

Iran 'ready for new chapter of co-operation' - UN envoy

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By Barbara Plett BBC UN correspondent
Soltanieh urged the West to seize a "unique opportunity"

Iran says its nuclear fuel deal proves it is ready to open a new chapter of cooperation with the West.

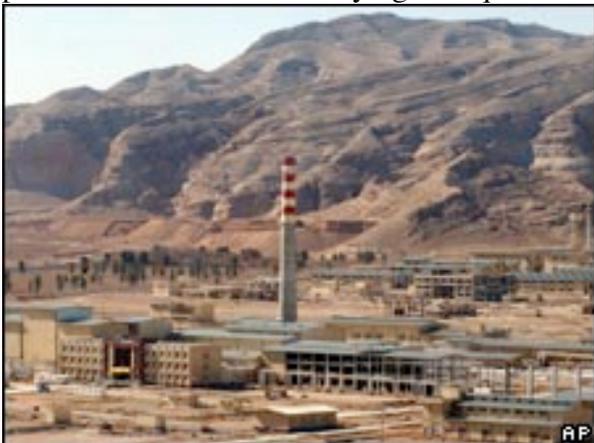
In an interview Tehran's ambassador to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) urged the UN Security Council to respond positively.

Ali Asghar Soltanieh was speaking to the BBC on the day that Iran officially outlined the details of the fuel exchange to the the UN's nuclear watchdog.

So far Western powers have said the agreement is too little too late, and are pursuing sanctions against the Islamic state.

Removing stockpile

The fuel swap was first proposed last October as a confidence building measure by the IAEA along with America, France and Russia (the so-called Vienna Group) on behalf of six world powers who believe Iran's trying to acquire nuclear weapons.



The West suspects Iran would have nuclear material left over

It involves exchanging 1,200 kilograms of Iran's low enriched uranium for special nuclear fuel rods needed to power its medical research reactor.

For the six powers the advantage was in removing Tehran's stockpile of fissile material, thus slowing down any possible moves to build a bomb.

Iran sought amendments for eight months and then finally agreed to the transfer, following a high level intervention from Turkey and Brazil.

The new element is that the low enriched uranium (LEU) would be deposited in Turkey as a guarantee that Iran would get the promised fuel rods.

'Maximum concession'

"We are not sure unless this fuel is in the core of the reactor that such a thing will actually

happen," Mr Soltanieh said, indicating that deep suspicions linger from America's failure to honour nuclear contracts after the 1979 Iranian revolution.

Once the rods materialise, the LEU "deposit" will go to whichever state supplies the uranium to make them, possibly Russia, he said.

He called this a "maximum concession" and urged the Vienna Group to "seize this unique opportunity" to negotiate the technical details of the deal.

"I'm sure if they will take the right course of action and change gear from confrontations, resolutions and sanctions...then I think we will open a new chapter of cooperation," he said.

Western suspicions

But Western states say the exchange has lost its value as a confidence-building measure, because Tehran's stockpile of fissile material has expanded since October, and because it decided in February to escalate uranium enrichment to 20%.

They've tabled a draft sanctions resolution in the Security Council, and see the fuel deal as a manoeuvre by Iran to avoid the tougher measures.

The core issue, say Western diplomats, is that Iran continues to enrich uranium in defiance of United Nations resolutions.

They point to IAEA statements that Iran's lack of cooperation prevents the agency from confirming Tehran's intentions are entirely peaceful, as claimed.

Mr Soltanieh made clear that suspending enrichment was a non-starter.

Such UN resolutions are "not possible, not implementable," he said, fiercely defending what he said was Iran's right as a member of the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty to produce nuclear fuel, and suggesting that the Iranian government might reconsider the exchange deal if the Security Council eventually votes for sanctions.

He urged instead that both sides "open a new avenue for mutual confidence building," noting that "there's been a serious trust deficit for the last 30 years".

Iran nuclear deadline looms



Iran is running out of time to sign a nuclear pact brokered by Turkey and Brazil [REUTERS]

Iran has less than 24 hours to sign a nuclear swap deal brokered by Turkey and Brazil. If Iran signs the deal, US plans for a new round of sanctions against Tehran at the UN Security Council could suffer a setback.

Iran must write and deliver a letter to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to kick start the fuel swap agreement reached on Monday.

Under the proposed deal, Iran agreed to ship much of its stockpile of low enriched uranium to Turkey in exchange for fuel for a research reactor for medical isotopes - something that the US

had proposed in 2009.

But the deal notwithstanding, the US has been pushing for fresh sanctions.

"The US announced a deal with China and Russia for new sanctions right after Turkey and Brazil brokered a deal with Iran," Al Jazeera's Anita Mcnaught said, reporting from Ankara, Turkey's capital.

"Turkey saw that as a slap in the face.

"US officials never believed the Turkish-Brazilian brokered deal would succeed.

"No one [in the US administration] thought Iran was amenable to anything other than sanctions." she said.

US displeasure

The US is unhappy with the deal because it does not include a commitment from Iran to suspend its nuclear enrichment activities.

"There are American officials who think Iran just used the Brazil-Turkey deal to slow down sanctions," our correspondent said.

The controversy over Iran's nuclear programme has dragged on for years with the US and its allies accusing Tehran of seeking to covertly develop atomic weapons. Iran insists its nuclear programme is for generating electricity for civilian use.

Brazil and Turkey have growing ambitions in international affairs. Both countries are non-permanent members of the UN Security council who do not have veto power.

Turkish officials had been in touch with their US counterparts throughout negotiations with Iran, a Turkish foreign ministry spokesman said. The US and Turkey are strategic allies.

"Hillary Clinton [the US Secretary of State] did not want them [Brazil and Turkey] to fail but she never thought they would succeed. So the US went ahead with the sanctions draft," our correspondent said.

"If Iran signs the letter, then sanctions may not be an option. China might want to give the Brazil-Turkey deal a chance."

Obama to pursue UN sanctions despite Iran nuclear deal

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Iran says its programme is for peaceful purposes

US President Barack Obama has vowed to pursue fresh UN sanctions against Iran despite Tehran's nuclear deal with Turkey and Brazil.

Mr Obama telephoned Turkish PM Recep Tayyip Erdogan to say Iran's moves still "do not build confidence".

Brazil and Turkey earlier urged fellow members of the UN Security Council to heed a deal they struck with Iran over its nuclear programme.

The deal would see Tehran trade uranium for ready-enriched reactor fuel. Many Western countries have long suspected Iran is trying to make a nuclear weapon, but Tehran insists its programme is for purely peaceful, energy purposes.

'Discrediting'

Mr Obama told Mr Erdogan there were still "fundamental concerns" about Iran's nuclear programme.



Barack Obama did acknowledge Turkish and Brazilian efforts

The White House said Mr Obama had acknowledged the deal set out by Turkey and Brazil. But the US president "stressed the international community's continuing and fundamental concerns about Iran's overall nuclear programme, as well as Iran's failure to live up to its international obligations".

The statement added: "Further, he indicated that negotiations on a new UN Security Council resolution will continue."

It said Iran had persistently failed to meet the P5+1 countries - the five permanent UN Security Council members plus Germany - and had refused to halt uranium enrichment.

Brazil and Turkey had both earlier expressed disappointment that proposals for new sanctions had been tabled a day after Tehran agreed to the deal.

The new measures put before the UN foresee cargo ship inspections and new banking controls. "Brazil and Turkey are convinced that it is time to give a chance for negotiations and to avoid measures that are detrimental to a peaceful solution of this matter," the foreign ministers of Brazil and Turkey earlier said in a letter to the UN Security Council.

On Monday, the three countries signed a deal in which Iran agreed to send low-enriched uranium to Turkey in return for enriched fuel for a research reactor.

Placing Iran's nuclear material in a third country was intended to act as a confidence-building measure by the major world powers to prevent Iran producing more highly-enriched, weapons-grade material.

A similar deal was suggested last year by the P5+1, who have been negotiating with Iran over its nuclear programme.

But plans for a fourth set of UN sanctions against Iran over its nuclear programme were circulated among all 15 members of the Security Council on Tuesday.

A close adviser to Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Mojtaba Hashemi Samareh, dismissed the new measures as illegitimate.

The head of Iran's atomic energy organisation, Ali Akbar Salehi, said the sanctions on Iran would backfire.

"They won't prevail and by pursuing the passing of a new resolution they are discrediting themselves in public opinion," said Mr Salehi.

19 May 2010 19:56 UK

Brazil, Turkey urge delay in UN sanctions vote on Iran



The West suspects Iran's atomic programme aims to make weapons

Brazil and Turkey have urged fellow members of the UN Security Council to heed a deal they struck with Iran over its nuclear programme.

Both were disappointed by proposals for new sanctions tabled a day after Tehran agreed to trade uranium for ready-enriched reactor fuel.

Iranian officials said major powers would be "discrediting" themselves if they ignored the hard-won deal.

The US-drafted text is backed by all five permanent (P5) council members.

They believe that Iran is trying to obtain a nuclear weapon, which Iran denies.

The new measures put before the UN foresee cargo ship inspections and new banking controls.

Landmark deal

"Brazil and Turkey are convinced that it is time to give a chance for negotiations and to avoid measures that are detrimental to a peaceful solution of this matter," the foreign ministers of Brazil and Turkey said in the letter to the UN Security Council.

Continue reading the main story

This [UN Security Council draft] resolution is the last effort by the West

Ali Akbar Salehi Head of Iran's atomic energy organisation New Iran sanctions being tabled UN diplomats say that is an admonition to all sides, including Iran, not to over-react, and the P5 not to aggressively push for a vote on the sanctions resolution - so that there can be space and time for the Brazil-brokered deal to be implemented, says the BBC's UN Correspondent Barbara Plett.

On Monday, the three countries signed a deal in which Iran agreed to send low-enriched uranium to Turkey in return for enriched fuel for a research reactor.

Placing Iran's nuclear material in a third country was intended to act as a confidence-building measure by the major world powers to prevent Iran producing more highly-enriched, weapons-grade material.

A similar deal was suggested last year by the five permanent members of the Security Council - the US, France, UK, China and Russia - plus Germany, who have been negotiating with Iran over its nuclear programme.

But plans for a fourth set of UN sanctions against Iran over its nuclear programme were circulated among all 15 members of the Security Council on Tuesday.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has dismissed Iran's deal as an attempt to deflect pressure. She said the five veto-wielding permanent members had agreed on a "strong" draft resolution.

Iran dismissal

A close adviser to Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Mojtaba Hashemi Samareh, has dismissed the new measures as illegitimate.

And the head of Iran's atomic energy organisation, Ali Akbar Salehi, has said newly-proposed sanctions on Iran will backfire.

"They won't prevail and by pursuing the passing of a new resolution they are discrediting themselves in public opinion," said Mr Salehi, who is also Iran's vice-president and the highest-ranking Iranian official to speak since the proposals were tabled.

"This [UN Security Council draft] resolution is the last effort by the West," he told Iran's semi-official news agency, Fars.

"They feel that for the first time in the world developing countries are able to defend their rights in the world arena without resorting to the major powers and that is very hard for them," he said. Iran is also preparing a letter for the UN atomic watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency, officially notifying them of their deal with Turkey, Mr Salehi said.

18 May 2010 22:11 UK

'Strong' new Iran sanctions UN resolution being tabled



Mrs Clinton addressed the Senate

Plans for a fourth set of UN sanctions against Iran over its nuclear programme are being submitted to all 15 members of the Security Council in New York.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced earlier that the five, veto-wielding permanent members had agreed on a draft resolution.

New measures seen by reporters cover cargo ship inspections and banking.

The draft was produced despite a deal Iran made with Turkey to exchange nuclear material for enriched uranium.

Mrs Clinton suggested Iran had been trying to deflect pressure.

“ As other nations grow stronger and more internationally assertive the result is likely to be more confusion in international politics ”

Mark Urban

Newsnight diplomatic editor

.....
Mark Urban's blog

The Turkish deal, which Brazil helped to negotiate, was similar to one proposed by the West and its allies last year.

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan called on the world to support it but said that if Iran did not ship out the uranium within one month, as agreed, then it would be on its own.

The members of the Security Council, which includes Turkey and Brazil, are holding a session behind closed doors at which they are to receive the draft and discuss it.

The US is seeking maximum backing for the new sanctions.

'Exercise vigilance'

"The resolution would establish a comprehensive new framework for cargo inspections, both in states' ports and on the high seas" if there was reason to suspect a ship was carrying conventional arms or nuclear missile items, an official told AFP news agency on condition of anonymity.

ANALYSIS



Jon Leyne, BBC Tehran correspondent

This is Washington's answer to what was widely seen as a last-minute attempt by Iran to head off new sanctions.

Indeed, in slightly triumphant tone, Hillary Clinton said it was as convincing an answer as it was possible to provide.

It appears that the two more sceptical big powers, Russia and China, have not been convinced by Iran's agreement to ship out a large part of its stocks of enriched uranium to Turkey.

The resolution would bar countries from selling tanks, armoured combat vehicles, warplanes and warships as well as other heavy weapons to Iran, the agency says.

Reuters news agency, which saw the 10-page draft document, says it also calls for expanding punitive measures against Iran's banking and other industries.

It "calls upon states to take appropriate measures that prohibit... the opening of new branches, subsidiaries, or representative offices of Iranian banks" if there are grounds for believing that they are linked to nuclear proliferation.

The draft also states "the need to exercise vigilance over transactions involving Iranian banks, including the Central Bank of Iran, so as to prevent such transactions contributing to proliferation of sensitive nuclear activities" or to the development of delivery systems for atomic weapons.

'Strong draft'

Mrs Clinton addressed the US Senate foreign relations committee after talks between the five permanent Security Council members - the US, UK, Russia, China and France - and Germany. "We have reached agreement on a strong draft with the co-operation of Russia and China," she said.

The US and its Western allies believe Iran is trying to build a nuclear weapon, but Iran denies this.

Mrs Clinton said she had spent Tuesday morning on the phone with her Russian counterpart, Sergei Lavrov, "finalising the resolution".

Russia and China have previously resisted calls for a new round of sanctions.

Talking about the Turkish deal, Mrs Clinton accused Tehran of trying to deflect pressure from the major powers.

"We don't believe it was any accident that Iran agreed to this declaration as we were preparing to move forward in New York," she said.

"The fact that we had Russia on board, we had China on board and that we were moving early this week, namely today, to share the text of that resolution, put pressure on Iran which they were trying to somehow dissipate."

17 May 2010 21:42 UK

West sceptical over Iran nuclear deal

Advertisement

Iranian, Brazilian and Turkish foreign ministers brokered the deal

There has been a cool international response to Iran's announcement that it will send uranium abroad for enrichment after talks with Turkey and Brazil.

The UN and Russia said the move was encouraging, but the US expressed concern at Iran's statement that it would continue to enrich uranium.

The US and the UK said work on a UN resolution imposing more sanctions on Tehran would continue.

The West suspects Iran's nuclear programme is aimed at making weapons.

Iran insists it is solely designed to meet its energy needs.

Teheran hopes the new agreement - in which it would ship 1,200kg (2,645lb) of low-enriched uranium to Turkey in return for higher-grade nuclear fuel for a research reactor - would avert new sanctions.

Progress made?

In a deal brokered by Turkey and Brazil, Iran said it was prepared to move uranium within a month of its approval by the so-called Vienna Group (US, Russia, France and the IAEA).



By Barbara Plett

BBC UN correspondent

A key part of the Western strategy has been winning international consensus for a new round of sanctions.

Russia and particularly China have been reluctant to support such a move, they may now want to further delay the process until they see what the deal means in practice.

Here the UN's nuclear monitoring agency, the IAEA, will be crucial: a positive response would lend the agreement significant credibility.

Even if that doesn't happen, Turkey and Brazil have to be taken into account.

They are both current members of the Security Council, and while they couldn't block a new sanctions resolution, they could split the vote, which is what Iran wants.

In return, Iran says it expects to receive 120kg of more highly enriched uranium (20%) - a purity well below that used in the manufacture of nuclear weapons - within a year.

The deal does not address the central nuclear issues dealt with by successive UN Security Council resolutions - Iran's refusal to halt its enrichment programme.

The US reacted by saying it still had serious concerns over Iran's nuclear programme, although it did not reject the agreement.

The US is in the final stages of negotiating a fourth sanctions package with other UN Security Council members.

It said the Iranian government "must demonstrate through deeds - and not simply words - its willingness to live up to international obligations or face consequences, including sanctions".

"While it would be a positive step for Iran to transfer low-enriched uranium off of its soil as it agreed to do last October, Iran said today that it would continue its 20% enrichment, which is a direct violation of UN Security Council resolutions," said a White House statement.

Russia welcomed the deal, although President Dmitry Medvedev said further talks were needed on Iran's nuclear programme.

'Constructive'

Meanwhile, French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner said there had been "some important progress" in talks at the Security Council on fresh sanctions against Tehran.

KEY POINTS OF THE DEAL

Iran will notify the IAEA of the details of the agreement within a week

If approved by the Vienna Group, Iran will ship 1,200kg of low-enriched uranium (LEU) to Turkey

The LEU will remain the property of Iran while in Turkey

Tehran and the IAEA may send observers to monitor its security

The Vienna group must then deliver 120kg of nuclear fuel to Iran within a year

Iran may request that Turkey return its LEU "swiftly and unconditionally to Iran

Full text of the joint declaration

Q&A: Iran and nuclear issue

The UK, for its part, said work on a UN resolution would continue until Tehran showed its intentions were peaceful.

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva were at the talks in Tehran with Mr Ahmadinejad.

Crucially, Turkey and Brazil are both on the UN Security Council, and so have a vote on those sanctions.

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, who spent 18 hours hammering out the deal with his Brazilian and Iranian counterparts, said there was now no need for more sanctions against Iran.

"The swap deal shows that Tehran wants to open a constructive path... there is no more ground for new sanctions and pressures," he said.

Iran has been mounting a big diplomatic effort to prevent new UN sanctions; its foreign minister has visited all 15 members of the Security Council.

17 May 2010 11:28 UK

Iran signs nuclear fuel-swap deal with Turkey



The deal was hammered out by Turkey, Brazil and Iran

Iran has signed an agreement to send uranium abroad for enrichment after mediation talks in Tehran with Turkish and Brazilian leaders.

Iran's foreign ministry said it was ready to ship 1,200kg of low-enriched uranium to Turkey, in return for nuclear fuel for a research reactor.

Correspondents say the plan could revive a UN-backed proposal and may ward off another round of sanctions.

Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is calling on world leaders for new talks.

He said it was time for talks "with Iran based on honesty, justice and mutual respect".

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Iran may request that Turkey return its LEU "swiftly and unconditionally to Iran

The West, worried that Iran is trying to build a nuclear bomb, has been pushing for stiffer sanctions against Iran. Tehran denies having a nuclear weapons programme.

The new deal does not address the central nuclear issues dealt with by successive UN Security Council resolutions, namely Iran's refusal to halt its enrichment programme and address questions about its past nuclear activities.

Iran says it will continue enriching uranium.

On Monday French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner said there had been progress in talks at the Security Council on fresh sanctions against Tehran, AFP news agency reported.

The German government said that nothing could replace a deal between Iran and the UN's nuclear watchdog, the IAEA.

'Negotiating ploy?'

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva and Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad were at the talks in Tehran.



Paul Reynolds, World affairs correspondent, BBC News website

Whether this is a breakthrough or a device to try to stop further sanctions - currently being discussed - remains to be determined. On the plus side, it appears that Iran is still interested in swapping some of its low-enriched uranium for fuel rods for its medical research reactor in Tehran which is in need of replenishment.

Sending low-enriched uranium to Turkey would be a good first step but it does not solve the problem because Turkey cannot produce fuel rods. There therefore needs to be a further agreement with the countries that made an earlier offer to supply them - the US, Russia and France.

And these countries are likely to be very cautious as they fear that Iran will impose conditions that, for them, make a deal impossible.

And all this does nothing to resolve the underlying issue which is Iran's determination to continue with enrichment despite being ordered to stop by the Security Council.

Q&A: Iran and nuclear issue

"Turkey will be the place to keep Iran's 3.5% [low-enriched] uranium," Iranian foreign ministry spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast told a news briefing after foreign ministers signed the deal. He said that 1,200kg would be shipped to Turkey, and that Iran would notify the IAEA, "within a week".

Under the deal, Iran has said it is prepared to move its uranium within a month of its approval by the so-called Vienna Group (US, Russia, France and the IAEA).

In return, Iran says it expects within a year 120kg of more highly enriched uranium (20%), a purity well below that used in the manufacture of nuclear weapons.

If the deadline is not met, Iran says Turkey "will return swiftly and unconditionally Iran's low-enriched uranium".

The BBC's Tehran correspondent Jon Leyne, in London, says the agreement does not make clear whether Iran's low-grade uranium will be used to make the new fuel or just held as a kind

of security deposit.

Our correspondent says Western governments will fear this is just a negotiating ploy designed to delay new sanctions.

Crucially, Turkey and Brazil are both on the UN Security Council so have a vote on those sanctions.

The Turkish Foreign Minister, Ahmet Davutoglu, who spent 18 hours hammering out the deal with his Brazilian and Iranian counterparts, said there was now no need for more sanctions against Iran.

"The swap deal shows that Tehran wants to open a constructive path... there is no more ground for new sanctions and pressures," he said.

'Last chance'

The US is in the final stages of negotiating a fourth sanctions package with other UN Security Council members.

This new deal will be examined in great detail and with a high degree of scepticism in foreign capitals, our Tehran correspondent says.

Iran backed out of a similar proposal last October citing disagreement about the details of the deal, which included a simultaneous swap, something the IAEA said was not feasible.

Iran's stocks are now thought to be much larger than the 1,200kg covered by the new agreement.

Israel was quick to react to the deal. The AFP news agency reported an unnamed official as accusing Iran of "manipulating" Turkey and Brazil to stave off further sanctions.

Both Russia and the US say the talks represent Iran's last chance to avoid harsher sanctions.

Iran has been mounting a big diplomatic effort to prevent new UN sanctions; its foreign minister has visited all 15 members of the security council.

6 May 2010 13:27 UK

US leader Biden says Iran may spark nuclear arms race



Vice-President Biden is underlining the strength of US ties with Europe
US Vice-President Joe Biden has warned that Iran's actions risk sparking a nuclear arms race in the Middle East.

His warning came in a speech to the European Parliament - the first by a top US leader since then-president Ronald Reagan spoke there in 1985.

Iran's leaders "spurn our collective good faith efforts", Mr Biden said, and risk "continuing isolation".

Iran insists it has the right to develop civil nuclear power. The US suspects it of seeking atomic weapons.

"Wouldn't it be ironic as the Iron Curtain fell... that a new arms race would emerge in some of the most unstable parts of the world," Mr Biden said.

"That would be an irony that our children, our grandchildren and our great-grandchildren would not forgive us, in my view, to allow to come to pass," he added.

Pressure on Iran

Mr Biden's warning echoed the words of US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who told delegates at a nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) conference this week that Iran had violated its obligations and should be held to account.

Earlier, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran accused states with nuclear weapons of threatening those who wanted to develop peaceful nuclear technology.

His comments prompted delegates from the US, the UK and France to walk out.

The US is negotiating with other Security Council members to impose a fourth round of UN economic sanctions against Iran over its uranium enrichment programme.

A listening administration

Mr Biden told MEPs in Brussels on Thursday that "we are back in the business of listening to our allies".

"It's no accident that Europe is my first overseas destination as vice-president. We need each other more now than we have ever."

He welcomed the new powers acquired by the European Parliament under the EU's Lisbon Treaty, saying "the Obama-Biden administration strongly supports a vibrant EU".

He stressed that a strong EU was "absolutely essential to American... long-term security".

On the dispute over EU personal data transfers to the US as part of anti-terrorism measures, he warned that "the longer we are without agreement the greater the risk".

"The terrorist finance tracking programme is essential to our security," he said, but added: "I understand your concerns".

3 May 2010 21:44 UK

Clinton says Iran poses 'global nuclear risk'



Hillary Clinton urged punishment for those who flout non-proliferation Iran's nuclear ambitions are putting the world at risk, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton says.

She told delegates at a nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty conference at the UN that Iran should be held to account.

Earlier, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran accused states with nuclear weapons of threatening those who want to develop peaceful nuclear technology.

His speech triggered a walk-out by representatives of the US, UK and France.

Mrs Clinton also said the US will disclose the number of weapons in its nuclear arsenal, a closely guarded secret for more than half a century.

She said the move was to improve transparency in the nuclear disarmament regime and encourage other nations to comply with it.

"Beginning today, the United States will make public the number of nuclear weapons in our stockpile and the number of weapons we have dismantled since 1991," she said.

"So for those who doubt that the United States will do its part on disarmament, this is our record, these are our commitments and they send a clear unmistakable signal."

Shortly afterwards, the US Defense Department revealed the US has a total of 5,113 nuclear warheads in its stockpile.

Throughout her speech Mrs Clinton regularly rounded on Iran, accusing President Ahmadinejad of offering the same "tired, false and sometimes wild accusations" against the US and others.

"Iran will do whatever it can to divert attention away from its own record in an attempt to evade accountability," she said.

The permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany are discussing further sanctions against Iran for refusing to stop enriching uranium, which can be used in making nuclear bombs.

Tehran insists its nuclear programme is entirely peaceful.

3 May 2010 05:55 UK

Ahmadinejad to attend UN nuclear talks in New York

Barbara Plett

BBC News, New York



Iran has denied it intends to make a nuclear weapon

Delegates from nearly 200 nations were gathering at the UN to review efforts to check the spread of nuclear weapons.

They meet every five years to try to strengthen the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

But this time the unresolved Iranian nuclear crisis threatens to overshadow the conference in New York.

Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad made a last-minute decision to attend to defend his country against US claims it wants to build a bomb.

The nuclear non-proliferation treaty, or NPT, is a grand bargain: nations with nuclear weapons promise to disarm, while those without promise not to get them, in exchange for the right to peaceful use of nuclear energy.

But the regime has come under heavy strain in recent years, and veteran observers say Monday's conference cannot afford to fail.

Participants say a positive atmosphere has been created by the commitment of US president Barack Obama to tackle nuclear issues.

However, America is leading the charge to strengthen NPT measures against countries such as Iran, which it accuses of secretly trying to build a bomb.

That is something Iran strongly denies, and President Ahmadinejad is attending in person to make his case.

Some diplomats fear the controversy will prevent a successful outcome of the conference.