

No nuclear double standard: Saudi Arabia

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Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al-Faisal said here yesterday every country in the region has the right to develop nuclear programs for peaceful means. He, however, warned against adopting double standard in the implementation of International Atomic Energy Association (IAEA) treaties in the case of some countries while turning a blind eye toward others in the region.

"IAEA rules and regulations should be applied on all the countries in the region without exception," he said. "And that includes Israel."

Prince Saud, who arrived at the 102nd Gulf Cooperation Council's ministerial meeting behind the wheel of his BMW with Qatari Foreign Minister Sheikh Hamad Al-Thani and GCC Secretary-General Abdul Rahman Al-Attiyah as passengers, inaugurated yesterday's meeting. All foreign ministers of the GCC member countries attended with the exception of Bahrain's minister.

Prince Saud said that the Iranian nuclear crisis had "added an additional burden" to the already existing challenges in the region. The issue must be dealt with in a "rational manner away from rigidity and tension."

The prince said the new security agreement being implemented in Iraq "would not achieve its goals without the establishment of true national reconciliation" in which all Iraqis would reap the fruits of unity. That reconciliation, he added, would end sectarian violence and spread the ideals of harmony and peace in a stable and prosperous Iraq.

The minister said the worsening security situation puts a great responsibility on the Iraqi government.

Prince Saud said the current crises in the region had taken "tensions in Arab and Islamic world to new realms." Among the challenges were combating "sectarian differences" and "violence between Sunnis and Shiites."

Due to the gravity of the situation, the Kingdom has initiated talks on this with all its neighbors, including the Islamic Republic of Iran, he said. Prince Saud said the Kingdom had discussed these matters with the Iranian leadership. The talks, he said, were aimed at achieving a unified stance and achieve goals for security and prosperity in the region.

The foreign minister said that "there was no improvement in the situation in Lebanon."

He called on Lebanese parties to put their national interests before everything else. Despite the international community supporting the government of Fouad Siniora, Prince Saud said, it was up to the Lebanese people to determine their own future.

The minister also said the GCC commended the agreement reached in Makkah between Palestinian groups, describing it as "the beginning of the end of Palestinian suffering."

He said the initiative of a new national unity government would also push forward the peace process and pave way for the international community to help the Palestinian government.

Prince Saud said the GCC condemned the digging near Al-Aqsa Mosque, which he said not only violated the sanctity of the mosque, Islam's third holiest site, but was also in "clear violation of the 4th Geneva Convention which forbids the occupier to ruin historical, religious, and world heritage sites."