**Mandate of the United Nations Special Rapporteur**

**on the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures**

**on the enjoyment of human rights**

**Side Event**

**Impact of Unilateral Sanctions on Health-Related SDGs**

**Room XXV - Palais des Nations, Geneva**

20 September 2023, from 14:00 to 15:00h

**Statement by Prof. Michael Fakhri**

**UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food**

My name is Michael Fakhri and I am the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food.

I want to thank my colleague Alena Douhan, the Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights for inviting me to this side event.

The topic of this side event and Alena’s most recent report regarding the impact of unilateral sanctions on health-related SDGs is incredibly important.

As the Special Rapporteur has noted, and as well recognized in human rights, the right to health is not only about the right to health care. The right to health is holistic and embraces a wide range of socio-economic factors that promote conditions in which people can lead a healthy life.

Therefore, this extends to the underlying determinants of health, such as food and nutrition, housing, access to safe and potable water and adequate sanitation, safe and healthy working conditions, and a healthy environment.

Of course, my focus is on food and nutrition.

Within my mandate, on the right to food and nutrition, unilateral coercive measures are a major concern.

I will first outline why unilateral coercive measures are problematic from a human rights perspective in general.

I will then address the issue of food and nutrition.

**II. GENERAL**

It has been known for decades that unilateral coercive measures are an ineffective international policy tool. Measures like blockades or economic sanctions are deployed with the intent to economically weaken an opposing national regime and generate domestic pressure to induce the regime to concede to foreign demands.

In reality, unilateral coercive measures often create or worsen a protracted crisis by collectively punishing people in target countries. Countries sometimes aim to only impose sanctions against designated individuals or groups.

These sanctions, however, still usually produce side effects that disrupt local, regional, and international food systems and economies, especially if the targeted people play a powerful role in the food system.

Humanitarian exemptions in unilateral sanctions are usually ineffective due to the absence of regular monitoring and the broad, often haphazard effect of sanctions on the economy.

Moreover, financial institutions tend to over-comply with unilateral sanctions to reduce the legal and business risks associated with inadvertent violations. This inhibits aid and magnifies harm.

To be sure, unilateral coercive measures are not the same as people calling from within their own countries for international boycotts, divestment, or sanctions against the government that rules them and people from abroad joining the campaign in solidarity with the struggle.

Despite the ineffectiveness of unilateral coercive measures, despite the human rights violations arising from unilateral coercive measures, rich countries continue to impose them.

In response, the local ruling class in targeted countries often point to such measures as the primary cause of their countries’ social and economic problems. This can deflect attention from domestic policies causing harm and human rights violations in the targeted country itself.

In sum, unilateral coercive measures are political ineffective, harm large amounts of people, and undermine the human rights system.

**III. Right to Food and Nutrition**

From a right-to-food perspective, unilateral coercive measures almost always lead to reducing entire populations’ access to healthy and nutritious food.

This of course weakens already marginalized groups such as peasants, workers, and indigenous peoples, especially women, children, older persons, people with disabilities, and racialized people.

In other words, unilateral coercive measures often weaponize food – by denying people access to healthy, nutritious, and affordable food. Unilateral coercive measures should be understood as a form of violence.

Thus, the effects of unilateral coercive measures are often the same as armed conflict – that is they lead to wide scale food insecurity.

In fact, from a right-to-food perspective, one of the main causes of hunger and famine is violence and armed conflict. In turn, food insecurity often leads to more violence and conflict.

Unilateral coercive measures are part of this viscous cycle, undermining people and community’s health.

I wish you all the best at this event. Thank you very much.