



# 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**

**Joint written statement\* submitted by Asociación Cubana de las Naciones Unidas (Cuban United Nations Association), Fundación Latinoamericana por los Derechos Humanos y el Desarrollo Social, Jose Marti Cultural Society, Khiam Rehabilitation Center for Victims of Torture, Organization for Defending Victims of Violence, non-governmental organizations 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 2024]

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



## **Impediments on the Enjoyment of the Right to Health**

We note the limited concerns expressed by Special Rapporteur on the Right to Health concerning the negative impact of Unilateral Coercive Measures (UCM) (1) on this right and express serious worries over the mandate holder's scarce attention to the detrimental impacts of UCMs on the right to health, widely discussed by the Special Rapporteur on UCMs and affirmed by the significant body of research conducted on the field.

We also note the report (2) submitted by the Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures and human rights Alena Douhan to the 54th session of the Human Rights Council on " Impact of unilateral coercive measures on the right to health", which emphasizes on the vulnerability of health systems around the world to the enforcement of unilateral sanctions and the growing cases of over-compliance and excessive de-risking policies of banks and businesses. The report highlights that UCMs pose serious challenges to the procurement and delivery of medicines, medical equipment and other humanitarian goods, which are by default exempted from any restrictions.

In addition to Professor Douhan's reports and statements, some of which are joined by the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Health, we would draw attention to the paragraph 41 of the General Comment No. 14, of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights which calls on the states parties to refrain from imposing embargoes or similar measures restricting the supply of another State with adequate medicines and medical equipment, as well as the General Comment No. 8, on the relationship between economic sanctions and respect for economic, social and cultural rights.

In line with the UN documents, we also draw the attention of the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Health to the bitter on-the –ground realities created by UCMs in sanctioned countries.

### **Some Alarming Findings**

We reiterate on the fact that the UCM massive impacts on the right to health demand adequate attention of the Special Rapporteur on the right to health and draw her attention to shocking "tip-of-the- iceberg" findings from sanctioned countries including the Islamic Republic of Iran, Cuba, Syrian Arab Republic, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela , and the, representing a tinge of the huge burden of health issues imposed by UCMs on civilian lives.

### **Islamic Republic of Iran**

In the Islamic Republic of Iran, the unilateral coercive measures have seriously impacted the right to health for many patients with chronic disease, leading to unnecessary sufferings and premature death. The Iranian Thalassaemia Society and the Iran EB Society have documented early death for their patients including children, due to lack of access to life-saving medicine under sanctions.

Limitations on trade, imposed by sanctions, have impacted the capacity of pharmaceutical companies in provision of raw materials for medicine production. Additionally, economic sanctions are found to be responsible for limitations of excess to necessary diagnosis and treatment for many chronic diseases.

A 2022 study found sanctions imposed on the Islamic Republic of Iran to have had adverse effects on Iranian health, including on mortality rates, the severity of illnesses, mental health, and child health (3), while the country has managed to overcome multiple complications created by UCMs for the people.

## **Cuba**

On Cuba, we would like to highlight the impacts of sanctions on public health, underscoring the findings of the released reports (4) that voice concerns on the negative impacts of sanctions on human lives through curtailing the access to necessary medicine, technologies, raw material, international cooperation as well as the macro economy. In 2021, it was estimated that the embargo costed Cuba about \$144 billion (5).

It has been emphasized that sanctions have hindered the country's outstanding efforts to improve the health system. Specifically, during the outbreak of the pandemic, the country has taken steps to prevent the spread of Covid-19, produce vaccines and treatment patients while all the efforts were adversely impacted by sanctions, costing human lives and unnecessary sufferings to the population.

The Cuba blockade has targeted the economy and disproportionately affected women's autonomy, family lives and livelihoods, limiting progress toward a more just and inclusive society and undermining the efforts toward women's empowerment and reduction of existing and potential inequalities.

## **The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela**

Similar to other sanctioned countries the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela has experienced infringe on a wide range of Human Rights as a result of sanctions, while running national projects to mitigate and compensate the detrimental impacts. A 2023 report (6) estimated that Sanctions have adversely impacted the health sector and created shortages of medical Supplies and medications, threatening the health of 300,000 patients. In 2019, shocking findings of a research documented the of death of 40,000 people in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, in a one-year period as a result of sanctions. (7)

In 2018, following a visit to the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, the UN Independent Expert on International Order, Alfred Zayas associated the unilateral sanctions imposed on the Bolivarian Republic Venezuela as "crimes against humanity, (8)" due to their detrimental health impacts and called for investigations by the International Criminal Court into the negative impacts of sanctions on the target population's health.

## **Syrian Arab Republic**

In the Syrian Arab Republic , the comprehensive unilateral sanctions, in particular the 2019 Caesar Sanctions, have imposed serious adverse effects on a broad spectrum of human rights, including the right to life and to health of the civilian population.

A comprehensive 2023 report considered the Syrian Arab Republic sanctions responsible for creating one of the largest refugee waves in modern history, along with avoidable hunger, disease, and death among civilians who were unable or unwilling to leave their homeland (9).

The over-compliance of banks and businesses with the imposed sanctions has disrupted international transactions with the sanctioned country as well as the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the population, undermining the life-saving operations of national and international humanitarian actors, costing human lives.

Devaluation of national currency, the growing inflation rate and significant decrease in oil exports - as the main source of national income - are all caused by sanctions and have created limitation of access to safe drinking water, sufficient food, required electricity and fuel, posing multiple challenges to the life and health of the people. In 2022 about 12 million (10) people in the Syrian Arab Republic were found to be food insecure with their health and life in jeopardy, while the country utilized all capacities at hand to protect its people.

## Recommendations:

One more time, we renew our repeated calls on the Special Rapporteur on health – which were previously expressed in our oral and written Human Rights Council statements, as well as our responses to the call for inputs issued by her mandate - and urge the Special Rapporteur to discuss UCMs as serious impediments to attainment of the highest levels of physical and mental health for the people of sanctioned countries.

We note the discussion on harm reduction raised by the Special Rapporteur, in relation with drug use, in 2023 and 2024, as an important theme and take the opportunity to emphasize that in sanctioned countries, the undermined economy and factors such as reduced health budgets, expose people to higher risks of drug use. That is, sanction lifting is even necessary for harm reductions associated with using drugs. Therefore, we call on the Special Rapporteur to define harm reduction in a broader sense, to include the policies, programs, and practices that aim to minimize the negative health impacts associated with unilateral sanctions.

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Bahjat Al-Fuad Rehabilitation of Medical and Psychological Centre for Torture Victims NGO(s) without consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.

1- Despite the proven deadly impact of UCMs on the right to health in target countries, the discussion is absent in the two recent reports of the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Health: " Drug policies and responses: a right to health framework on harm reduction" and " Food, nutrition and the right to health".

2- A/HRC/54/23

3- <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/hpm.3651>

4- One of the informing reports on the situation include "Right to Live without a Blockade", published by Cuba Oxfam, available at:

5- <https://www.eiir.eu/international-relations/assessment-of-the-impact-of-us-sanctions-on-cuba-a-counterproductive-approach/>

6- <https://www.pghr.org/post/sanctions-on-venezuela-implications-of-economic-restrictions-on-the-health-of-venezuelans#:~:text=Restrictions%20imposed%20by%20the%20sanctions,without%20access%20to%20proper%20care.>

7- <https://cepr.net/images/stories/reports/venezuela-sanctions-2019-04.pdf>

8- A/HRC/39/47/Add.1

9- <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9975820/>

10- <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/11/1130427>