



# General Assembly

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## Human Rights Council

Forty-second session

9–27 September 2019

Agenda item 2

**Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General**

### **Written statement\* submitted by Organization for Defending Victims of Violence (ODVV), 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.

[19 August 2019]

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

## **Oral update of the HC on the situation of human rights in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela**

Organization for Defending Victims of Violence (ODVV) welcomes the recent UN High Commissioner criticism of Unilateral Coercive Measures (UCMs) imposed on Venezuela, as measures that violate the rights of vulnerable groups and “increase the suffering” of people living in the country. According to Michelle Bachelet’s recent comments, “the sanctions are extremely broad and fail to contain sufficient measures to mitigate their impact on the most vulnerable sectors of the population.”<sup>1</sup>

However, ODVV expresses serious concerns over some sections of the report published by OHCHR following the High Commissioner’s visit to Venezuela. In ODVV’s view four serious sources of bias in the report include: limited discussion of sanctions, subjective interpretation of sanctions effect, over-looking the effect of sanctions on the government and disregard of the valuable lived-experiences of NGOs working in the country.

### **Limited Discussion of Sanctions**

Dedicating too little space to sanctions in the report and overlooking the extensive negative impact of sanctions on provision of all social services is deplorable. Considering the fact that imposition of sanctions on a country negatively affects all aspects of social life and can lead to violation of all human rights especially the right to life and the right to health to a point that the staggering record of sanctions-affected deaths were reported to be 40000 lives<sup>2</sup> in ONE year, in Venezuela, it is expected that the HC report would present a more extensive discussion of the sanctions detrimental effects on the target community.

### **Subjective Interpretation of Sanctions Effect**

Subjective interpretation of sanctions, making the claim that “The large majority of sanctions ... are targeted in nature...” is unfortunate, indicating that the report has no clear picture of the way sanctions target a country. What is worst, the report does not differentiate between a claim made by UCM source countries that sanctions are “targeted” and the on-the-ground reality of sanctions that indiscriminately take human lives. What is seriously ignored by the report is that economic sanctions on a county trade, including oil export, can never be “targeted in nature” and when the economy of a country is destroyed by sanctions all civilians will be subject to huge sufferings with the vulnerable groups bearing most of the burnt.

### **Over-looking the Effect of Sanctions on Governance**

Underestimation of the factors that adversely affect the State governance is another factor affecting the impartiality of the report. The report fails to present an account of the way UCMs meddle with the effectiveness of the government efforts to meet its commitments and provide various services to the population.

### **Disregard of NGOs**

The report has chosen to give no reference to the NGOs who examine the effect of sanctions on innocent population. The field surveys of NGOs can shed light on all the murky images that exist in the minds of international community on the targeted nature of some UCMs and can make it crystal

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/aug/09/un-rights-chief-decries-latest-us-sanctions-venezuela-michelle-bachelet>

<sup>2</sup> <http://cepr.net/publications/reports/economic-sanctions-as-collective-punishment-the-case-of-venezuela>

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clear for the world and the United Nations that sanctions are designed to excessively violate all human rights<sup>5</sup> in order to create intolerable pain in the target population.

Being over-concerned with sanctions effects on civilian populations ODVV:

- Calls upon the UN High Commissionaire to encourage publication of more impartial reports by OHCHR, considering all various aspects of social problems while reporting the situation of human rights of a country which targeted by sanctions and to draw on the huge body of research conducted by OHCHR itself in order to gain a clear picture on how UCMs would practically work on the ground.
  - Urges the all monitoring mechanisms of the Human Rights Council including the Special Procedures, to pay serious attention to the unnecessary civilian sufferings caused by imposition of “Unilateral Coercive Measures” on countries and report the pain to the HRC; closely co-operate with the Special Rapporteur on the Unilateral Coercive Measures to create a universal declaration on UCMs.
  - Calls on the UN HRC, UN HC and OHCHR to do their best to protect all civilian victims of Unilateral Coercive Measures in all target countries and to create justice mechanisms to hold the source countries accountable for all the adverse effects of UCMs on vulnerable groups and the crimes committed by the source countries through UCMs, creating access to compensation especially effective financial compensation for all UCM victims.
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<sup>5</sup> The way UCMs intentionally violate all human rights is described in Richard Nephew’s book: The Art of Sanctions. <https://cup.columbia.edu/book/the-art-of-sanctions/9780231180269>