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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 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.

[17 August 2024]

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



Unilateral Coercive Measures and their Impact on the Promotion of International Order

Introduction

The Human Rights Council, in its resolution 18/6 creating the mandate of the Independent Expert on International Order, reaffirmed the urgent need for the establishment of an international economic order based on equity, sovereign equality, interdependence, common interest and cooperation among all States, irrespective of their economic and social systems.

However, unilateral coercive measures (UCMs)—such as economic sanctions, trade restrictions, and financial blockades imposed by individual States or groups of States—pose significant threats to the mentioned principles, international order and often result in severe human rights violations. Unilateral Coercive Measures are often justified on the grounds of promoting political or economic change, but in reality, they tend to exacerbate human suffering, disproportionately affecting vulnerable populations and infringing on basic human rights.

The extent and scope of the human rights violations caused by UCMs has encouraged the HRC to appoint a Special Rapporteur to discuss their negative impacts. This statement highlights the detrimental impact of UCMs on human rights and international order and recommendations for upholding an international order based on human rights.

Unilateral Coercive Measures and their Impact

Unilateral Coercive Measures "are imposed on countries beyond the authority of the UN and the international rule of law"(1) with the intention of compelling another State to change its behavior, policies, or governance structures, while, on the ground, they extensively violate the human rights of innocent populations (2), leaving severe humanitarian consequences. They, also undermine the fundamental principles of international law and the United Nations Charter, particularly with respect to State sovereignty, non-interference in domestic affairs, and respect for human rights.

Economic and other sanctions coupled with secondary sanctions, overcompliance and de-risking policies substantially affect the target countries' economy, the humanitarian situation and people's lives, including access to basic goods, services and infrastructure. The UN Special Rapporteur on UCMs has qualified such measures as a form of "economic warfare", with serious adverse effects on the lives of millions of people, living inside and outside the target countries (3).

Sanctions contribute to high unemployment rates, particularly in industries reliant on international trade and foreign investment. They also, result in severe shortages of medicines, medical equipment, and essential healthcare services. In countries like the Islamic Republic of Iran, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) and the Syrian Arab Republic, sanctions have impeded the ability of governments to import life-saving medications, medical devices, and the raw materials needed for pharmaceutical production. This has led to a spike in preventable deaths, chronic illnesses going untreated, and the resurgence of diseases that were previously controlled. The right to health, protected under Article 12 of the ICESCR, is thus systematically violated by the imposition of UCMs.

Of particular concern are significant challenges faced in the procurement and delivery of life-saving medicines and medical equipment produced by foreign companies and destined for the treatment of rare diseases, including certain types of cancer, thalassemia, hemophilia, leukemia, ichthyosis, multiple sclerosis, epidermolysis bullosa, autism and certain forms of diabetes (4).

UCMs frequently cause disruptions in food supply chains, driving up food prices and making basic necessities unaffordable for the average citizen. This leads to widespread malnutrition, especially among children, pregnant women, and the elderly.

Moreover, sanctions that limit access to clean water infrastructure further exacerbate public health crises, as seen in countries like the Syrian Arab Republic, where essential services have been decimated by years of conflict compounded by UCMs.

According to the Iranian Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture, the reimposition of sanctions in 2018 has jeopardized the country's food security by disrupting the supply of at least 10 million tons of agricultural imports, including the supply of livestock inputs, oilseeds and cooking oil, constituting a clear violation of the right to food in terms of access and adequacy (5).

UCMs Undermine the International Order

UCMs create social and economic models that negatively impact a democratic and equitable international order. The international order, based on the principles of multilateralism, respect for state sovereignty, and adherence to international law, is increasingly undermined by the imposition of UCMs.

The UN Charter, which establishes the framework for global peace and security, emphasizes the importance of collective action and the peaceful resolution of disputes. UCMs, by contrast, are unilateral actions imposed by states outside the legal framework of the UN, and often without the endorsement of multilateral bodies such as the UN Security Council.

The arbitrary nature of UCMs, which are not subject to international legal standards or review, threatens the rule of law and undermines the legitimacy of international legal institutions such as the International Court of Justice (ICJ). The erosion of sovereignty through UCMs sets a dangerous precedent for the international community, as it opens the door to further unilateral actions that disregard international legal norms.

Recommendations:

Considering the adverse impact of UCMs on international order and human rights we call on the UN independent expert to:

- Remind all the UN Member States of their obligations under the Charter of the United Nations and the HRC resolution 18/6;
- Urge States to observe the principles and norms of international law including the principles of sovereignty, equality, political independence, non-intervention in the domestic affairs of a States and the peaceful settlement of international disputes;
- Call on States to resort to multilateralism, dialogue, diplomacy and cooperation instead of unilateralism in resolving international disputes.

1- ODVV cited in A/HRC/52/34

2- <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=14639&LangID=E>
Intervention by Alfred de Zayas - Unilateral sanctions

3- A/74/165; A/HRC/42/46; A/HRC/39/54

A/HRC/51/33/Add.1: Visit to the Islamic Republic of Iran - Report of the Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights, Alena Douhan.

4- Ibid para. 28

5- Ibid para. 42