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# Addressing the Humanitarian Effects of Sanctions on Food Security

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**Forum:** Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)

**Issue:** Addressing the Humanitarian Effects of Sanctions on Food Security

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## **Introduction:**

Addressing and solving the issue of food security has been a prevalent part of society since modernisation. The reliable access to food is a key aspect for everyone around the world. Yet politically implemented sanctions on various countries worldwide, due to conflict, sometimes yield unintended consequences to the system of food security, and the effects can be deadly. In attempts to push or pressure opposition governments, sanctions can be put in place that adversely affect the civilian population of nations which contributes to destabilising any type of food security that exists in the affected nations. While not solely the fault of the sanctions, it is important to keep in mind the serious consequences that could be caused by an official decree made by countries far from the ones being affected.

## **Key Terms:**

**Food Security:** To have food security, or be in food security, is the state of having 'reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food'. This includes not fearing hunger or starvation and having a resilience to any future disruptions of the food supply. The opposite of food security is food insecurity, a state that can be caused by many factors such as; famine, drought, climate change, pandemics, economic instability, fuel shortage, or wars.

**Sanctions:** Sanctions are actions taken by countries against other countries, organisations, or people. These sanctions are often used to show that certain actions made are not condoned, or that they go against international agreements. However, sometimes countries use sanctions for personal interests, or to punish countries severely, and it does not always have the effect they intend.

**Economic Sanctions:** Economic sanctions are a type of sanction that attempts to disrupt economic factors of a country. This can be by blocking trade, travel, regulating the import and exports of goods, and trade embargoes. They restrict nations 'global trade capabilities' as well as financial access, and can be dangerous,

especially in our modern day where many countries rely on each other (interdependence).

**Humanitarian Crisis:** Humanitarian Crises are events that threaten the well-being, safety or health of a general community or populace. This could be caused by external conflicts, or internal conflicts.

**Humanitarian Supplies:** Humanitarian supplies are basic goods and supplies needed to maintain a people's health, privacy, and to meet their personal hygiene needs. These are most commonly deployed by NGO's or governments assisting their civilians or external communities after a conflict or natural disaster.

**Poverty:** Poverty is a state when a person/persons does not have enough money to meet their basic needs (Eg. Shelter, food, healthcare, clothing).

**Malnutrition:** Malnutrition is caused by the lack of proper nutrient filled foods or simply lack of food. Especially in children, malnutrition can be deadly. It can cause permanent health issues, stunted growth, eye problems, or heart disease.

**The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty:** The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty was an agreement signed in 1968 with around 190 signatories (including China, Russia, and the US). Its main purpose was to halt/reduce the spread of nuclear technology (such as bombs) of which a few of the countries were already capable of. North Korea, Israel, India, Pakistan and South Sudan did not sign the list or pulled out in the later years.

**Adverse Effects:** A negative or harmful result that was not intended with the experiment/study/policy done. Eg. Sanctions made by the UN to halt trade with country X in order to stop their arms dealing has adverse effects and instead blocks food supply to thousands of civilians living in country X.

## **Background Information:**

The very first sanction is believed to have occurred in 432 BC, and throughout the years, particularly in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, sanctions of all kinds have been implemented internationally to further global goals. In the forefront of the two world wars, intergovernmental organisations, beginning with the League of Nations and then the UN played key roles into implementing sanctions to pressure countries into complying with certain policies, and since then, the use of sanctions has played a role as a potentially more 'peaceful' alternative to violence and threat in conflicts

globally. However, sanctions, while avoiding direct violence, have the potential to cause greater threat to civilians worldwide, and this brings us to our issue of the humanitarian effects of these sanctions regarding food security. Over the years, organisations and countries including (but not limited to) the USA, UN and the EU have implemented economic sanctions on governments hoping for a certain outcome. However they fail to consider the adverse effects it has on the civilian populations of these countries, more specifically, their food security. This often leads to disastrous consequences. Here are some examples of the humanitarian impact due to sanctions regarding food security.

During the events of the Iran-Iraq war (1980), as well as the beginning of the Iranian Nuclear Program, the USA imposed various sanctions on the Iranian Government, restricting banking assets, trade, and prohibiting the selling of arms to them in order to halt and hold back their progress. The USA, UN and the EU doled out sanctions aplenty from 1995 onwards intent on restricting many aspects of trade, cooperation, and energy industry. All of this, combined with yet another imposition of a US sanction in 2018 led to disastrous humanitarian effects for the civilians in Iran. Data (.gov) showed that in 2015, more than '40% of Iran's 82 million population were living below the poverty line, with the increase of food prices contributing to the food insecurity'. The economic sanctions halting the major growth of economy led to skyrocketing food retail prices, and the common household, especially in rural areas, slowly lost reliable access to food. The lack of reliable food access led to the malnutrition of civilians, and children growing up around this time suffered frequently from starvation as well.

When the Taliban rule came into power in Afghanistan, existing sanctions and newer heavy sanctions were implemented by major parties (specifically the US and the UN) in order to restrict what the government could do. However, these sanctions targeted the banking system, and eventually led to the economic and banking system going into disarray. This in turn, coupled with the Taliban's punishing laws regarding who could earn money and laws restricting women, eventually led to devastating consequences on the food security of civilians. The lack of money flowing into the country, as well as increasing food prices, and the lack of paid wages in many parts of the country led to hundreds in extreme poverty, no access to food, and with no other options to obtain money or food, some families began selling their



children in order to feed the rest. This further shows the effect of these particular sanctions on food security in Afghanistan.

Due to the Nuclear threat by the Democratic People's Republic of North Korea, and later their exit of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, many international countries as well as the UN, imposed heavy sanctions restricting many parts of international cooperation's, including trade, transportation, and banking. While these sanctions may have successfully avoided the use of military force, the sanctions did take a massive humanitarian toll on the wellbeing of the civilians living there. NGO's attempting to operate to help citizens could not come to their aid due to transportation restrictions, the sanctions delay any arrival of food or humanitarian aid, and those in rural areas face the brunt of it. Tools like agricultural fertilizer or physical aid, as well as medical supplies, is unable to be transported in reliably, and both the agricultural and medical sectors take heavy hits. In 2018, around 4000 preventable deaths occurred due to 'delays from exemptions from the sanctions for NGO's operating', and according to a UNICEF report '*200,000 North Korean children already suffer from acute malnutrition, and sanctions put 60,000 of these vulnerable children at risk of starvation due to the disruption in the availability of humanitarian supplies caused by tightening sanctions.*'. Yet there shows no sign of this changing.

These are just a few examples of places where sanctions have had negative humanitarian impacts on the food security of said countries, and there are many more hidden effects caused by various sanctions that ruin the lives on many, unbeknownst to people in other countries. Thus, the need to address the humanitarian effects of sanctions on food security worldwide is a high priority, to not only help the wellbeing's of various innocent citizens who suffer from these sanctions, but also to push our modern world into a direction that understands the negative effects of placing sanctions without regard to civilian safety. Though there are challenges, it is not impossible to address this topic.

### **Major Parties Involved:**

**The United States of America (USA):** Due to having the power and influence, they are main independent contributors of sanctions to parties worldwide. They dole out sanctions to certain countries if the countries threaten or do not comply to their interests and rely on sanctions as a tool of foreign policy. They are involved in many

trade wars and have imposed sanctions on countries like China, Russia, and Iran, and in turn have had sanctions placed against them.

**The United Nations (UN):** The United Nations plays a very big role in sanctioning and handling the effects of sanctions. Their various divisions (WHO, WFP, etc) are forefronts along with other NGO's to providing humanitarian aid to countries as well as focusing on child wellbeing. The Security Council passes a huge majority of sanctions that will eventually be implemented internationally.

**The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK/North Korea):** Due to the sanctions on them, as well as their self-isolation policy, the DPRK is one of the countries whose citizens suffer from food insecurity yet cannot get outside help

**Action Against Hunger:** This is an NGO that specialises in solving child hunger. They have current missions in Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan and many more places. In 2000, they withdrew from the DPRK after the government refused to collaborate to save children suffering and starving.

### **Relevant Treaties:**

<https://press.un.org/en/2022/sc15134.doc.htm> - Adoption of resolution 2664 (2022)

<https://sumsub.com/blog/un-sanctions-list/> - List of current sanctions

<https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n17/463/60/pdf/n1746360.pdf?token=18XoJBT20u8iLC65CK&fe=true> - DPRK

### **Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue:**

**December 9 2022** – UNSC adopted resolution 2664 ensuring that “the provision of goods and services necessary to ensure the timely delivery of humanitarian assistance or to support other activities that support basic human needs” continues when sanctions are applied

### **Possible Solutions:**

**Review Older Sanctions:**By reviewing older and vaguer sanctions extreme effects that could perhaps have been unnecessary, or does not apply at the time, can be spotted, and reviewed. This allows a clearer and more concise reasoning behind the implementation of the sanction(s). However, it is important to consider the purpose of the sanction, and not go as far as to completely disregard its original purpose.

**Increasing Humanitarian Aid:**By increasing humanitarian aid to countries affected by sanctions, you can help the civilian populace to survive. However, there are many drawbacks to this, as by aiding the country's population, you may be going against the purpose of the sanction and simply allowing the government to do what the sanctions originally blocked, as they no longer have to worry about their civilians due to outside aid.

**Monetary funds to NGOs to support an increase in activity in sanction-affected countries:** By funding NGO's in a better way, they are freer to choose the places they wish to aid and the scope of their help becomes wider, this can help those affected severely to survive and thrive.

**Government Cooperation Between Sanctioned and Non-Sanctioned Countries to Ensure Humanitarian Aid and Success:** This could allow a wider level of interdependence, and governments cooperating could work out the restrictive nature of the sanctions, perhaps even solve them. However, this is an extremely murky solution and could completely disregard the point of implemented sanctions.

**Summits to Discuss the Change, Elimination, or Implementation of Certain Restrictive Sanctions:** Being able to discuss with countries the effects of sanctions, and being able to air out opinions could help greatly. However, it is important to consider the fact that sanctions could possibly be the only thing stopping the next stage of diplomacy, war. Some sanctions cause humanitarian crises, but the alternative, war, could potentially rack up larger death tolls.

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