



General Assembly

Distr.: General
16 June 2020

English only

Human Rights Council

Forty-fourth session

15 June–3 July 2020

Agenda items 2 and 3

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

**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.

[26 May 2020]

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

GE.20-07937(E)



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Impact of Unilateral Coercive Measures (UCM)s on the right to international solidarity during COVID-19 pandemic

The growing number of COVID-19 virus cases, faces the world with unprecedented challenges and as the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, has underlined, COVID-19 is the greatest test we have faced since the formation of the UN.¹

According to World Health Organization (WHO), considering the alarming levels of spread and severity COVID-19 can be characterized as a pandemic.² A pandemic requires countries to accelerate their efforts, striking the right balance between protecting health and preventing economic and social disruption, while respecting human rights.³ While, states bear the brunt of making difficult choices between possible solutions, the new challenge moves across borders and as the virus spreads to developing countries and countries with weaker health systems, all of the international community should cooperate to confront the problem together.

In this situation, international solidarity is necessary to decisively combat the pandemic. As International cooperation is the core of international solidarity,⁴ the world must enhance co-operation. Unfortunately, some countries such as the United States of America (US) are not in the same side with others.

The US response to the Islamic Republic of Iran (Iran) has aimed at worsening the conditions which were already affected by the US Unilateral Coercive Measures (UCM)s. When the Trump administration withdrew from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), it also reinstated UCMs prohibiting Iran from oil export, earning a national income and having access to global currencies. These sanctions along with potential civil and criminal penalties⁵ — in the case that the Treasury Department finds for violations of the U.S sanctions laws — influence both Iranian society and Iranian government preparedness and response plan to combat COVID-19 pandemic. Following the re-imposition of UCMs on Iran, most foreign companies, governments and individuals were discouraged about facilitating trade with Iranian entities. When the pandemic arrived in Iran in February and March 2020, it was nearly impossible for Iranian companies and hospitals to import essential medicines and medical equipment.⁶

In a world of increased interdependence, cooperation must be grounded in the principles of human rights and according to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, who warned about the negative impacts of sanctions “Progress in upholding human rights is essential to improve those systems [the health systems in sanctioned countries], but obstacles to the import of vital medical supplies, including over-compliance with sanctions by banks, will create long-lasting harm to vulnerable communities”.⁷

In the face of the global pandemic, it is clear that international solidarity is an important way to rethinking the concept of today’s geopolitics. The pandemic brings governments, organizations and individuals from across the world together to find and support a common solution and obviously no country can cope with it alone.

Recommendations:

- Since the UCMs are contrary to international law, international humanitarian law, the Charter and the norms and principles governing peaceful relations among States, and

¹ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/03/1060702>.

² <https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---11-march-2020>.

³ <http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-emergencies/coronavirus-covid-19/news/news/2020/3/who-announces-covid-19-outbreak-a-pandemic>.

⁴ <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Solidarity/Pages/InternationalSolidarity.aspx>.

⁵ See for example: https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/faqs/Sanctions/Pages/faq_iran.aspx.

⁶ <https://www.lawfareblog.com/challenges-us-sanctions-against-iran-during-coronavirus-pandemic>.

⁷ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/03/1060092>.

on long-term, these measures may result in social problems and raise humanitarian concerns in the States targeted,⁸ the Organization for Defending Victims of Violence (ODVV) calls for immediate lifting of all UCMs imposed by the US on target countries such as Iran and avoid weakening their health care system.

- ODVV requests the independent expert on human rights and international solidarity to assess the real impact of UCMs on the right to solidarity and cooperation in target countries during pandemic and strongly condemn its use by certain countries such as the US as one of the most serious threats to solidarity.
 - Also, ODVV encourages the Independent Expert on international solidarity to cooperate with the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on UCMs to publicly condemn resort to unilateral sanctions.
 - As the Covid-19 pandemic is global and challenges the world, the ODVV calls the international community, the international human rights and the humanitarian law bodies and institutions to stand in solidarity with frontline workers of Covid-19 in Iran, do not left them behind and help them to cooperate regionally and internationally to confront this global problem.
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⁸ See for example: E/CN.4/RES/1994/47 and resolution 27/21 and Corr.1 on human rights and unilateral coercive measures. Available at:
<https://www.refworld.org/docid/3b00f0b318.html>
<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/UCM/Pages/SRCoerciveMeasures.aspx>.