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## Human Rights Council

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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 Network of Women's Non- governmental Organizations in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 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.

[15 January 2020]

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



## **Sanctions and tobacco Violators of human rights, women's rights, and children's rights**

### **Introduction**

Human rights include the right to life and freedom, the right to work and education, the right to health, and so on. But there are situations where, intentionally or unintentionally, these rights are seriously challenged and impaired. Tobacco and sanctions are two cases of violations of human rights, women's rights, and children's rights, which are addressed in this report. Paying attention to human rights violations through the lens of "sanctions and tobacco" and providing solutions in this regard can lead to a desirable situation for individuals, especially women, in terms of their well-being and health.

### **Tobacco use, tobacco costs, and tobacco-related diseases**

Today, human health has faced a serious challenge called tobacco use. The continuing growth of medical science has proven the relationship between tobacco use and various diseases. The Islamic Republic Iran is no exception, and various studies confirm the prevalence of tobacco use, with official statistics proving the high costs of tobacco use and the treatment of diseases caused by tobacco smoking. Tobacco is a major cause of cardiovascular, pulmonary, and cancerous diseases. According to statistics, in the year 2018, the three leading causes of death for Iranians were cardiovascular diseases (39.1%), cancers (30.1%), and respiratory diseases (9.3%).<sup>1</sup>

According to the National Document on the Control and Prevention of Non-Communicable Diseases, Iran should reduce the prevalence of premature death from non-communicable diseases by 30 percent by 2025. In fact, the Document cites a 30 percent reduction in tobacco use as one of the key issues to achieve this goal. However, according to studies and various evidence, the decline in the age of tobacco use as well as the increasing growth in tobacco use, especially hookahs, have been significantly higher in women than in men in recent decades. In addition to the general dangers associated with tobacco use, women are at risk of physiologically specific factors of their sex, which doubles the importance of the issue.

According to statistics, in 2017, the prevalence of smoking was 25.16% in Iranian men and 4.01% in Iranian women. Also, cigarette smoking in young women has increased from less than 1% to 2.1% and has decreased in young men from 5.1% to 4.8%. In addition, tobacco use among adolescents 13 to 15 years of age has increased, most of which are among female adolescents.<sup>2</sup>

### **Why tobacco violates women's and children's rights?**

Review of some of the international human rights documents related to the effects and harms of tobacco and its second-hand smoke clearly shows violations of the rights of individuals, especially women and children. The most important of these rights are the right to life and the right to health, which will be addressed below.

### **The right to life**

Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 6 of the Convention on the Rights of the

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<sup>1</sup> Social Cap: Latest marriage and divorce statistics from the spokesperson of the Registration organization. May 13, 2018, available at: [www.sarpoosh.com/society/family-women](http://www.sarpoosh.com/society/family-women). [Persian]

<sup>2</sup> Valizadeh, B. (2018). National Tobacco Control Program. Tehran: Ministry of Health and Medical Education. [Persian]

Child, and many other international treaties emphasize the right to life, and all countries have upheld it as an inherent human right.<sup>3</sup>

## **The right to health**

The right to health is universal. This right applies not only to access to health-care services but also other factors affecting health. These are very widespread factors and include tobacco control, including the right to have knowledge about tobacco harms and to receive appropriate education about it.<sup>4</sup> The right to health and to have access to medical therapeutic services are rights that are highlighted in various human rights documents.

According to the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, the right of all human beings to enjoy the best of their physical and mental health shall be recognized and all countries shall commit themselves to taking all necessary measures to accomplish tasks such as decreasing abortions, decreasing children mortality, improving the healthy development of children, improving health services, prevention, treatment, and control of diseases, especially communicable and non-communicable diseases, and creating the appropriate conditions for public centers and medical assistance for all groups of people. These rights are also emphasized in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.<sup>5</sup>

It has been showed that tobacco, as the largest preventable cause of death in the world, violates all these rights. According to the Tobacco Atlas, in 2017, tobacco caused more than 7.1 million deaths, of which two million were among women. Also, according to the latest reports of the World Health Organization, in 2019, smoking kills one person every four seconds, killing 8 million people annually. In 2019, another one million people died from tobacco second-hand smoke.

Therefore, it can be argued that tobacco not only violates the right to life, i.e. the highest human right, but it also violates the right to health. Moreover, women are the biggest victims of the lucrative tobacco industry, whether they are smokers themselves or exposed to second-hand smoke. Also, infants and children are not immune from the effects of smoke. For example, some reports show that mortality was 23 percent higher in infants who had a smoking mother.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, the negative effects of tobacco use on the health of pregnant women, children, infants, and fetuses are completely contrary to the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The negative consequences of tobacco use on mentioned individuals are as follows:

### **The negative effects of second-hand smoke on pregnant women**

- premature delivery (rupture of the amniotic sac);
- spontaneous abortion;
- ectopic pregnancy;
- stillbirth;
- absorption of nickel (a carcinogenic substance in cigarettes) in the placenta in pregnant women.

<sup>3</sup> Goodarzi, S. (2018). Investigating the impacts of western sanctions on human rights and women's rights. *Quarterly Journal of Women's Rights Protection*, 3(9): 127-152. [Persian]

<sup>4</sup> Pazoki, Z. (2014). *The Impact of sanctions on health right according to the international law*. M.A. Thesis in International Law, University of Tehran, 2014. [Persian]

<sup>5</sup> Goodarzi, S. (2018). Investigating the impacts of western sanctions on human rights and women's rights. *Quarterly Journal of Women's Rights Protection*, 3(9): 127-152. [Persian]

<sup>6</sup> Drope J., Schluger N., Cahn Z., Drope J., Hamill S., Islami F., Liber A., Nargis N., Stoklosa M. (2018). *The Tobacco Atlas*. Atlanta: American Cancer Society.

**The negative effects of second-hand smoke on fetuses, infants, and children**

- behavioral disorders;
- asthma and other allergies;
- middle ear infection;
- lung infection (pneumonia);
- increased likelihood of colds in children;
- increased likelihood of smoking in adolescence and youth;
- impaired fetal lung growth;
- neural anomalies in the fetus, including convulsions, learning difficulties, or irritability in children;
- low birth weight;
- sudden infant death syndrome;
- febrile convulsion;
- reduction of IQ in children.

**Sanctions: human rights violators**

Sanctions may run counter to the right to health. Health, in short, means the normal and proper functioning of an organism free from illness or malfunction. But health, in a broad sense, means having a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being of which absence of illness is only a small part. The sanctions on medicines and other essentials showed that these sanctions are inconsistent with human rights. Therefore, the health system is not immune from these sanctions,<sup>7</sup> and the shortage of medicines, medical equipment, operating room equipment, etc. are some of the problems that have arisen following the new United States of America (US) sanctions, which pose serious challenges to Iranian patients and their families.

This is precisely a violation of Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states:

- Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing, and medical care and necessary social services.
- Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance.<sup>8</sup>
- The effects of sanctions on target countries include increased child mortality, widespread poverty, immigration, food and drug shortages, and other social and economic disruptions. Sanctions have had adverse effects on the individual and social lives of women, as the most vulnerable group in society. The imposition of economic sanctions has reduced the educational and occupational levels of Iranian women. Economic sanctions have forced many women who were formerly in charge of the household to become unemployed.<sup>9</sup>

**The effects of sanctions on the right to health**

While some foreign companies left Iran after imposing US sanctions and abandoned their contracts with Iranian companies, the foreign investment amounted to about \$ 60 million in the first five months of this year, half of which was invested in tobacco production. According

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<sup>7</sup> Pazoki, Z. (2014). The Impact of sanctions on health right according to the international law. M.A. Thesis in International Law, University of Tehran, 2014. [Persian]

<sup>8</sup> Impact of sanctions on public health. July 25, 2019, available at: [www.eghtesadonline.com](http://www.eghtesadonline.com). [Persian]

<sup>9</sup> Goodarzi, S. (2018). Investigating the impacts of western sanctions on human rights and women's rights. Quarterly Journal of Women's Rights Protection, 3(9): 127-152. [Persian]

to the report of the Iranian Ministry of Industry and Commerce, the investment was intended to create employment and prevent currency outflows. Experts say that the high-profit margins of the Iranian cigarette market are an incentive for US, British, Japanese, and Korean companies to invest in cigarette production.

Removing smuggled cigarettes from the market, modernizing machinery and equipment, and producing high-quality products were among the goals stated by officials to invite foreign investors to produce their products in Iran. Some foreign companies in Iran now have extensive production, but this production is only in the field of tobacco.

Therefore, the question arises as to why Japan and South Korea can invest in the cigarette industry and have no restrictions in this regard, but in areas such as health and medicine - especially smoking cessation drugs - there are restrictions and sanctions.<sup>10</sup> The evidence shows that world powers, in particular, the United States, have violated human rights in the individual, social, and health spheres.

## Suggestions and requests

Economic sanctions, either unilaterally or by the United Nations, contravene the principles and goals of various international treaties because of neglecting the fundamental rights of individuals in the target countries. Article 4 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights contains non-violable human rights, which must be respected by all states even in emergencies. Accordingly, the following items are recommended:

- Imposing extensive sanctions are one form of human rights violation. Therefore, sanctions on medicines and medical equipment related to people's health should be exempted, according to international treaties.
- Imposing sanctions on people's needs and not imposing sanctions on the importation of cigarettes are both double standards in the United States' policies and violation of the United Nations treaties.
- The necessity of forming a global coalition of victims of sanctions by target countries against great powers which requires protection and oversight by the United Nations.

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<sup>10</sup> Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting News Agency (2019). Foreign investment in Iranian tobacco: selling the community's health. Available at: [www.iribnews.ir](http://www.iribnews.ir). [Persian]