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Brussels, 12 May 2020

Dear President Michel,
Dear High Representative and Vice-President Borrell,

Impact of sanctions in fight against COVID-19

The Covid-19 pandemic is taking a heavy toll on the lives and health conditions of European citizens. It is therefore of utmost urgency to ensure that the EU does not lose sight of the severe consequences that other countries across the world, such as Cuba, Iran, Libya, Syria, North Korea and Venezuela notably, will suffer if no preventive emergency actions are taken in time.

The World Health Organization reported on 27 April 2020 that after battering China, Western Europe and the United States, infections and deaths from COVID-19 are now rising in Africa, Eastern Europe, Latin America and some Asian countries. As a result of the pandemic, the UN World Food Programme projects that the number of acutely hungry people worldwide could nearly double from 135 million to 265 million.

UN experts and humanitarian organisations in the field have been repeatedly calling on major powers to lift the economic sanctions regime, which is severely hindering the emergency response capacity to those countries. The scale of the problem we are facing is clear taken into account that sanctioned jurisdictions represent around 75% of the beneficiary states of the UN Global Humanitarian Response Plan to COVID-19.

On this account, we support Mr. Borrell's position on sanctions as stated on the 3rd of April, in which he supported the appeal by United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres calling for an immediate global ceasefire.

Exceptions processes are often too long and costly, making them unsuited to match the urgency of the response. Navigating humanitarian exemptions and evolving regulations requires also much due diligence on organizations, often disadvantaging smaller ones that do not have the capacity, resources, or experience.

Furthermore, sanctions' indirect hindrances - such as overcompliance and the risk-averse behaviours of donors, financial institutions and private companies - are still in play during the pandemic despite widespread shortages of medical equipment and export controls on personal protective equipment put in place by multiple states.

To alleviate some of these indirect hindrances, the US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) issued, on the 16th of April, a fact sheet on the "provision of humanitarian assistance and trade to combat COVID-19." We therefore expect the European Union to issue shortly its own guidelines in relation to its existing sanctions' regimes.

VP/HR Borrell claimed that existing UN-EU sanctions already provide the necessary exemptions for medical and food supplies to be delivered to hard-hit countries. However, aid groups still report facing hurdles to help vulnerable people during the health crisis. More needs to be done to meet the demands and expectations of humanitarian organisations working on the ground and of those people in need of urgent support.

We urge the European Council and the VP/HR to make sure that the UN-EU humanitarian exemptions are given broad and practical effect, with prompt, flexible authorization for essential medical equipment and supplies. In order to save lives and protect the most vulnerable, the EU should guarantee that humanitarian organisations can fully fulfil their missions especially amid the pandemic.

We consider sanctions as supplementary and often necessary tools in pursuing Foreign Policy matters. However, we believe that to prevent best further consequences in several countries the EU should pursue, in a coordinated fashion with the UN and its international partners, the temporary implementation of an international moratorium on economic sanctions' regime imposed among others to Cuba, Iran, Libya, Syria, North Korea and Venezuela.

We therefore urge the European Council to give a full mandate to the VP/HR to explore viable solutions to come to an effective and economic sanctions' relief to the aforementioned countries for a determined period of time.

Moreover, we also call on VP/HR Borrell to make a plea with his US counterpart to discharge those countries from the ongoing embargo. These countries must be given the opportunity to export sufficiently, with resources strictly applied to the purchase of medical and sanitary equipment.

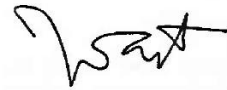
We believe that if Europe fails to preserve its humanitarian, rule-based global outreach now, it will not only lose its reputation and credibility vis-à-vis its international partners, but it will also no longer be able to claim the inherent value of its humanitarian and non-confrontational standing in world affairs.

Respectfully,



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