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progress on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for
Sustainable Development and to achieve the overarching
goal of poverty eradication”

Joint Statement submitted by, “the Institute for protection of
women’s rights, Maryam Ghasemi Educational Charity Institute
and the Iranian Elite Research Center” non-governmental
organizations 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

The effect of unilateral sanctions on women’s poverty

Economic sanctions in the modern world are one of the political tools used for punishing or expressing disapproval of the actions of a government or individual. In recent decades, the use of these tools on the international stage has grown, making it essential to examine their impact on the lives of ordinary people. Many study in the world show and assess the effects of economic sanctions on living standards, human development and economic indicators, and human rights in target countries.

The results of studies indicate that sanctions have had various impacts on different aspects of life, including per capita income, poverty, inequality, mortality, and human rights. In general, it can be argued that sanctions that restrict governments’ access to foreign currency have a negative impact on government’s ability to provide essential goods and public services, thereby making life difficult for people who have no role in political disputes.

One of the reasons that has worsened poverty among women in the world and hindered poverty reduction is the imposition of unilateral sanctions by some countries such as the United States. Unilateral sanctions cause severe civilian misery and profound social and economic dislocation. Their impact goes beyond humanitarian crises and leads to severe economic recession and social impoverishment. Unilateral sanctions harm everyone and are particularly damaging to the human rights of women, children, and other vulnerable groups within the populations of sanctioned countries. In addition to women and children, these groups include indigenous peoples, people with disabilities, refugees, internally displaced persons, migrants, people living in poverty, older persons, people affected by serious diseases, and others who face particular challenges in society.

Vulnerable groups are often those most dependent on social or humanitarian assistance, but the assistance often cannot be provided despite existing exemptions due to sanctions. The complexity of sanctions regimes, combined with extraterritorial enforcement and high penalties, has meant that unilateral sanctions are often not respected by companies for fear of the consequences of inadvertent violations. Sanctions destroy “development” successes, and their effects cannot be mitigated by humanitarian aid alone. But other, often neglected, vulnerable groups such as the chronically ill and elderly or other groups marginalized and excluded for economic, social, or political reasons should also be taken into account.

Women as organizers of family life, health care and education will often bear the burden of finding alternatives for their families in all cases. Apart from the immediate and visible effects – shortages and high prices – analysts warned that the sanctions could disrupt family dynamics. The implementation of these comprehensive sanctions against the country led to a severe economic collapse, limiting access to vital resources such as medicines, food and public health care. This deterioration in living conditions consequently had a negative impact on women’s participation in public life. The imposition of sanctions led to a downsizing of the country’s public sector, which adversely affected the female population by lowering wages and limiting opportunities for alternative sources of income.
In the sanctioned countries, before the imposition of economic sanctions, women sought education and professional careers, as this was seen as the most important means of achieving independence, freedom and equality. Due to the economic collapse, employment opportunities for women were limited to low-paid jobs in the public sector or full-time domestic work. Many educated middle-class women resorted to informal income-generating activities out of desperation over their income, as formal employment under sanctions was seen as socially and economically degrading. As a result, women’s professional careers and earnings were seen as secondary and temporary compared to those of men.

There is no specific legal instrument to regulate sanctions but minimally they should respect basic principles in international humanitarian law, such as ‘distinction’ and ‘proportionality’. Humanitarian agencies (for example, UNICEF and Save the Children), religious organizations (including the Quakers and the Vatican), networks of professional health organizations (for example the American Public Health Association and the World Medical Association) and human rights groups (such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch) have all been critical of sanctions. While no simple or uniform policy on sanctions may be possible, the major humanitarian effects can be anticipated and prevented or attenuated. In addition, affected countries can be helped to meet the basic needs of their citizens during sanctions, and their ability to recover and develop can be strengthened in the process.

**Recommendations**

- The negative impact of unilateral sanctions on women should not be underestimated and is perceived as a minor social problem in the sanctioned countries.

- Notes that the deterioration of the social and economic situation caused by unilateral sanctions has increased all forms of abuse and violence against women in violation of their human rights; stresses the need to increase public, financial and human resources to support women at risk of poverty and to address situations that put them at risk.