its international obligations, then there could be a new relationship between our two countries, and Iran could begin to return to its rightful place among the community of nations.

Last year, you, the Iranian people, made your voice heard when you elected Dr. Hassan Rouhani as your new President. During his campaign, he pledged to strengthen Iran's economy, improve the lives of the Iranian people, and engage constructively with the international community, and he was elected with your strong support.

Last fall, I spoke with President Rouhani. It was the first conversation between an American President and an Iranian leader since 1979. I conveyed to President Rouhani my deep respect for the Iranian people, just as he expressed his respect for the American people. And I told him that I firmly believe that we can address the serious disagreements between our governments, reduce distrust, and begin to move beyond our difficult history.

Since then, we've made progress. For years, the international community has had concerns that Iran's nuclear program could lead to Iran acquiring a nuclear weapon, which would be a threat to the region and to the world. Under the initial agreement we reached in November, the Iranian Government has agreed to limit key parts of its nuclear program. Along with our international partners, the United States is giving Iran some relief from sanctions. Now we're engaged in intensive negotiations in the hopes of finding a comprehensive solution that resolves the world's concerns with the Iranian nuclear program.

As I've said before, I'm under no illusions. This will be difficult. But I'm committed to diplomacy because I believe there is the basis for a practical solution. Iran's highest officials, including Supreme Leader Khamenei, have said that Iran is not developing nuclear weapons. So there is a chance to reach an agreement if Iran takes meaningful and verifiable steps to assure the world that its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes only. Iran would have access to peaceful nuclear energy. And we will have addressed—peacefully, with diplomacy—one of the greatest challenges to international peace and security.

A comprehensive agreement on the nuclear issue—and an Iran that upholds universal rights at home and abroad—would help move Iran along the new path that so many Iranians seek. After all, throughout your history, the talents and genius of the Iranian people have led to great achievements in literature and the arts, science and technology. But the economic hardship that so many Iranians have endured in recent years—because of the choices of Iranian leaders—has deprived your country and the world of the extraordinary skills and contributions you have to offer. And you deserve better.

If Iran meets its international obligations, we know where the path of dialogue and greater trust and cooperation can lead. It will mean more opportunities for Iranians to trade and forge

ties with the rest of the world. It means more economic growth and jobs for Iranians, especially young Iranians who dream of making their mark in the world. It will mean more opportunities for Iranian students to travel abroad and build new partnerships that help you realize your incredible potential. In short, real diplomatic progress this year can help open up new possibilities and prosperity for the Iranian people for years to come.

That's the message the Iranian people sent at the ballot box last year. I hope that the entire Iranian Government hears that message too. Because for the first time in many years, we have the opportunity to start down a new path. And if Iran seizes this moment, this Nowruz could mark not just the beginning of a new year, but a new chapter in the history of Iran and its role in the world, including a better relationship with the United States and the American people, rooted in mutual interest and mutual respect.

Thank you, and *Eid-eh Shoma Mobarak*.

NOTE: The remarks were recorded at approximately 4:05 p.m. on March 14 in the Roosevelt Room at the White House.

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