April 23, 2020

The Honorable Donald Trump  
President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Trump,

As a broad coalition representing humanitarian, research, peacebuilding, faith-based, human rights, and other civil society organizations with over 40 million supporters, we write to you out of deep concern for the health and well-being of ordinary people in Iran, Syria, Venezuela, Cuba, North Korea, and other heavily-sanctioned locations. We also seek relief for people in Gaza, the West Bank, Yemen, and other countries being sanctioned by U.S. security partners and where U.S. laws and policies sanction non-state groups that control territory or political structures.

The current COVID-19 pandemic highlights the precarious and, in some cases, critical state of the health infrastructures and economies of these sanctioned locations, and how, without immediate intervention, millions of people face severe economic hardship, infection, and death.

We support UN Secretary-General António Guterres in his recent call “for the waiving of sanctions that can undermine countries’ capacity to respond to the pandemic.”1 Specifically, we urge you to:

1) **Issue emergency universal exemptions for humanitarian goods.** The exemptions could take the form of an emergency universal general license that would allow humanitarian agencies to respond to the crisis quickly and more effectively.

The license would need to, at minimum, exempt:

1) Aid necessary for the treatment of COVID-19;
2) Equipment used in the recovery from the disease;
3) Goods required to address simultaneous needs and issues exacerbated by the pandemic such as food security, water supply, civilian energy infrastructure, and other health-related needs such as medical kits and equipment;
4) Necessary training required for the use of medical and humanitarian equipment; and,
5) Communication and partnerships with non-sanctioned organizations and individuals. (These exemptions would be necessary for contexts such as North

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Korea where a specific license is required for partnerships with non-sanctioned organizations and individuals).

6) Transactions and communications ordinarily incidental and necessary to accessing civilian populations in need of assistance.

Finally, the universal general license must address the reluctance of financial institutions, as well as other entities within supply chains, to carry out transactions required for the delivery of this aid.

2) Implement reporting protocols that monitor the impact and human cost of sanctions. High COVID-19 related death rates in heavily-sanctioned countries illustrate the grave consequences of deficient healthcare infrastructures, weakened in part by sanctions. In 2019, the Government Accountability Office issued a report that noted, “[s]anctions may also have unintended consequences for targeted countries, such as negative impacts on human rights or public health.” In addition, the report concluded that unilateral sanctions measures are difficult to assess and are not necessarily effective in achieving foreign policy aims. We urge the implementation of regular assessments to better understand the human costs of sanctions and whether sanctions are effective in achieving their purpose.

3) Suspend broad-based and sectoral sanctions that cause significant economic damage and leave populations more exposed to sickness and disease, food insecurity, and other humanitarian emergencies. Even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, an increasing number of humanitarian and human rights experts warned of the impacts of sanctions on ordinary civilians.

For example, various experts have noted that sanctions were already causing shortages of medical supplies, decimating livelihoods, blocking banking channels, and exacerbating already dire situations in sanctioned countries such as Iran, Venezuela, North Korea, Syria, and other heavily-sanctioned locations.3456

These problems are not only devastating for the millions of people living in sanctioned regions, but, at the present moment, they also are a threat to the health and safety of non-sanctioned countries around the world. The swift spread of COVID-19 to every corner of the globe clearly shows that an out-of-control epidemic in just one country is a

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public health threat for all of us. Broad, sectoral sanctions should be suspended in order to help strengthen, and in some cases rebuild, critical health infrastructures. As the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet has stated:

“At this crucial time, both for global public health reasons, and to support the rights and lives of millions of people in these countries, sectoral sanctions should be eased or suspended. In a context of global pandemic, impeding medical efforts in one country heightens the risk for all of us.”

The urgent appeals listed above are based on a commitment to save human lives and build global environments of cooperation. The collective decades of research and on-the-ground experience of signatories to this letter have led us to the conclusion that broad, unilateral sanctions are harming ordinary civilians and inhibiting effective international cooperation to fight the COVID-19 pandemic.

We therefore urge you to take immediate emergency measures, and consider long-term measures as well, that would allow the peoples of sanctioned countries to respond to the devastating human and economic fallout of COVID-19.

Sincerely,

About Face: Veterans Against the War
American Friends Service Committee
Campaign for Peace, Disarmament and Common Security
Center for Constitutional Rights
Center for International Policy
Center on Conscience & War
Channing and Popai Liem Education Foundation
Charity & Security Network
Chicago Religious Leadership Network on Latin America
Church of the Brethren Office of Peacebuilding and Policy
Church World Service
Churches for Middle East Peace
CODEPINK
Congregation of Our Lady of the Good Shepherd, U.S. Provinces
DC International Womxn's Alliance (DIWA)
Defending Rights & Dissent
Democratic Socialists of America
Environmentalists Against War
FEMENA
Global Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the United Church of Christ
Grassroots Global Justice Alliance
Grassroots International

Heartland Initiative
Helping Hand for Relief and Development
Human Security Collective
Institute for Policy Studies, New Internationalism Project
International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN)
JASS/Just Associates
Just Foreign Policy
KinderUSA
Korea Peace Network
Latin America Working Group
MADRE
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Association of Korean Americans (NAKA)
National Council of Churches
National Iranian American Council Action
National Students for Justice in Palestine
No War Campaign
Nodutdol for Korean Community Development
Pax Christi International
Pax Christi USA
Peace Action
Peace Action Maine
Peace Action New York State
Peace Appeal Foundation
Peace Corps Iran Association, Board
Peace Direct
Peace Philosophy Centre
PEACEWORKERS
Presbyterian Church USA
Project Blueprint
Rethinking Foreign Policy
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas - Justice Team
The Board of the Peace Corps Iran Association
The Korea Peace Committee of the Korean Association of the United Methodist Church
The United Methodist Church - General Board of Church and Society
TLiC Justice & Peace Committee
United for Peace and Justice
United Mission For Relief and Development UMR
US Labor Against the War
Veterans for Peace Korea Peace Campaign
War Prevention Initiative
War Resisters League
Western States Legal Foundation
Women Cross DMZ
World Beyond War
Zakat Foundation of America

CC: Secretary Steven Mnuchin
     Secretary Michael Pompeo