

From VOA Learning English, this is In The News.

This week, Iranian and international negotiators agreed on first steps to limit Iran's nuclear program. They also agreed to ease international economic pressure on Iran. The agreement was reached early Sunday in Switzerland.

Secretary of State John Kerry described the agreement as a first step toward a possible peaceful settlement with Iran.

American officials say Iran will dilute or weaken its near weapons grade uranium so it can not be used in weapons. Iran has also agreed to inspections of its nuclear centers.

In exchange, the United States and other countries will ease actions meant to punish Iran for its nuclear activities. But they will continue the strongest restrictions on Iran's oil exports and banking system.

The deal was delayed because of a dispute over Iran's claim to a right to enrich the metal uranium. The United States says no such right exists for any country. Different levels of enriched uranium are needed to produce nuclear power and nuclear weapons.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammed Javad Zarif spoke to reporters after the deal was announced.

"Many times, at least twice very explicitly in this text, this recognition is there that Iran will have an enrichment program. And we believe that we are right, and we are exercising that right and we only require respect for that right."

The nuclear agreement has many critics. Israeli officials say it does nothing to stop Iranian efforts to build nuclear weapons. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu condemned the deal.

He said this is not a historic agreement, but a historic mistake.

In Washington, President Barack Obama sought to answer concerns of Israel and American partners in the Middle East. Mr. Obama said the deal halts Iran's nuclear program for the first time in almost 10 years. He said the next step will be to negotiate a detailed and lasting solution.

The president appealed to American lawmakers not to move forward with new sanctions against Iran. Senator Saxby Chambliss is a member of the Republican Party from Georgia. He objects to any easing of economic pressure against Iran.

"Now is just not the time to ease sanctions when they are working."

Many people are waiting to see what happens next. Ephrim Asculai was an official with the International Atomic Energy Agency. He now works at the Institute for Defense Security Studies in the Israeli city of Tel Aviv. He says the agreement answers many concerns over Iran's nuclear activities. But he is worried about some of the details, like whether Iran will let international inspectors visit all of its nuclear centers.

Mark Fitzpatrick is with the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London. He says the two sides must now honor the agreement to show they can honor a deal.

“Implementing it will show that they both mean what they say. It’ll be very important that the two sides carry it out so that both sides can show their doubters – and both sides have real skeptics and doubters – that the other side can strike a deal and keep to it.”

And that’s In The News, from VOA Learning English. I’m Steve Ember.