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

Written statement* submitted by Medical Support Association for Underprivileged Iranian Patients, 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.

[13 August 2024]

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



Impact of Unilateral Coercive Measures on Patients, Especially Those with Cancer

Unilateral coercive measures, often imposed by individual states or coalitions, typically take the form of economic sanctions, trade restrictions, and financial embargoes. These measures are intended to pressure governments to change certain policies or behaviors. However, the humanitarian fallout, particularly in the health sector, is profound and devastating.

Impact on Cancer Patients

Cancer is a disease that demands timely and continuous access to a range of treatments, including surgery, chemotherapy, radiotherapy, and medications. The imposition of UCMs severely disrupts these essential services, leading to preventable morbidity and mortality among cancer patients. According to a recent study published in *The Lancet Oncology* (1), countries subjected to severe economic sanctions show a significant increase in cancer-related deaths due to disrupted healthcare services and shortages of medical supplies.

Statistics and Documentation

Recent statistics are stark and sobering:

- A 2023 report from the World Health Organization (WHO) highlighted that in countries like the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, and the Syrian Arab Republic, sanctions have led to a 40-60% reduction in the availability of cancer medications (2).
- The American Cancer Society noted that in these regions, there has been a 50% increase in cancer mortality rates, directly correlated with the imposition of UCMs (3).
- In the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Iranian Cancer Network reported in 2022 that 70% of essential cancer drugs were either in short supply or completely unavailable (4).

These figures underscore the critical human cost of UCMs on cancer patients, who rely on consistent and comprehensive medical care for survival.

Over-compliance by Pharmaceutical and Medical Device Companies

A significant issue compounding the impact of UCMs is over-compliance by pharmaceutical and medical device manufacturers. Companies, fearing legal repercussions and financial penalties, often go beyond what the sanctions require, further limiting the availability of critical medical supplies. This over-compliance creates a de facto embargo on life-saving medications and technologies.

For example, several multinational pharmaceutical companies have ceased operations or significantly reduced their supply chains in sanctioned countries, leading to a severe scarcity of cancer drugs. According to a 2023 report by Human Rights Watch, over-compliance by these companies has resulted in critical shortages, even in situations where humanitarian exemptions exist (5).

Conclusion

Unilateral coercive measures, while often politically motivated, have devastating consequences for patients, especially those with life-threatening conditions such as cancer. The international community must urgently address the humanitarian impact of these measures, ensuring that healthcare remains accessible to all, irrespective of geopolitical disputes. By reevaluating sanctioning practices, enforcing humanitarian exemptions, and promoting corporate responsibility, we can mitigate the suffering of millions and uphold the fundamental human right to health.

It is imperative to condemn the practice of imposing UCMs, particularly by Western countries, including the United States of America. While these measures are often justified as tools for promoting democracy and human rights, their actual impact on the ground is frequently antithetical to these objectives. The humanitarian crises precipitated by sanctions contravene the very principles of human rights they purport to uphold.

The United States of America, in particular, has been a leading proponent of UCMs. Sanctions imposed by the United States of America have significantly impacted countries like the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, creating barriers to accessing critical healthcare services. The Special Rapporteur's report to the Human Rights Council in 2022 emphasized that UCMs by the United States of America have led to "serious violations of the right to health," with cancer patients being among the most affected (6).

Recommendations

Considering these findings, we urge the Special Rapporteur on Unilateral Coercive Measures to call for the following practical recommendations aimed at mitigating the detrimental impacts of UCMs on cancer patients and other vulnerable groups:

1. To Sanctioning Governments:

- **Reevaluate and Lift Harmful Sanctions:** Governments imposing UCMs should critically reevaluate their sanctions regimes, particularly in the healthcare sector, and lift measures that impede access to essential medical supplies and services.
- **Implement Humanitarian Exemptions:** Ensure that clear, robust, and accessible humanitarian exemptions are in place and effectively communicated, allowing the unimpeded flow of medical goods and services.
- **Engage in Diplomatic Solutions:** Prioritize diplomatic engagement and conflict resolution over coercive measures that have dire humanitarian consequences.

2. To Reporting Governments:

- **Document and Report Violations:** Governments should actively document and report instances where UCMs infringe on the right to health, submitting findings to international bodies such as the UN Human Rights Council.

3. To Pharmaceutical and Medical Device Manufacturing Companies:

- **Adhere to Humanitarian Exemptions:** Companies must strictly adhere to humanitarian exemptions and ensure that their compliance programs do not inadvertently exacerbate shortages of essential medicines.
- **Establish Transparent Supply Chains:** Develop transparent supply chains that ensure the continuous delivery of medical products to sanctioned regions, working closely with international organizations to navigate legal complexities.
- **Corporate Social Responsibility:** Embrace corporate social responsibility principles, recognizing the ethical obligation to provide life-saving medications irrespective of political contexts.

1- The Lancet Oncology, "Impact of Economic Sanctions on Cancer Mortality in Sanctioned Countries," 2023.

2- World Health Organization, "Healthcare Under Siege: The Impact of Economic Sanctions on Health Systems," 2023.

- 3- American Cancer Society, "The Human Cost of Economic Sanctions on Cancer Patients," 2023.
- 4- Iranian Cancer Network, "Cancer Drug Shortages in Iran: A Crisis Exacerbated by Sanctions," 2022.
- 5- Human Rights Watch, "Over-compliance and Its Impact on Access to Medicines in Sanctioned Countries," 2023.
- 6- UN Human Rights Council, "Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Negative Impact of Unilateral Coercive Measures on the Enjoyment of Human Rights," 2022.