**Response: UCM-Study on impact of unilateral sanctions on human rights during the state of emergency amid COVID-19 pandemic**

SIHA Network is a network of civil society organizations that works in a number of strategic ways to challenge all forms of subordination of women and girls in the Greater Horn of Africa. As such, we approach these questions from the perspective of a South-led, women-led organization based in Sudan (although we work in several other countries in the Greater Horn region).

***Question 1: Do sanctions introduced by individual states or regional organizations without or beyond authorization of the UN Security Council targeting states and/ or non-state actors have an impact on enjoyment of human rights by the citizens of targeted states in the situation of natural and man-made emergency, including COVID-19 pandemic? Please, elaborate in detail.***

In the case of Sudan, the sanctions are nominally being lifted, but in reality, this has been a slow process and no real difference has been felt by the people in Sudan yet. The sanctions leveled against the Sudanese government have exacerbated the degree of poverty, political exclusion, and social isolation and subordination experienced by women in Sudan. The sanctions enabled the Islamist militant government to control the population and resources, and to cut the Sudanese people off from external cultural influences and access to knowledge and information. For 30 years the Sudanese population has lived in an isolation which the government used to justify and perpetuate gender-based oppression and many human rights abuses. This isolation has greatly hindered the development of human rights institutions in Sudan. The sanctions allowed the Sudanese government to more effectively disrupt the struggle for women’s rights, by giving the Islamists full control over the cultural avenues available to the Sudanese people. This has contributed to social and cultural polarization and discrimination against women and girls because it deprives Sudan the opportunity to participate in the global development of human rights and it removes pressure on the government to join international mechanisms for human rights.

Moreover, the sanctions have enabled corruption as the Sudanese government was cut off from many avenues of economic development through legal means, the government turned to illegal means, which come with increased human rights abuses. This state of affairs was worsened by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, as this caused a significant increase in the country’s economic hardship. Additionally, because of the sanctions Sudan faces significant barriers to be able to purchase PPE equipment and medications legal from the global market during the global shortage of medical supplies caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

***Question 2: What specific aspects of human rights are affected by unilateral sanctions in targeted States during the pandemic? Can you give examples of particular rights most affected by unilateral sanctions and in what way? What steps were taken by the sanctioning States on one hand and in the targeted States on the other hand to address those human rights violations and remedy the situation?***

The sanctions Sudan has faced for years, combined with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to human rights violations in the form of gender-based violence, as reports of male family members violently abusing their sister, daughters, wives, and nieces are increasing. The situation has also contributed to lack of access to sufficient food, water, and healthcare due both to the over-taxed, under equipped healthcare system and to dwindling sources of income, especially for informal laborers. Moreover, due to the sanctions Sudan lacks an internationally connected banking system, which reduces the capacity of the system to support loans and other resources needed for economic development and growth. This has impacted Sudanese women particularly, because inheritance and guardianship laws keep them trapped in cycles of poverty, and thus they would have more to gain from an opening of the economic and financial systems of Sudan. This opening would make way for an increased diversity of women’s employment and access to economic upward mobility, but such an opening would only be possible in a post-sanction, post-COVID-19 Sudan. Additionally, the right to information and knowledge has also been eroded by sanctions and the impacts of COVID-19.

***Question 3: Do sanctions have an impact on non-targeted third States and their citizens in the course of emergency, including the pandemic? Can you provide examples of this impact?***

The sanctions against the Sudanese state, also have negative impacts on large groups of citizens from non-targeted third States, as refugees and asylum seekers from other non-targeted third states who come to reside in Sudan comprise vulnerable population within Sudanese society, who are more acutely impacted by the adverse effects of the combined detrimental effect of COIVD-19 and sanctions upon Sudan. Sudan received a high number of refugees from around the Horn of Africa every year. The sanctions and dire economic situation brought on by COVID-19 exacerbate several of the root causes of human trafficking. Migrants and asylum seekers are particularly vulnerable to traffickers. Moreover, migrants and refugees are overrepresented in the informal labor, which leaves them particularly vulnerable to the impact of economic downturn.

***Question 4: Do unilateral sanctions have an impact on the ability of states to react to emergency situations and to protect human rights especially of the most vulnerable categories of population? If yes, what areas/ spheres / types of activity/ vital infrastructure appeared to be the most affected in the course of COVID-19 pandemic? What groups of population are affected the most?***

Yes, unilateral sanctions establish preexisting conditions of widespread poverty and inequality which are then severely exacerbated when an emergency situation occurs. By deepening inequalities emergencies and sanctions together leave the already vulnerable groups in society most exposed to increased suffering and human rights violations. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, women and minority ethnic groups have been the most effected by the crisis. The health care sector has been particularly impacted as access to care has deteriorated. Informal labor, especially selling tea, food, or products in markets and on the streets has been severely impacted. Women are over-represented in the informal sector and nearly all have most of their incomes due to the COVID-19 containment measures. Informal vending cannot comply with social distancing measures and workers have low wages and no income protection.

Part of the reason the informal sector forms such a large portion of employment is Sudan is because of the accumulated lack of investment in infrastructure due to years of operating under sanctions. The sanctions have also cost Sudan many years of investment in its health infrastructure, which led to the underequipped, and low-quality healthcare sector that Sudan had when COVID-19 arrived. Before the virus arrived to Sudan, the country’s health care system was already collapsing, which leaves Sudan especially vulnerable to COVID-19.

***Question 5: What types of sanctions have the most negative impact over the enjoyment of human rights in the course of COVID-19 pandemic? Please provide detailed information about obstacles, which were caused by the sanctions, in the implementation of the national health care system’s preparedness and response plan to combat COVID-19 pandemic.***

The economic sanctions against the Sudanese state have been a particularly heavy burden for the Sudanese people to bear, particularly women and minority ethnicity groups. As COVID-19 has also wrought severe economic damage, the presence of both in Sudan has been particularly detrimental to people’s livelihoods and thus their ability to attend to their health and basic needs.

***Question 6: Are humanitarian exemptions sufficient, effective and efficient to protect the life of people and to guarantee human rights especially of the most vulnerable groups in the course of natural and man-made disasters including COVID-19 pandemic?***

Sanctions only having exceptions for humanitarian aid, creates dependency because it prevents governments from developing their economies and creating infrastructures and institutions that will contribute to sustainable economic growth, making them depend on aid. Sudan is suffering more now during the COVID-19 pandemic because humanitarian aid cannot arrive to same degree as always, but the population has no other form of support on which to depend.

Moreover, the humanitarian aid structure is based on the leadership and expertise of the Western international governments and NGOs, which has resulted in little or no investment in the development of local skills and expertise. Which left countries like Sudan, who have been made artificially dependent on humanitarian aid because of international sanctions, in even worse circumstances when COVID-19 lead to the widespread withdrawal of international staff back to their countries of origin.

Finally, the actors in the humanitarian aid sector have proven themselves to be poorly equipped to accommodate the expansion of political freedoms and humanitarian rights in Sudan post-revolution. This stems from the dynamic that has developed over years Sudanese dependency on humanitarian actors, significantly exacerbated by sanctions. It is a dynamic in which humanitarian actors are not used to having to work with government actors because the government has been unfriendly to humanitarian aims for years. Yet, although the government has changed and actors such as the Minister of Heath, are looking to expand access to healthcare, the humanitarian actors are not coordinating with the Ministry of Health, in part because they have not recently had to build up a capacity to do so in Sudan.

***Question 7: Does the mechanism of getting licenses for purchase of medical equipment, its component parts and software, medicines, protective kits, food and other essential goods provide for the possibility to guarantee vital needs of the population? Has it been eased by the sanctioning States in the course of pandemic?***

Before the crisis, it was difficult for individuals, hospitals, and the ministry of health to access medical supplies and equipment due to the sanctions. Now with high demand and global shortages, it has become even more difficult for the Sudanese people and Sudan’s health infrastructure to access the medical supplies and equipment needed.

***Question 8: Have you faced any problems in delivery of humanitarian aid in the course of COVID-19 pandemic. If yes, please, specify***

Although SIHA Network’s primary focus is not direct aid provision, we do at times provide some direct support, particularly to the conflict zones of Sudan, where aid is most desperately needed. However, we have not been able to send food, money, or supplies to our colleague in Darfur due to years of conflict and militarization which has resulted in gatekeepers who can block or divert aid as they see fit.

***Question 9: Please, indicate, what steps have been taken by the sanctioning States on one hand and in the targeted States on the other hand to alleviate possible human suffering caused by unilateral sanctions in the course of pandemic. What were the main obstacles created by sanctions to guarantee vital human needs and save lives in the course of pandemic?***

We are not aware of any measures taken by the sanctioning States or the Sudanese government during to mitigate the negative impacts of sanctions upon the Sudanese population during COVID-19.

***Question 10: What measures of international community do you consider to be vital to urgently enhance the ability of targeted states to resist pandemic?***

The international community needs to lift sanctions on governments as these violate the human rights of women and girls and vulnerable populations within the countries. Additionally, the international community should take strong stance against violence, inequality, and injustice in messages like the one shared by the UN Secretary Council in which he spoke clearly about suspending all conflicts and extending support as much as possible.

Relevant works by SIHA:

SIHA Network. (December 2009). Beyond Trousers, the Public Order Regime and the Human Rights of Women and Girls in Sudan. https://sihanet.org/publications/

SIHA Network. (September 2013). Third-Class Citizens: Women and Citizenship in Sudan. https://sihanet.org/publications/

SIHA Network. (June 2016). Gender Under Bombardment. https://sihanet.org/publications/

SIHA Network. (January 2020). The Sudan Women Protest Applauds the Courageous Steps Taken by the Transitional Government to Achieve “Sudan-Made” Peace. https://sihanet.org/news/

SIHA Network. (March 2020). Dos and Don’ts: Coronavirus Response Advice Does Not See the Reality of Women in Sudan. https://sihanet.org/news/

SIHA Network. (April 2020). The State Policies in Sudan Continue to Undermine Women & Marginalized Communities. https://sihanet.org/news/

SIHA Network. (May 2020). SIHA Sends Urgent Memo to Deter GBV in Sudan to Attorney General. https://sihanet.org/news/

SIHA Network. (May 2020). “Outlawing FGM” is Only the Tip of the Iceberg Considering a Deeply Misogynistic Legal Framework in Sudan. https://sihanet.org/news/