

# *International community calls for end to U.S. sanctions against Iran*

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Tehran, March 22 (RHC)-- The international community is calling for an end to Washington's sanctions against Tehran.

Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan has called on the U.S. to remove its "unjust" sanctions against Iran as international condemnation is growing against the bans amid the outbreak of the coronavirus in the country.

"I would stress and insist to the international community to lift the sanctions on Iran," Khan told reporters. He added: "It is very unjust they are dealing with such a large outbreak on one side, and on the other they are facing international sanctions."

Imran Khan's call echoed an outcry on national and international levels against U.S. sanctions, with Russia, China, as well as different medical organizations and rights groups urging the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump to lift sanctions against the Islamic Republic.

Iran's death toll from the coronavirus outbreak rose on Saturday by more than 100 to 1,556, and the total number of people infected now exceeds 20,000, a health ministry official said.

In a tweet on Saturday, U.S. congresswoman Ilhan Omar once again called for the removal of sanctions against Iran, calling the bans 'supervillain-level cruelty' as the country struggles to deal with the rapid spread of the coronavirus. In a similar tweet on March 14, she wrote, "We need to suspend these sanctions before more lives are lost."

Meanwhile, a coalition of 25 organizations, including civil rights groups, charities and think-tanks, has come together to urge the Trump administration to lift sanctions on Iran to help it fight its coronavirus outbreak.

The National Iranian American Council (NIAC) led an effort to send a letter to President Donald Trump, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin calling for a temporary suspension of sanctions. The letter was signed by various organisations, including the liberal Jewish group J Street, think-tank International Crisis Group, Oxfam America and the non-profit Physicians for Social Responsibility.

"To help stem the continued spread of the virus inside Iran and beyond, we urge you to issue a time-bound suspension of those U.S. sanctions that make it harder for ordinary Iranians to secure basic goods and services to weather the crisis," the letter read.

"Doing so would not just serve U.S. interests in helping contain the further spread of the virus, but would also be a powerful humanitarian gesture to the more than 80 million Iranians suffering under the pandemic."

While the U.S. administration claims there are no sanctions on medicine going to Iran, many banks and companies have refrained from taking part in any such ventures out of fear of getting caught up in U.S. secondary sanctions.

While Iran has called on the United Nations to urge the US to temporarily lift sanctions, and China and Russia have called on the US to do so as well, Washington has remained obdurate in its "maximum pressure" campaign. The U.S. issued a new set of sanctions last week, aimed at the transport of petrochemicals from Iran.

Jamal Abdi, president of the NIAC, told Middle East Eye earlier this week that he was not surprised the administration was still "full speed ahead on sanctions", as Iran copes with a pandemic that grows deadlier every day. "Based on the Trump Administration's own metrics, the massacre being inflicted on Iranians by the coronavirus is the most stunning victory yet for 'maximum pressure'," Abdi told the London-based news outlet.

The coalition of groups said the sanctions have damaged the country's public health sector by blocking the sale of medicine and medical supplies needed to combat the epidemic. Sanctions have also more broadly impacted Iranians by closing down private businesses and forcing the value of Tehran's currency, the rial, to plummet.

The letter calls on the U.S. to suspend all sanctions on Iran, including those on the country's oil and financial sectors, for a period of 120 days, to allow for the country to stave off economic devastation and fight the viral outbreak.

"Easing sanctions is one simple step that can be taken to serve the interests of the Iranian people and public health across the globe," the letter read.

In a message issued to the American people, Iran's President Hassan Rouhani said "brutal" U.S. sanctions unilaterally imposed on the Iranian nation are robbing a great number of Iranians of health, jobs and sources of income. He said: "At a time that the Iranian people are harmed by both the deadly coronavirus and the most brutal form of US economic terrorism in history, the U.S. government is not

willing to abandon its malicious policy of maximum pressure; and is thus in practice aiding the spread of this virus with its sanctions."

Rouhani urged the American people not to allow the current administration's hostile attitude toward Iran to tarnish history of their country. "The Iranian people value friendship and respect based on the principles of dignity and humanity and respond positively to overtures based on such values. Simultaneously, they are ready to resist pressure and threats, as they have heroically throughout history."

The U.S. reinstated its sanctions against Iran in May 2018 after leaving a UN-endorsed nuclear agreement between Iran and the P5+1 group of countries. Tehran sued Washington at the International Court of Justice afterwards. The tribunal ruled that the U.S. should lift its sanctions on humanitarian supplies.

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