



# General Assembly

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## Human Rights Council

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Agenda item 3

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development**

### **Written statement\* submitted by Organization for Defending Victims of Violence, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[01 June 2019]

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\* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.

## **Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the right to health**

### **The Impact of Unilateral Coercive Measures on the Right to Health**

The United States of America (US) has publicly announced that the Unilateral Coercive Measures (UCMs) against the Islamic Republic of Iran (Iran) have exempted food and medicine and medical equipment from sanctions, however, the reality is totally different and sanctions seriously limits the access of civilians to food, medicine and medical care.

Around the world, UCMs violate the people's right to life, right to food, right to health, right to work, right to education, right to development, right to an adequate standard of living and the right to a safe and clean environment.

### **UCMs and the Right to Health**

Since August 7th 2018, the United States has banned banking transactions between the Islamic Republic of Iran and other countries. For this reason, money cannot be transferred to foreign countries and Iranian medicine companies cannot pay for importing medicine or raw material into the country and food companies will not be able to import food. In such a situation, the target country is in a blockade of import of all essential items specially food and medicine.

Consequently, the price of medicine and food escalates and the supply of essential items decreases which in itself adversely affects the lives and health of all vulnerable groups in the country. The United States sanctions on all financial transaction between the Islamic Republic of Iran (Iran) and any foreign company can cause serious shortage of medicine, medical equipment and food and threaten thousands of lives.

According to Javaid Rehman, the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran,<sup>1</sup> companies exporting medical supplies to the Islamic Republic of Iran face challenges in accessing non-sanctioned banking services as well as shortages of foreign currency in the country, which limit the possibility of payments to foreign companies.

Following declarations<sup>2</sup> that the Society for worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT) could be subject to sanctions, SWIFT indicated its decision to suspend some Iranian banks.

The Special Rapporteur is concerned that by preventing financial transfers to the Islamic Republic of Iran, the aforementioned secondary sanctions, which target third parties, are likely to hinder the production, availability and distribution of essential medical and pharmaceutical equipment and supplies, which could potentially increase mortality rates.

According to the Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights: "The current system creates doubt and ambiguity which makes it all but impossible" for the Islamic Republic of Iran to import "urgently needed humanitarian goods.

This ambiguity causes a 'chilling effect' which is likely to lead to silent deaths in hospitals as medicines run out, while the international media fail to notice."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See [www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary\\_iran\\_the\\_case\\_for\\_protecting\\_humanitarian\\_trade](http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_iran_the_case_for_protecting_humanitarian_trade).

<sup>2</sup> See [www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2018/11/287090.htm](http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2018/11/287090.htm)

<sup>3</sup> See [www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23469&LangID=E](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23469&LangID=E)

Another factor that limits access to food and medicine is that the re-imposed United States sanctions on the Islamic Republic of Iran, prohibited the purchase or acquisition of the United States' dollar banknotes by the Iranian government.

The ban accelerates the drastic decline of Iranian currency, Rial, against the dollar that leads to the skyrocketing of prices of all essential items including medicine, thus limiting the public access to food, medicine and healthcare, which is an unacceptable method of placing political pressure on a country.

“Regime change through economic measures likely to lead to the denial of basic human rights and indeed possibly to starvation has never been an accepted practice of international relations,” said Idriss Jazairy, the UN Special Rapporteur concerned with the negative impact of sanctions.

“The extraterritorial application of unilateral sanctions is clearly contrary to international law,” the expert said. “I am deeply concerned that one State can use its dominant position in international finance to harm not only the Iranian people, who have followed their obligations under the UN-approved nuclear deal to this day, but also everyone in the world who trades with them.”<sup>4</sup>

Few months ago, natural disasters added to the complexity of sanctions in Iran. Unprecedented flood and rainfalls destructively affected 24 provinces out of 31. As the country was struggling with the management of the natural disaster, the already-in-place illegal Unilateral Coercive Measures (UCMs) imposed on Iran by the United States were showing their malignant impact more than ever.

Contrary to the statements made by the United States Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, on April 2, 2019, who claimed the United States stands ready to contribute to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, that would “direct the money through the Iranian Red Crescent for relief,” the United States has been preventing any financial aid to Iran. United States has been continuing to threaten all third parties against sending financial aid to Iran and prevents all banks and even the Red-Cross from any type of financial support.

Iran Red-Crescent Society (IRCS) has announced that “No foreign cash aids have been made to the Iranian Red Crescent Society, as there are basically no financial channels for such purpose.

Even though, certain countries and organizations have announced their readiness to offer cash contributions, given the inhumane sanctions against Iran, there is no channel for cash aids to be sent to IRCS”<sup>5</sup>.

Also, it has even been very difficult for the Iranians residing out of Iran to direct money into their flood-stricken homeland due to the sanctions on Iran Financial transactions. That is, even in emergency situations, when the country which is challenging the natural disaster is supposed to receive foreign support, sanctions are kept in place and prevent any financial transfers to Iran to alleviate the hardship that the people experience.

### **Recommendations**

- ODVV calls on Mr. Dainius Pūras, the Special Rapporteur on the right to health to pursue joint objectives and act with cooperation of the Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of sanctions on human rights, pay attention to the negative effects of UCMs on people within the scope of their mandate and offer recommendations on how to prevent such effects.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=24566&LangID=E>

<sup>5</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/report/iran-islamic-republic/no-cash-donations-international-donors-ircs>

- ODVV urges the Special Rapporteur on the right to health to pay attention to the negative human rights and humanitarian consequences of the United States sanctions on Iranians' access to food and medicine.

- The ODVV calls on the Special Rapporteur on the right to health to discuss the sanctions pressure in public statements and reports submitted to the Human Rights Council and to show the inhuman effects of the UCMs on the human rights of targeted people especially children and the disabled.

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