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**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and
to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly
entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and
peace for the twenty-first century”**

Statement submitted by The Institute for Protection of Women’s Rights (IPWR), a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Violation of women's rights in sanctioned countries

Gender gap has been a major issue since the end of the 19th century, and countries around the world have since made great efforts to empower women and bring about change. However, economic barriers still play a major role in women's lives and have a lasting impact on the economy, environmental degradation and poverty. Women's empowerment reduces poverty and has a major impact on the lives of women and their children.

While sanctions were originally intended to prevent war and hold certain actors accountable, the misuse of this instrument and its uneven imposition have turned it into a tool whose consequences are not dissimilar to warfare. Economic sanctions that transcend national borders and aim to completely block a country's trade are tantamount to economic warfare against civilians.

Unilateral sanctions prevent the populations of affected countries from fully exercising their human rights, and the impact is particularly severe for vulnerable groups. Sanctions can have a devastating impact on the economic and political stability of the target countries, and women often suffer particularly from the effects of such external shocks due to their weak socio-economic and political status.

In addition to women and children, these groups include indigenous peoples, people with disabilities, refugees, internally displaced persons, migrants, people living in poverty, older people, people with serious illnesses and others who face particular challenges in society. In this situation, medicines and medical equipment cannot be delivered and people cannot reach hospitals for medical care, including for tests and check-ups during pregnancy, for the delivery of babies, for the vaccination of children and getting medical aid.

The impact of sanctions on humanitarian aid certainly harms all members (or at least the majority) of the target country. However, women and other marginalised groups bear the brunt of the suffering. When a country's economy shrinks due to sanctions, women are more likely than men to experience discrimination in hiring as well as more frequent dismissals. Since household management and reproductive work are seen as women's main tasks, their jobs are considered expendable compared to those of men.

When women lose their jobs in the midst of a struggling economy, social services that benefit women, such as state-supported education, health care and maternity leave, disappear. Economic desperation has pushed women into the informal labour market, forced labour and human trafficking.

Women are more economically burdened than men, but sanctions also affect women's health and undo gains made in women's social and political rights. The negative consequences of economic sanctions during the crisis COVID-19 were unacceptable from a human rights perspective. They have harmed the population and effectively restricted unrestricted access to humanitarian goods, in violation of the United States' international human rights obligations.

The economic impact of sanctions further exacerbates social inequalities for women in targeted countries. Economic suffering can motivate people to commit violent acts.

Recommendations

The international community must call on the United States to cease financial sanctions against countries and not to impose new sanctions

We call on the international community, and in particular the sanctioning states, to heed the devastating impact of sanctions and to take immediate concrete steps to address corporate and banking transgressions in accordance with international human rights law.

It is time to take action to remove these repressive sanctions or to design the structure and application of economic sanctions in a way that protects the health of those subject to them.

The use of economic sanctions for political purposes violates human rights and the norms of international conduct. Such action can trigger man-made humanitarian disasters of unprecedented proportions.

We call on the international community to engage in constructive dialogue to find a peaceful solution in accordance with the spirit and letter of the United Nations Charter before the indiscriminate use of economic starvation becomes the new ‘normal’.

We Iranian women human rights defenders, who are either currently working in Iran or have worked to provide practical support to women and vulnerable groups, call on the international community, the United Nations, states and international civil society alike to take all possible steps to stop this unnecessary and entirely avoidable march to war. Differences between states must be settled by peaceful means, as advocated by the UN Charter, without exposing innocent civilians to collective punishment. Causing hunger and disease through economic instruments should not be accepted in the 21st century.
