

Christian Leaders Repeat Calls for Iran Sanctions

✘ A cross-section of Christian leaders is calling on President Obama, Congress and the international community at large to bring a halt to Iran's nuclear weapons program by placing strict sanctions on the nation.

During a national conference call Tuesday, members of Christian Leaders for a Nuclear-Free Iran (CLNFI), including Richard Land of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, repeated calls for economic sanctions on Iran and a complete arms embargo.

Ralph Reed, chairman of the Faith and Freedom Coalition and a member of CLNFI, said "a narrow window" for the U.S. to seek a peaceful and diplomatic solution "is rapidly closing."

"We're very concerned that if we wait any longer than right now, right at this moment, that window is going to close and the available options to the civilized world to deal with a nuclear Iran are then going to go from bad to worse," Reed said.

He added that financial sanctions "would make it very difficult for the Iranian regime to continue to go down this course."

The call came days before the U.S. was to meet with Iran in Geneva with the other permanent members of the U.N. Security Council—England, France, China and Russia—and Germany. The talks, to begin Thursday, are aimed at getting the nation to freeze its nuclear program and open up to serious nuclear inspections, the Associated Press (AP) reported.

Last week, more than 50 Christian leaders who sent a letter to Congress stressing the need for a diplomatic initiative that would bring about "swift, sure and severe sanctions" to prevent Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad from obtaining nuclear weapons.

"We urge your immediate action to address Iran's program to develop and deploy nuclear weapons by imposing economic sanctions on foreign companies that export refined petroleum products, including gasoline," the letter stated. " ... The U.S. should also immediately initiate a boycott of any arms sales to Iran."

The document, sent a day before Ahmadinejad was to address the United Nations General Assembly on Sept. 23, was signed by such leaders as San Antonio pastor John Hagee, Christian Broadcasting Network founder Pat Robertson and Southern Baptist Convention President Johnny Hunter.

Tuesday's conference call came on the heels of Iran's latest public display of nuclear readiness. Last week the country's military leaders test fired several short to medium-range missiles and three long-range ballistic missiles capable of striking Israel and U.S. forces.

Ahmadinejad reaffirmed his commitment to wage war against Iran's enemies while speaking to a crowd of parade participants in Tehran Sept. 22. "No power dares imagine an invasion against Iran," he said, according to the AP. Observers say Ahmadinejad's remarks allude to the U.S. and Israel.

"Our armed forces will cut the hand of anyone in the world before it pulls the trigger against the Iranian nation," he added.

On Tuesday, Jordan Sekulow, director of international operations for the American Center for Law and Justice, said U.S. sanctions are urgent in light of the brutal human rights

violations occurring in Iran.

“There is a growing movement throughout the world, specifically in Western Europe and the [European Union’s] 27-member states that have seen a shift in their own view of what’s happened,” he said. “Documented rapes, tortures-these are not allegations. These are official reports in Iranian news sources.”

He said the European Center for Law and Justice last Friday filed a second complaint with the United Nations asking leaders to investigate the arrests, tortures, rapes and murders of Iranian opposition leaders as well as ordinary citizens.

“We feel not only is there a nuclear threat issue with this regime, but there are Iranian people themselves suffering every single day at the hands of this brutal regime,” Sekulow said.