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Promotion and protection of human rights: human rights questions, including alternative approaches for improving the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms

Impact of unilateral coercive measures on the right to education and other academic rights

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the General Assembly the report of the Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights, Alena Douhan, submitted in accordance with Assembly resolution [79/167](#) and Human Rights Council resolutions [27/21](#) and [54/15](#).

* [A/80/150](#).



Report of the Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights, Alena Douhan

Summary

In the present report, the Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights, Alena Douhan, assesses the impact of unilateral sanctions, means of their enforcement and overcompliance on the right to education and other academic rights. Main impacts identified include impediments to the exercise of the right to education in general; access to technologies and teaching materials; access to informational resources, academic events and cooperation; the right to benefit from scientific progress; and disruption of academic freedoms and academic networks. Negative impacts affect students and academics from countries under sanctions, third States and sanctioning States, as well as their general populations.

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution [79/167](#) and Human Rights Council resolutions [27/21](#) and [54/15](#), which mandate the Special Rapporteur to gather relevant information on the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights; to study emerging trends and challenges to follow-up on the exercise of human rights; and to issue recommendations for preventing, mitigating and redressing their adverse effects.

2. The present report focuses on the impact of unilateral coercive measures, means of their enforcement and overcompliance on the right to education and on all types of academic freedoms, in accordance with general comment No. 25 of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights¹ and documents of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). In the absence of a special identification, the term “unilateral sanctions” in the present report refers to unilateral sanctions, means of their enforcement and overcompliance.

3. In the implementation of her mandated activities, including thematic research, official country visits and individual communications, as well as capacity-building and outreach initiatives with different stakeholders, the Special Rapporteur has received information on challenges in the exercise of the right to education and the right to benefit from scientific progress and academic freedoms; access to teaching, research and professional resources; and academic and professional cooperation.

4. For the preparation of the present report, the Special Rapporteur issued a call for submissions² addressed to all relevant actors. Responses were received from the Governments of China, Cuba, Iraq, Mexico, Uzbekistan, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and Honduras, as well as from United Nations entities, civil society organizations and associations, lawyers and scholars. The Special Rapporteur expresses her gratitude to all respondents.

5. Due to the broad and extraterritorial nature of unilateral coercive measures, the report does not seek to disaggregate the effects of specific sanctions by type or by country. Rather, it evaluates the comprehensive impact of all related mechanisms – direct sanctions, secondary sanctions, overcompliance and de-risking – on education and academic rights globally, including the effects on sanctioning States and third countries.

II. The right to education

A. Notions and elements of the right to education and the scope of obligations of States

6. The right to education is universally recognized as an independent human right³ that is aimed at ensuring other categories of human rights, and even as a public common good.⁴ The right to education is interpreted by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights as an “indispensable means of realizing other human rights”, including freedom from poverty, the right to a decent life, gender equality, the prohibition of child labour, the right to decent work, protection of the environment, the promotion of human rights in general, respect for human dignity

¹ [E/C.12/GC/25](#).

² See www.ohchr.org/en/calls-for-input/2025/call-input-2025-thematic-reports-un-human-rights-council-and-un-general.

³ International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, arts. 13 and 14.

⁴ [A/HRC/53/27](#), paras. 15 and 16.

and the full development of the human personality.⁵ UNESCO identifies it as a universal human right of high priority and instrumental in the exercise of other human rights.⁶ Education should be exercised at the maximum possible level of quality, with the progressive provision of all necessary physical infrastructure, including buildings and libraries, as well as competitive salaries for teachers, sanitation facilities, teaching materials, computers and information technology facilities.⁷

7. The right to education should be implemented by States to the maximum of available resources, both individually and through international assistance and cooperation, without any discrimination (including substantive and indirect,⁸ rather than only formal and direct,⁹ including based on nationality, origin or other status¹⁰), by taking deliberate, clear and concrete steps, including via legislation, to provide access to effective remedy and judicial protection.¹¹ Such measures should be taken also in situations of emergency and other challenges to mitigate negative consequences for the right to education, to the maximum of resources available.¹²

8. The Special Rapporteur emphasizes that any limitations can be “determined by law only in so far as this may be compatible with the nature of these rights and solely for the purpose of promoting the general welfare in a democratic society”, in accordance with article 4 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Any measures resulting in retrogression should be carefully assessed and justified by the State, and, with respect to activity that results in retrogression regarding any economic, social and cultural rights,¹³ there is a “strong presumption of impermissibility of retrogressive measures”.¹⁴

9. While acknowledging the right of a State to differentiate between its own nationals and aliens with respect to rights that can only be applied to citizens,¹⁵ she uses the term “racial discrimination” here broadly, based purely on article 1 (1) of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, as including discrimination on the grounds of national or ethnic origin, including on the grounds of current nationality or national origin, which prohibits differentiation between different categories of aliens.¹⁶ The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, in its general recommendation No. 30 (2004), requests the removal of discrimination against and among foreigners regarding economic, social and cultural rights, especially the right to education.¹⁷

10. The Special Rapporteur underlines that States bear the obligation to ensure that at least fundamental human rights are not affected by their unilateral activity, even when the criteria of counter-measures are observed, and that no human rights in the

⁵ Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, general comment No. 13 (1999), paras. 1 and 4.

⁶ UNESCO and the Right to Education Initiative, *Right to Education Handbook* (Paris, 2019), p. 28.

⁷ Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, general comment No. 13 (1999), para. 6; *Right to Education Handbook*, p. 77.

⁸ Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, general comment No. 20 (2009), paras. 8 and 9.

⁹ *Right to Education Handbook*, pp. 82 and 83.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, paras. 24, 27 and 30.

¹¹ Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, general comment No. 3 (1990), para. 2.

¹² *Ibid.*, para. 11.

¹³ *Ibid.*, para. 9.

¹⁴ General comment No. 13 (1999), para. 45.

¹⁵ Human Rights Committee, general comment No. 15 (1986).

¹⁶ Interights, *Non-Discrimination in International Law: A Handbook for Practitioners* (London, 2011), pp. 168–175.

¹⁷ Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, general recommendation No. 30 (2004), para. 29.

International Bill of Human Rights (including the right to education, the right to benefit from scientific progress and the prohibition of discrimination) are affected, including extraterritorially. Therefore, all States are under the obligation to respect, to protect and to fulfil the right to education, the prohibition of discrimination, and academic freedoms.

11. Under the principle of due diligence, States or regional organizations are under the obligation to ensure that activities taken under their jurisdiction or control do not violate human rights, including extraterritorially. They are obliged to take legislative, administrative, judiciary, budgetary and any other type of measures to respect, protect and fulfil human rights, in accordance with general comment No. 14 (2000) of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. In its general comments, the Committee¹⁸ has explicitly formulated this obligation regarding a broad scope of human rights, including the right to academic freedoms and scientific development.¹⁹

B. Impact of unilateral sanctions on the right to education

12. The impact of unilateral sanctions on the right to education has only been briefly analysed in the work of the United Nations, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and relevant specialized agencies. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, in its general comment No. 8 (1997), focusing on the impact of sanctions adopted by the Security Council while acting under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, acknowledged that, even in such “international cases”, impact on the right to education and academic rights has only been addressed in a minimal way.²⁰

13. The right to education, as enshrined in article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights is characterized by UNESCO as including the four main areas of availability, physical and economic accessibility, acceptability and adaptability,²¹ of both formal and non-formal education,²² including, inter alia, obligatory primary education; available and accessible secondary education, made progressively free; accessible higher education, without any discrimination; life-long education; proper learning environments (healthy environments, sanitation, adequate infrastructure and human rights); training opportunities and conditions for teaching staff; standards for and improvement of the quality of education; guarantees of freedom of choice; non-retrogression; and the prohibition of discrimination at all levels.²³

14. The Special Rapporteur notes multiple reports on the impediments caused by unilateral sanctions on access to education. Unilateral sanctions are also reported to impair States’ ability to allocate resources to education, including for developing and maintaining infrastructure, ensuring inclusive access to basic learning, sufficiency and qualification of staff, proper academic programmes and teaching materials.

15. In Cuba, in particular, real wages have declined, transportation and energy failures have intensified, and dropout rates have risen due to systemic underfunding. The number of university teachers declined from 54,078 in 2021 to 50,298 in 2024,

¹⁸ E/C.12/2000/4.

¹⁹ Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, general comment No. 25 (2020), para. 46.

²⁰ Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, general comment No. 8 (1997), paras. 3 and 5.

²¹ Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, general comment No. 13 (1999), para. 6; *Right to Education Handbook*, p. 76.

²² *Right to Education Handbook*, p. 24.

²³ See www.unesco.org/en/right-education/state-obligations-responsibilities.

with a disproportionate drop in the number of women, from 32,807 to 21,611.²⁴ In Zimbabwe, the national education budget shrank as a result of sanctions, which limited access to international finance, causing instability in the Basic Education Assistance Module and resulting in simplification of the school curriculum. Rising schooling costs forced many children out of school, while teacher shortages grew due to emigration.²⁵ In the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, the budget of the Ministry of Education was reduced by 89.7 per cent due to economic crisis exacerbated by unilateral sanctions, resulting in mass dropouts, staff departures and school infrastructure degradation.²⁶ Similar reports have been received regarding the Syrian Arab Republic,²⁷ Honduras,²⁸ Iraq²⁹ and Niger and relating to Afghan refugees' education in the Islamic Republic of Iran.³⁰

16. The availability of adaptable digital education, including access to online platforms, educational software, and up-to-date technological tools, without discrimination of any kind, is recognized by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights to be a vital component of the right to education.³¹ Multiple reports refer to impediments in accessing Coursera, edX, and Udemy and other educational platforms due to United States sanctions.³² As these platforms play a key role in enabling youth and economically disadvantaged individuals to build professional skills, users must rely on virtual private networks (VPNs) and unofficial intermediaries, which increases risks and limits accessibility.³³ As a result, educational content in many professional and cultural fields becomes either restricted or entirely inaccessible. While Uzbekistan is not directly targeted by unilateral coercive measures, sanctions against key economic partners have indirectly affected access to foreign e-learning platforms and online scientific resources. Although the Government has started to invest in national alternatives, transitional gaps in terms of accessibility and quality persist.³⁴

17. The Special Rapporteur underlines that the right to education, as outlined in article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and reinforced by UNESCO instruments, requires that core learning materials and specialized tools be made available. Limitations on access to such resources – whether through export restrictions, banking barriers or overcompliance – can obstruct the fulfilment of educational obligations, particularly in technical and inclusive education contexts. Limited availability of hardware and modern scientific tools further impairs learning in multiple spheres.³⁵

18. She also refers to reports of impediments in the access to, inter alia, books, teaching materials, computers and equipment, resulting in the narrowing of curricula and the unavailability of training and retraining. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, in particular, sanctions have disrupted the procurement of laboratory equipment and textbooks, particularly in rural and underfunded regions. Students in medical and

²⁴ Submission by Dr. Emily Morris.

²⁵ Submission by the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission; see also [A/HRC/51/33/Add.2](#), paras. 41 and 48.

²⁶ Submission by the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

²⁷ Submission by Amadeus Consultancy Limited.

²⁸ Submission by Honduras.

²⁹ Submission by Iraq.

³⁰ Submission by the Association for Protection of Refugee Women and Children (HAMI).

³¹ Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, general comment No. 13 (1999), para. 6; Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, general comment No. 25 (2020), para. 16.

³² Submissions by Cuba, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Iranian academia, Raúl Rodríguez Rodríguez, Coming Out and HAMI.

³³ Submission by Coming Out.

³⁴ Submission by Uzbekistan.

³⁵ Submissions by Iranian academia, H. Taheri and B. Jafartash Amiri.

technical disciplines have faced significant shortages of learning tools,³⁶ and girls in rural areas have been disproportionately affected: dropout rates have increased by 20 per cent, according to a 2024 report of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).³⁷ The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela reports a shortage of textbooks, school kits and technological tools such as Canaima laptops. These challenges were compounded by declining infrastructure and a lack of food support programmes in schools, resulting in reduced enrolment rates, especially at the secondary education level.³⁸ Other examples of restricted access to educational materials have been reported in Zimbabwe³⁹ and the Syrian Arab Republic.⁴⁰

19. The Special Rapporteur notes with concern that restrictions on essential education supplies, which must be made available with adequate quality and in sufficient quantity, including materials adapted to learners' needs, in accordance with paragraph 6 of general comment No. 13 (1999) of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and other challenges infringe on the State's ability to fulfil its obligation to ensure the availability of education. In Cuba, the cancellation of contracts for the education sector between March 2023 and February 2024 due to the United States embargo directly impacted the production and distribution of basic materials, including 4.5 million pencils, 700 science kits and hundreds of thousands of other classroom items. Additionally, the State-run publisher was unable to deliver updated national textbooks due to budgetary and logistical constraints.⁴¹

20. The Special Rapporteur is also concerned about the tendency to designate academic institutions for sanctions to prevent the technological advancement of the country in specific spheres, or to prevent the development of the sector under sanctions (as, for example, in China, the Russian Federation and the Islamic Republic of Iran),⁴² which is often aimed at isolating the scientific communities of targeted countries. As a result, a growing number of academic institutions maintain webpages listing foreign academic and research institutions that are deemed "restricted" with respect to any type of cooperation, which is often a broader list than that of designated universities.⁴³ Students and professors from sanctioning States have been requested to move home in the middle of the semester, and cooperation partners have withdrawn from long-existing cooperation networks.⁴⁴ Besides the direct effects on the designated institutions, their staff and students, there have been broader negative spillover effects on the academic and scientific community, including adverse reputational and operational consequences affecting the academic and professional careers of scholars, researchers and students affiliated with designated institutions or with any institutions of these and other countries. Financial, travel and other restrictions have a negative effect on foreign students in the countries under sanctions, who face the same challenges as the general population and suffer due to longer, costlier and more complicated financial transfers. All the above-mentioned issues

³⁶ [A/HRC/51/33/Add.1](#), para. 58; submissions by Iranian academia and HAMI.

³⁷ Submission by Iranian Women's Health Initiative.

³⁸ Submission by the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

³⁹ Submission by the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission; see also [A/HRC/51/33/Add.2](#), para. 38.

⁴⁰ Anna Cervi and Erica Moret, "After 14 Years of Conflict, Can Barriers to Education in Syria Be Overcome?", The Carter Center (Atlanta, Georgia, 2025).

⁴¹ Submission by Cuba.

⁴² See www.research.ucsb.edu/sites/default/files/ri/Restricted%20Foreign%20Research%20Institutions.pdf; [A/HRC/57/55/Add.1](#), paras. 43–45.

⁴³ See <https://research.umn.edu/units/ric/export-controls/russiabelarusukraine-related-sanctions>; see also <https://hcsra.sph.harvard.edu/news/ovprs-updated-guidance-russia-related-sanctions-impacts-university-research>.

⁴⁴ Anne Crowley-Vigneau and others, "Russian higher education under sanctions: a constructivist perspective", *Polis Political Studies* 2022 (4).

erode the ranking status of such universities, result in isolation and constitute discrimination in the sphere of education.

21. The Special Rapporteur emphasizes that, under article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, States must ensure access to all levels of education, without discrimination, and must also promote international cooperation in education. This obligation includes facilitating academic exchange and the mutual recognition of qualifications. Multiple reports refer to growing obstacles in accessing international credentials, including as a result of withdrawal of foreign funding and academic exchange programmes (e.g. Erasmus+ and Horizon with respect to the Russian Federation, Belarus,⁴⁵ Cuba⁴⁶ and the Islamic Republic of Iran,⁴⁷ and European Union and United States funding programmes with respect to Zimbabwe,⁴⁸ the Syrian Arab Republic⁴⁹ and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela⁵⁰); the request to stop all cooperation initiatives,⁵¹ including via financing from the country under sanctions, or joint projects (China⁵²); impediments to student participation in even international moot courts, due to challenges in obtaining visa appointments or an unwillingness to assist in visa application processes; exclusion or removal of universities from global ranking platforms; denial of participation in joint diploma or mobility programmes (Russian Federation⁵³); rejection of applications or users from sanctioned jurisdictions for mobility programmes;⁵⁴ cancellation or denial of student visas; deportation of enrolled students; restrictions on scholars based solely on nationality or country of origin, without individual assessment or evidence of wrongdoing;⁵⁵ and challenges with respect to travel and payment for applications, certifications and testing, as services are frequently blocked due to financial restrictions.⁵⁶ For Iraq, historical listings of academic institutions on United States Department of the Treasury blacklists continue to affect their eligibility for cross-border projects and joint academic initiatives.⁵⁷

22. As the obligation of States to ensure progressively the right to education depends on the available resources, poverty, inflation and income loss, particularly among vulnerable households, the inducement or exacerbation of those conditions by unilateral sanctions is reported to seriously affect the accessibility and affordability of education. General comment No. 13 (1999) of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights requests States to ensure that educational access does not depend on the economic status of the learner's family, and calls for measures to ensure that low-income populations are not disproportionately excluded (paras. 6 and 53). In the Islamic Republic of Iran, in particular, over 1 million children, including Afghan refugees, were reported to be out of school in 2021, with poverty compelling families to divert limited income away from education-related expenses identified as the main

⁴⁵ See <https://erasmusplus.org.ua/en/news/eu-sanctions-on-russia-and-belarus-following-the-invasion-of-ukraine/>.

⁴⁶ Submission by E. Morris.

⁴⁷ [A/HRC/51/33/Add.1](#), para. 44; submission by Iranian academia.

⁴⁸ Submission by the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission.

⁴⁹ Cervi and Moret, "After 14 years of conflict".

⁵⁰ Submission by the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela; Cervi and Moret, "After 14 years of conflict".

⁵¹ [A/HRC/57/55/Add.1](#), paras. 47–50.

⁵² *Ibid.*, paras. 52–53.

⁵³ Submission by Coming Out.

⁵⁴ Submission by Iranian academia.

⁵⁵ Nicolas Garon, "The attorney's guidebook to handling UN and OAS visas: understanding the US' obligations in IGO visa issuance", *SSRN*, 20 September 2024.

⁵⁶ Submissions by the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Dr. Emily Morris and HAMI. See also Cervi and Moret, "After 14 years of conflict".

⁵⁷ Submission by Iraq.

cause.⁵⁸ In Zimbabwe, declining Government revenues due to international sanctions have resulted in erratic funding of support programmes such as the Basic Education Assistance Module. This has left many families unable to afford school fees and has triggered a rise in dropouts and early school leavers.⁵⁹ Similar patterns of poverty-induced educational exclusion linked to unilateral coercive measures have also been documented in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela,⁶⁰ Honduras,⁶¹ Iraq,⁶² Niger and the Syrian Arab Republic.⁶³

23. The Special Rapporteur received information on the impact of unilateral sanctions on the availability and safety of accessible and inclusive educational infrastructure. When unilateral sanctions contribute to economic degradation or block the import of construction materials and technical supplies, it results in deteriorated or unsafe learning environments. In the Syrian Arab Republic, after 14 years of conflict and prolonged unilateral sanctions that prevented any reconstruction and maintenance efforts, over 7,000 schools were reported to be partially or completely non-functional as of 2023. The State's ability to restore and maintain school infrastructure is severely constrained by restrictions on importing cement, steel, laboratory equipment and furniture. Budget shortfalls have also led to a reduction in maintenance and teacher training, further degrading the quality of the learning environment.⁶⁴ In Zimbabwe, many rural schools lack basic classroom buildings, desks, sanitation facilities and clean water. Students often study under trees or in temporary shelters, and teacher housing and administrative buildings are in disrepair.⁶⁵ In the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, the widespread deterioration of public infrastructure, including schools, is compounded by inflation, a lack of international funding and restricted access to building materials. A large number of schools operate with damaged roofs, insufficient electricity and broken sanitation systems.⁶⁶ Similar challenges have been reported with respect to Cuba⁶⁷ and the Islamic Republic of Iran.⁶⁸

24. Another important element of the right to education is the sustainability and adaptability of academic systems and the retention of qualified professionals. When unilateral sanctions contribute to an exodus of educators, researchers and students due to economic hardship, blocked opportunities or a lack of institutional support, they undermine academic continuity and jeopardize long-term educational development. Schools, particularly in rural areas, and universities report frequent vacancies, teacher turnover, loss of experienced personnel, uncompetitive salaries, brain drain and obstacles to international cooperation.⁶⁹ According to the national data of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, over 60 per cent of public university faculty have left the sector since 2017, many migrating abroad, leading to the deterioration of the quality of higher education.⁷⁰

⁵⁸ Submissions by Network of Women's Non-governmental Organizations in the Islamic Republic of Iran and HAMI.

⁵⁹ Submission by the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission.

⁶⁰ Submissions by Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights.

⁶¹ Submission by Honduras.

⁶² Submission by Iraq.

⁶³ Submission by Amadeus Consultancy Limited.

⁶⁴ Cervi and Moret, "After 14 years of conflict"; submission by Amadeus Consultancy Limited.

⁶⁵ Submission by the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission.

⁶⁶ Submission by the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

⁶⁷ Submission by Cuba.

⁶⁸ Submission by Iranian academia.

⁶⁹ Cervi and Moret, "After 14 years of conflict"; submissions by Iranian academia, Dr. Emily Morris and the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission.

⁷⁰ Submission by the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

25. Additional challenges relate to the inability of countries under sanctions to ensure inclusive education, especially for vulnerable groups. Relevant international instruments, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (art. 13), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (arts. 2 and 26) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, stress that education should be accessible to all, without discrimination. General comment No. 13 (1999) of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights highlights the obligation to pay particular attention to children from economically and socially disadvantaged backgrounds, minorities, girls, children with disabilities, refugees and displaced persons.⁷¹ Where unilateral sanctions disproportionately affect these groups and limit the State's capacity to provide tailored support, they undermine the principles of inclusivity and equality.

26. In the Syrian Arab Republic, sanctions have severely restricted the State's ability to maintain inclusive education programmes for children with disabilities, internally displaced persons and returnees, who often remain excluded from formal education. Special needs materials and assistive technologies are difficult to import, and funding for inclusive teaching staff and outreach programmes has declined.⁷² Around 500,000 street children have very limited possibilities to obtain shelter and even basic survival training.⁷³ In the Islamic Republic of Iran, Afghan refugee children face growing barriers to educational access. Although domestic law allows for their schooling, financial constraints, worsened by sanctions, have led to declining enrolment and rising dropout rates among refugee communities.⁷⁴ In the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, transport subsidies, assistive services and school feeding programmes have been scaled back, contributing to social exclusion and deteriorating attendance.⁷⁵ Similar concerns have been documented in Cuba,⁷⁶ Zimbabwe⁷⁷ and Nicaragua,⁷⁸ especially for rural children, ethnic minorities and learners with special needs, illustrating that, even when education is formally available, practical accessibility for vulnerable populations is deeply shaped by the State's capacity to offer support and remove barriers.

III. Scientific progress and academic freedoms

A. Legal framework

27. The Special Rapporteur refers to article 15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights regarding the right to benefit from scientific progress and its applications, respect for the freedom indispensable for scientific research, and the benefits derived from the encouragement and development of international contacts and cooperation in the scientific and cultural fields. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, in its general comment No. 25 (2020) addresses these rights in a broader context regarding their relationship with other economic, social and cultural rights.⁷⁹

⁷¹ Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, general comment No. 13 (1999).

⁷² Cervi and Moret, "After 14 years of conflict".

⁷³ [A/HRC/54/23/Add.1](#), paras. 26, 61, 62 and 66.

⁷⁴ Submission by HAMI.

⁷⁵ Submission by the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

⁷⁶ Submission by Dr. Emily Morris.

⁷⁷ [A/HRC/51/33/Add.2](#), paras. 38 and 41; submission by the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission.

⁷⁸ Fatemeh Kokabisaghi and others, "Impact of United States political sanctions on international collaborations and research in Iran", *BMJ Global Health*, 2019.

⁷⁹ Committee on Economic Social and Cultural Rights, general comment No. 25 (2020), para. 2.

28. The word “science” refers to activity aimed at the study of phenomena, the validation of that activity, the sharing of the findings and data, peer review and systematic reflections and conceptualizations, and therefore involves a “process following a certain methodology (‘doing science’) and ... the results of this process (knowledge and application)”,⁸⁰ which emphasizes that the results of scientific progress “contribute to the well-being of persons and humankind.”⁸¹

29. The right to benefit from academic progress includes access to the benefits of science and its applications, without discrimination; opportunities for all to contribute; academic freedoms; the participation of communities in decision-making; the right to information; and an enabling environment fostering the conservation, development and diffusion of science and technology.⁸²

30. Freedom of research, under article 15 (3), includes a wide range of elements, including protection of researchers from undue influence on their independent judgment; the ability of researchers to set up autonomous research institutions and to define the aims and objectives of the research; the freedom of researchers to openly question the ethical value of certain projects and their right to withdraw from these projects if their conscience so dictates; the freedom of researchers to cooperate with other researchers, both nationally and internationally; and the sharing of scientific data with policymakers and the public wherever possible.⁸³ Freedom of research is viewed as “essential to quality teaching, research, innovation, and the production, dissemination and application of knowledge”,⁸⁴ and as essential to “the human rights to acquire, develop, transmit, apply and engage with a diversity of knowledge and ideas through research, teaching, learning and discourse”.⁸⁵

31. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights underlines both the negative and the positive obligations of all States for the advancement of science and the dissemination of scientific knowledge (i.e. the obligations to respect, to protect and to fulfil), including via the adequate financing of science; the removal of any discriminatory barriers; the provision of access to the most advanced and up-to-date science; protection of the right to participate and benefit from science and scientific progress; refraining from disinformation, disparagement or deliberate misinformation; elimination of censorship and arbitrary limitations on access to the Internet; refraining from imposing and eliminating any obstacles to cooperation among scientists.⁸⁶

32. The Special Rapporteur notes that the duty to protect and to fulfil should be understood as a part of the due diligence obligation of States to ensure that no private actor, including universities, laboratories, staff or other persons, violate academic freedoms.

33. She underlines that, as in the case of the right to education, any limitations on academic freedoms should be prescribed by law, promote the general welfare of the democratic society and be compatible with the nature of the right restricted, proportionate to the aim and necessary insofar that whichever measure is imposed should be the one that least affects economic, social and cultural rights. In addition,

⁸⁰ Ibid., para. 5.

⁸¹ Ibid., para. 6.

⁸² See [A/HRC/20/26](#) and [A/HRC/55/44](#).

⁸³ Committee on Economic Social and Cultural Rights, general comment No. 25 (2020), paras. 13 and 41.

⁸⁴ Working group on academic freedom, “Principles for implementing the right to academic freedom”, 31 May 2024.

⁸⁵ Principle 1 of the principles for implementing the right to academic freedom; see also [A/HRC/56/58](#), para. 9.

⁸⁶ Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, general comment No. 25 (2020), paras. 14–20 and 42.

according to article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, such limitations may only apply if deemed necessary for the respect of the rights or reputations of other persons or for the protection of national security or public order,⁸⁷ with the burden of proof of the necessity and proportionality of such measures lying strictly with the State, and with no retrogressive measures permissible. The Human Rights Committee, in its general comment No. 34 (2011), explicitly states that research that does not harm national security or public order may not be suppressed.⁸⁸

34. She also aligns with the position of the Human Rights Committee that all restrictions in the online area (online platforms, blogs, etc.) should be fully compatible with article 19 (3) and be content-based, with the burden of proof lying with the State imposing such restrictions.⁸⁹ The same limitations should apply when webpages and blogs are used for reputational pressure or affect human rights.

35. The working group on academic freedom encourages international contacts and cooperation among academic, research and teaching staff and students, including through international gatherings, collaborative projects, travel abroad, the use of Internet or video-conferencing systems and supportive visa legislation and policies.⁹⁰

B. Impact of unilateral sanctions on the right to benefit from scientific progress

36. The Special Rapporteur notes multiple reports of restrictions on access to scientific knowledge and digital platforms caused by unilateral sanctions, in addition to the limitations referred to in previous sections of the present report. The right to benefit from scientific progress and its applications under article 15 (1) (b) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights includes access to scientific knowledge, tools, publications and digital platforms, without discrimination. The Covenant emphasizes the obligation of States to respect, protect and fulfil this right by ensuring the accessibility and dissemination of scientific knowledge, removing barriers to scientific communication and enabling international academic cooperation.⁹¹ These restrictions hinder research productivity, reduce global collaboration and exclude scholars from scientific discourse.

37. Scientific institutions and researchers reportedly face systemic exclusion from global platforms due to both direct sanctions and third-party overcompliance with such measures. For example, major publishers such as Elsevier, Springer and JSTOR, have blocked access from Iranian Internet protocol (IP) addresses, citing sanctions regulations.⁹² Iranian scholars are frequently unable to pay article processing charges for open-access journals due to blocked international financial transactions. Furthermore, platforms such as GitHub have suspended Iranian user accounts, affecting software developers and artificial intelligence researchers.⁹³ Access to key educational platforms and services such as Coursera, Zoom, Google Cloud, Amazon Web Services, MATLAB and AutoCAD is also either partially or fully restricted, impeding both teaching and research.⁹⁴ In Cuba, similar restrictions have led to exclusion from key scientific and legal databases, including JSTOR, LexisNexis and

⁸⁷ A/HRC/56/GRP.2, principle 2; [A/HRC/56/58](#), paras. 24–29.

⁸⁸ Human Rights Committee, general comment No. 34 (2011), para. 30.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, para. 43.

⁹⁰ A/HRC/56/GRP.2, principle 6.

⁹¹ Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, general comment No. 25 (2020), para. 52.

⁹² Submission by the Iranian Elite Research Center.

⁹³ Submission by the Association of Iranian Jurists Defending Human Rights; see also [A/77/296](#).

⁹⁴ Submission by the Association of Iranian Jurists Defending Human Rights.

Taylor & Francis.⁹⁵ Researchers in Zimbabwe, Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic also face limited access to international scientific databases such as Web of Science. Restrictions are often rooted in overcompliance by database providers or by the refusal by payment processing systems of transactions from sanctioned regions.⁹⁶ In these cases, the infrastructure of international research is de facto unavailable, reinforcing systemic marginalization from global academic dialogue.

38. The Special Rapporteur notes that the right to benefit from scientific progress and its applications includes not only access to the outcomes of scientific research, but also the freedom to disseminate findings and participate in scholarly discourse. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights emphasizes that States must ensure that it is possible to produce, disseminate and apply scientific knowledge. This entails an obligation to respect the freedom of researchers to publish, to protect against censorship or discriminatory exclusion and to fulfil their rights by actively supporting inclusive and equitable scientific communication channels.⁹⁷

39. Regrettably, numerous obstacles have emerged due to unilateral sanctions and overcompliance by academic publishers, journal platforms and financial service providers, despite the communications sent by the Special Rapporteur to some world-renowned publishers in 2022.⁹⁸ Reports received since then identify the persistence of a scheme⁹⁹ affecting the right to distribute academic knowledge and cooperate openly. Cuban institutions have also been excluded from journal subscription systems and scholarly databases based abroad, and researchers have reported difficulties in paying article processing charges required for open-access publication, even via international co-authors.¹⁰⁰ In Iraq, the lingering effects of past sanctions and the listing of institutions have translated into an informal embargo on participation in global publishing networks, including through the blocking of access to reviewer portals, manuscript submission systems and publishing grants.¹⁰¹

40. Scholars from countries under sanctions have been routinely barred from participating in editorial boards and peer-review processes, which undermines their contribution to global knowledge production. Major publishers such as Elsevier and Springer have, at times, instructed editors to avoid engagement with Iranian co-authors due to United States compliance policies.

41. Due to such challenges, many third-country scholars refrain from working on any joint research or publications with scholars under sanctions.¹⁰² Overcompliance by publishing houses and digital payment platforms has prevented researchers in Uzbekistan from making open-access payments and from being invited to contribute to international volumes or editorial initiatives, especially when affiliated with institutions that maintain historical ties with sanctioned regions.¹⁰³ For instance, papers co-authored with Iranian or Cuban researchers are delayed in the peer-review

⁹⁵ Submission by Raúl Rodríguez Rodríguez.

⁹⁶ Submissions by the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission and Iraq.

⁹⁷ Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, general comment No. 25 (2020), paras. 14 and 24–27.

⁹⁸ See communications OTH 37/2022; OTH 38/2022; OTH 39/2022; OTH 40/2022. All communications mentioned in the present report are available at <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/Tmsearch/TMDocuments>.

⁹⁹ Submissions by the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Iraq, Uzbekistan, the Iranian Elite Research Center, Association of Citizens Civil Rights Protection “Manshour-e Parseh” and Dr. Emily Morris.

¹⁰⁰ Submission by Dr. Emily Morris.

¹⁰¹ Submission by Iraq.

¹⁰² Submission by the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

¹⁰³ Submission by Uzbekistan.

process or rejected outright by certain journals and conferences.¹⁰⁴ Additionally, the unwillingness of publishers based in sanctioning States to deliver printed materials to Cuba, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Russian Federation or Belarus, citing fears of legal exposure due to sanctions regimes, has been repeatedly reported.¹⁰⁵

42. The Special Rapporteur underlines that these actions constitute a violation of the right to disseminate scientific results and the freedom of academic expression, undermining the core values of objectivity, inclusiveness and non-discrimination in global science, and undermining the right of all to benefit from scientific progress and its applications. The mechanism of violation may also involve third-party actors' overcompliance with sanctions regimes and the failure of States and international bodies to ensure that academic rights are preserved, regardless of geopolitical contexts.

43. Under article 15 (4) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, States are required to promote and facilitate international contacts and cooperation in scientific and cultural fields as essential components of the right to benefit from scientific progress. Freedom of research and the right to participate in and contribute to scientific advancement include unhindered academic mobility; participation in conferences, editorial roles and joint projects; and access to international funding mechanisms. These obligations fall under the duty to respect and fulfil the right by ensuring that no legal, political or administrative barriers arbitrarily restrict participation in global academic life.

44. Regrettably, unilateral sanctions and associated overcompliance have systematically obstructed international academic cooperation, similar to how unilateral sanctions and overcompliance have obstructed mobility in the education and scientific areas, as detailed above. These restrictions are enforced via different means, including visa denials or the inability to obtain appointments for visa applications; travel bans; the blacklisting of institutions; exclusion from academic events and the denial of remote participation; and exclusion from editorial boards and international consortiums and associations. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, in particular, in 2017, several Iranian researchers were barred from attending an American Association for Cancer Research conference in the United States, even though their abstracts had been accepted and they had received speaking invitations;¹⁰⁶ in 2019, Iranian Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineering members were reportedly banned from participating in editorial work and in the organizing committees of international journals and conferences under pressure from the United States Department of the Treasury.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, the University of Cambridge has suspended joint research with Iranian institutions due to sanctions-related concerns.¹⁰⁸ Cuban scholars have repeatedly been denied travel visas for international academic events and have often been excluded from online conferences because United States-based platforms (such as Zoom and Cisco Webex) have refused to let them subscribe and have blocked access from Cuban IP addresses,¹⁰⁹ even when it comes to United Nations events. Similar challenges were reported regarding

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Submission by Raúl Rodríguez Rodríguez; confidential submissions.

¹⁰⁶ Submission by the Iranian Elite Research Center.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Submission by Dr. Emily Morris; submission by Raúl Rodríguez Rodríguez.

Zimbabwe,¹¹⁰ the Syrian Arab Republic,¹¹¹ the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela¹¹² and Iraq.¹¹³

45. The Special Rapporteur is also concerned about confidential reports on limitations on participation in academic associations due to challenges related to the payment of membership fees, concerns from associations about compliance with the sanctions regimes of the country of registration (often a sanctioning State); the inability to obtain visas to participate in the activities of the association; the exclusion of scholars from countries under sanctions from the management of the associations due to geopolitical or reputational risks; and the closing of national branches due to an inability to use the banking system for the payment of membership or other fees.

46. Financial isolation resulting from unilateral sanctions and overcompliance has severely restricted the ability of researchers in sanctioned countries to access or contribute to scientific knowledge and has affected academic rights from all perspectives. Challenges include the exclusion of scholars from countries under sanctions from research grants due to formal restrictions and banking prohibitions on the transfer of funds to institutions and individuals in the targeted countries;¹¹⁴ concerns from academic institutions and associations on proper compliance; the blocking of any types of public or private payments for equipment, membership fees, software, online platforms, participation in conferences, booking hotels, obtaining access to academic and professional databases and journals, or making those processes extremely complicated and lengthy;¹¹⁵ prohibitions on receiving donations;¹¹⁶ and impediments to the import of scientific equipment and related financial transactions imposed by third-State institutions. Reported information also highlights the challenges faced by Cuban researchers in procuring laboratory equipment, even from third countries, due to United States sanctions and export controls prohibiting the sale or transfer of such equipment, particularly if such equipment contains 10 per cent or more of United States content or technology. In Iraq, academics continue to face systemic financial exclusion. These restrictions affect in particular Iraqi scholars who attempt to engage with international consortiums or subscribe to essential research databases.¹¹⁷

47. The above financial impediments, including banking prohibitions, denial of payment processing, restrictions on the trade in equipment and disqualification from funding schemes, are violations of States' obligations to ensure equitable and non-discriminatory access to the resources necessary for research and innovation and are direct violations of the obligation of States to fulfil the right to benefit from scientific progress through the provision of adequate financing mechanisms, including public and private funding, international cooperation and institutional support,¹¹⁸ as well as the due diligence obligation of States to prevent third-party interference that obstructs researchers' financial access to global scientific infrastructure and to remove obstacles that prevent marginalized or sanctioned populations from participating in and contributing to global scientific advancement. Denying mobility and cross-border collaboration impairs academic freedoms, the free flow of knowledge and the global nature of science as a public good. The Special

¹¹⁰ Submission by the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission.

¹¹¹ [A/HRC/54/23/Add.1](#), para. 66.

¹¹² Submission by the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

¹¹³ Submission by Iraq.

¹¹⁴ Submission by Venezuela.

¹¹⁵ Submissions by Iraq and Uzbekistan.

¹¹⁶ Submission by Uzbekistan.

¹¹⁷ Submission by Iraq.

¹¹⁸ Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, general comment No. 25 (2020), paras. 17 and 48.

Rapporteur aligns with the view of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights that States must remove barriers to scientific progress, including those arising from economic isolation, trade restrictions and extraterritorial overcompliance that deprive institutions of critical research equipment and materials.¹¹⁹

48. In States under sanctions, export controls and restrictions on high-tech goods have reportedly resulted in persistent shortages of advanced scientific, laboratory, computer, and diagnostic devices and equipment, as well as spare parts, reagents¹²⁰ and software or other digital tools essential for both research and education, including centrifuges, spectrometers, magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) and nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR) machines, superconducting magnets, three-dimensional printers, photovoltaic cells, wind tunnels, biotechnology reagents, such as recombinant proteins and polymerase chain reaction (PCR) kits, and isotopes for medical and scientific use. These shortages severely limit the ability of researchers to conduct experiments to ensure the reproducibility of scientific findings, undermining the global standards of education and research. In Cuba, the inability to import even enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay (ELISA) kits or PCR reagents, due to both United States sanctions and worldwide overcompliance, delays research outputs and prevents participation in international scientific networks. Impediments to the delivery of necessary healthcare equipment undermines, *inter alia*, the right to life and the right to the highest attainable level of health.¹²¹ In Niger, universities face delays or denials of international equipment shipments, including devices needed for scientific, engineering and agricultural research, affecting also the right to food and freedom from hunger.

49. The Special Rapporteur is also concerned about reports of brain drain and the demographic erosion of academic capacity in the countries under sanctions. Under article 15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, States are obligated to create conditions conducive to scientific progress, including through the retention of scientific talent and the preservation of institutional capacity. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, sanctions-induced financial hardships and restricted access to global networks have led to a massive exodus of academic talent. Over 60 per cent of top graduates in science, technology, engineering and mathematics emigrate within five years of graduation. Notably, Sharif University of Technology has lost more than 20 per cent of its faculty members, many of whom relocated to institutions abroad. Between 2009 and 2019, over 5,000 Iranian physicians emigrated, and more than 150,000 information technology professionals had reportedly left the country by 2021 due to economic stagnation, restricted innovation environments and geopolitical constraints.¹²²

50. In Cuba, long-standing embargo-related restrictions and financial isolation have severely constrained research funding and academic salaries.¹²³ This has driven a steady outflow of researchers, professors and medical personnel, particularly those working in the biomedicine and public health sectors. In the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, economic collapse, hyperinflation and material shortages, many worsened by sanctions, have resulted in the emigration of thousands of university professors and researchers. Many institutions report an acute shortage of qualified teaching staff, with some departments unable to maintain basic curricula or research programmes.¹²⁴ Zimbabwe has experienced a long-term erosion of academic capacity due to

¹¹⁹ Ibid., paras. 24, 42 and 49.

¹²⁰ Submission by Iranian academia.

¹²¹ Submission by the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela; see also communication USA 13/2022.

¹²² Submission by Iranian academia; see also Kokabisaghi and others, "Impact of United States political sanctions".

¹²³ Submission by Dr. Emily Morris.

¹²⁴ Submission by the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

constrained salaries, visa restrictions, decline in postgraduate supervision, loss of peer networks, the collapse of scientific funding and deterioration in academic programme quality due to economic isolation.¹²⁵

51. The Special Rapporteur emphasizes that this sustained demographic erosion of researchers and educators violates the obligation to fulfil the right to benefit from scientific progress, especially as it disproportionately affects the least developed countries and low-income countries, which already face structural constraints in maintaining knowledge production systems. The right to benefit from scientific progress is undermined when skilled academics are forced to emigrate due to material deprivation, isolation or lack of opportunity. Sustained brain drain not only weakens national research systems, but also erodes intergenerational mentorship, institutional memory and local innovation capacity, undermining the development of the nations and the world population and impeding the achievement of many of the Sustainable Development Goals.

52. Reports of pressures on, reprisals against and limitations on scholars and academic institutions from sanctioning States are also of serious concern. Besides the direct prohibitions on interaction with directly designated universities and research institutions, academics and academic institutions appear to be under pressure to avoid cooperation even when formal unilateral sanctions do not exist. Multiple reports confidentially highlighted a reluctance to engage in collaboration with Chinese researchers out of fear of being “blacklisted” by peers and donors, with possible serious reputational and financial implications. In particular, certain academic interlocutors outside China refused to share information about changes in foreign academic institutions’ policies vis-à-vis Chinese scholars, as they had been advised not to engage with the Special Rapporteur.¹²⁶

53. The Special Rapporteur is also alert to the fear felt by scholars from sanctioning States of participating in academic events in the countries under sanctions; of participating in conferences abroad alongside scholars from such countries, or even of responding to correspondence from their organizers; of submitting manuscripts for publication in the countries under sanctions; of the need to obtain special authorization for such publications, or the withdrawal of already submitted articles; and of possible negative repercussions for even participating in expert consultations, conferences and publications organized, co-organized or edited by the Special Rapporteur. Such reprisals are usually not explicit, but in some cases become very public. In particular, Tallinn University revoked the emeritus status of its former rector for participating in a conference in Moscow, even while claiming to adhere to academic freedoms.¹²⁷

54. This fear arises as a result of instructions from universities in sanctioning States that are often much broader than the unilateral sanctions themselves and that, similar to general overcompliance, are intended to apply additional limitations. Such instructions include recommendatory requests for voluntary self-disclosure of any funding,¹²⁸ broadly understood limitations on self-check-in for universities¹²⁹ and

¹²⁵ Submission by the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission.

¹²⁶ [A/HRC/57/55/Add.1](#), paras. 46 and 50.

¹²⁷ Mari Peegel and Aili Vahtla, editors, “Estonian university strips prof’s emeritus status over Russian conference”, *ERR News*, 17 September 2024; Anne-Laure Duféal, “Estonian professor stripped of ‘Emeritus’ status for attending Russian conference”, *Brussels Signal*, 18 September 2024.

¹²⁸ See [www.bis.gov/media/documents/academic-voluntary-self-disclosures-compliance-note-812.pdf](#) and [https://media.bis.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Academia%20press%20release%20final.pdf](#).

¹²⁹ See [www.aau.edu/sites/default/files/US%20OMB%20Questionnaire%20for%20Implementing%20Partners%5B62%5D%20copy.pdf](#).

threats of criminal prosecution for cooperation with counterparts from sanctioned countries.¹³⁰

55. The Special Rapporteur is alert to the use of academic research and publications as a means of defamation or of creating a feeling of distrust through the publication of articles in response to already existing sanctions-related works. She regrets, for example, that the profile of well-known journals is used for attacks on her reports,¹³¹ with publications written in an unethical and humiliating style, in violation of article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and principle 2 of the principles for implementing the right to academic freedom,¹³² instead of engaging in legal and factual assessment and argumentation, to which she was and is always open.

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

A. Conclusions

56. Unilateral sanctions, means of their enforcement and overcompliance have a detrimental effect on the right to education, the right to benefit from scientific progress and other academic freedoms around the world, including in the sanctioning States. They create conditions for retrogression, which constitutes a violation of articles 13 to 15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and is also inadmissible extraterritorially. Such impact has an indirect detrimental impact on other human rights, including the right to a decent life, gender equality, the right to decent work and a better future, the protection of children against forced labour and sexual exploitation, the right to life-long education, respect for human dignity, the right to life, the right to health and freedom from hunger, while constituting discrimination, directly affecting Sustainable Development Goals 4 and 10 and indirectly undermining the achievement of other Goals, especially in the spheres of health, food, energy, industry, innovation and consumption.

57. The imposition or enforcement of unilateral sanctions may constitute a violation of all elements of the right to education, the right to benefit from scientific progress and other academic rights in the countries affected by unilateral sanctions, both directly (via the imposition of unilateral sanctions on academics or academic institutions) and indirectly (due to the introduction of legislation aimed at implementing sanctions, including via the voluntary self-disclosure of projects; the exercise of extra precaution; the preventing of students and scholars from participation in academic events, editorial boards, academic exchange, scientific and educational associations and broader academic cooperation and from publishing in journals; the creation of challenges in payments, the procurement of teaching and training materials and access to academic and professional and other databases and resources). Impediments to access to information are also created via legislation on disinformation and misinformation, creating conditions for discrimination that ultimately constitute a violation of all types of obligations under articles 13 to 15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights to respect, to protect and to fulfil the right to education and the right to enjoy the benefits of scientific progress and its applications.

58. States are responsible for violations of academic freedoms within their jurisdictions and control that are aimed at implementing unilateral sanctions adopted

¹³⁰ Submission by the Institute of Sustainable Development; see also Kokabisaghi, “Impact of United States political sanctions”.

¹³¹ See Aaron Fellmeth, “Unilateral sanctions under international human rights law: correcting the record”, *Yale Journal of International Law*, 6 September 2023.

¹³² [A/HRC/56/58](#), paras. 27 and 28.

by them or by any other country. Responsibility for such violations cannot be shifted to private entities or justified by geopolitical reasons or good intentions. Such States are under an obligation to protect and to fulfil the right to education, the right to benefit from scientific progress and its applications and academic freedoms, under the principle of due diligence, and to take all possible measures to ensure that private actors and individuals under their jurisdiction and control do not violate those rights, including extraterritorially. If such violations take place, States are responsible for the violation of the principles of due diligence as well as for the violation of relevant human rights.

59. Any challenges in the exercise of access to justice and in ensuring access to effective remedies¹³³ when the right to education and academic rights are violated, as an integral part of due diligence obligations of States, constitute a violation of the right to education and academic rights, according to the understanding of relevant rights by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and UNESCO. Sanctioning and enforcing States bear the burden of proof that their activity and activity under their jurisdiction and control does not violate the right to education or the right to benefit from scientific progress and academic freedoms.

60. States under sanctions have the primary responsibility to ensure the right to education and academic freedoms, including via measures taken to mitigate the negative impact of unilateral sanctions, but only within the scope of the maximum resources available and with due account taken of the adverse impact of unilateral sanctions on national capacities and on resources.

61. Unilateral sanctions undermine the ability of States under sanctions to implement progressively their obligations under articles 13 to 15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, including regarding access to education; teaching materials, including digital means and learning technologies; accessibility of education; the maintenance of the proper quality of education; obstructions to international academic cooperation; school infrastructure and the learning environment; inclusive education and support for vulnerable groups; and brain drain due to reductions in available resources (including adequate financing of scientific research and remuneration of academic and scientific personnel).

62. Any direct or indirect limitations on international contacts and cooperation among academic, research and teaching staff and students, including through international conferences, associations, travel, exchange programmes and collaboration projects and through the use of the Internet or video-conferencing systems, constitute a violation of the obligation of States to encourage and ensure international cooperation under articles 2 and 15 (4) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights¹³⁴ and article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

B. Recommendations

63. **Sanctioning States and regional organizations should:**

(a) **Ensure that all unilateral means of pressure do not violate their international obligations or ensure that they stay within the limits of countermeasures, in accordance with the law of international responsibility. All measures not in conformity with the above requirements and not directly**

¹³³ [A/79/183](#); Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, general comment No. 25 (2020), para. 89.

¹³⁴ Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, general comment No. 25 (2020), paras. 77–83; principle 6 of “Principles for implementing the right to academic freedom”.

authorized by the Security Council constitute unilateral coercive measures and should be lifted, including those imposed on academics and academic institutions to prevent development in the sector under sanctions, regardless of the intentions;

(b) Provide, without any discrimination (whether direct or indirect, formal or substantive), access to judicial protection of the right to education and the right to benefit from scientific progress and academic freedoms affected by unilateral sanctions via affordable, fast, clear, transparent and effective remedies, including judicial protection;

(c) Ensure that the right to education, academic freedoms and international public and private cooperation in this sphere, under their jurisdiction and control and extraterritorially, are not affected by unilateral means of pressure;

(d) Stop and prevent in the future any discrimination based on nationality, origin or place of residence or birth, as well as discrimination based on IP address or any other nexus with countries under sanctions in all spheres, including education, science and professional training and development;

(e) Cease and take all necessary measures to prevent in the future reprisals and threats against any academics under their jurisdiction and control for educational and scientific cooperation with scholars or institutions under sanctions, including via participation in academic events, joint publications or editorial boards, and provide them with effective remedies to protect their rights as an integral part of academic freedoms;

(f) Ensure that unilateral means of pressure (inter alia, sanctions on money transfers, travel or insurance and limitations on the opening of bank accounts), regardless of their legal status, do not create any additional impediments or substantive or indirect discrimination in the sphere of education or science against people with links to a State, a sector of the economy or a private actor targeted by unilateral sanctions;

(g) Rescind all legislation on disinformation and misinformation, as reflected in the Special Rapporteur's report on unilateral sanctions in the cyberworld ([A/77/296](#)), that prevent the ability to obtain information from all possible sources, and make sure that information used for academic research is properly verified;

(h) Ensure that relevant State institutions and private actors under their jurisdiction and control do not launch or engage in any reputational pressure campaigns or other means of pressure against scholars and academics, and instead protect their right to exercise their academic freedoms;

(i) Remove, and ensure that entities under their jurisdiction and control remove, all direct obstacles (sanctions against research institutions or researchers; prohibitions on cooperation in certain spheres or with organizations from specific countries; obstacles to access to online instruments or platforms; reprisals against scholars cooperating with institutions or scholars from countries under sanctions) or indirect obstacles (visa restrictions and challenges in making visa appointments; impediments to the transfer of scholarships, revenue or salary payments; the closing of bank accounts; the introduction of sanctions clauses in publication ethics rules; challenges in sending publications to countries under sanctions; inability to obtain licences for the delivery of training, research and other materials for training, education and life-long education) to, inter alia, international cooperation, including in the form of

participation in academic events; collaboration projects; exchanges; training; or student competitions or exchanges.

64. UNESCO should monitor the impact of unilateral sanctions on the right to education and the right to benefit from scientific progress and academic freedoms, including via the development of the sanctions monitoring tool, and address the impact of unilateral sanctions alongside other impediments in its assessments and documents relevant to education, science, the rights of children and young people and non-discrimination.

65. The International Labour Organization (ILO) should monitor and assess:

(a) The impact of unilateral sanctions on the involvement of children in forced and unsafe labour, sexual exploitation, the right to decent and green jobs and life-long education, due to the inability to obtain access to education at all levels, and retrogression in the fulfilment of the right to education, the right to benefit from scientific progress and other academic freedoms in countries under sanctions;

(b) Any reprisals in the labour, economic and social protection areas against academics and researchers for engaging in academic and scientific cooperation with individuals, companies and countries affected by unilateral sanctions directly or indirectly.

66. United Nations institutions, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and United Nations specialized agencies, should address the impact of unilateral sanctions on the right to education and academic freedoms and on non-discrimination, as well as on indirectly affected human rights and the relevant Sustainable Development Goals, within their assessment and reporting systems, including the universal periodic review, and within the monitoring of the achievement of the Goals, the rights of children and gender equality.

67. United Nations treaty bodies should:

(a) Accept cases regarding violations by sanctioning or enforcing States of the right to education, academic freedoms and non-discrimination, as well as the consequently and indirectly affected right to development, the right to a decent life, the right to decent work, the right to food and gender equality, within the scope of relevant human rights treaties. Access to the United Nations treaty bodies in sanctions cases should not be conditional on exhausting local remedies, as the individuals affected are not able to access justice meaningfully, as reflected in the report of the Special Rapporteur on access to justice in the face of unilateral sanctions and overcompliance ([A/79/183](#));

(b) Take into account the impact of unilateral sanctions on the ability of States under sanctions to comply with their human rights obligations under relevant treaties, when assessing their national reports;

(c) Take into account the impact of unilateral sanctions, among other factors, on the human rights set forth in the relevant treaties, when drafting or updating their general comments.

68. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights should consider addressing in the future the issue of the impact of unilateral sanctions on economic, social and cultural rights in a new general comment.

69. Businesses or other private entities involved in the area of education, including universities; academic and professional associations; online platforms;

owners, editors and managers of academic or professional databases, publishing houses and journals; and individuals should:

(a) Refrain from any activity affecting any elements of the right to education (whether formal or informal) or the right to benefit from scientific progress and academic freedoms, or constituting discrimination due to any nexus to unilateral sanctions;

(b) Ensure proper consideration of any requests for the restoration of affected rights;

(c) Ensure that decisions on publication, participation in academic events or training of individuals are taken based on academic criteria only, without discrimination or sanctions-induced restrictions. The existence of any nexus to a State, sector of the economy, or individuals or entities under sanctions must not be used as a justification for abstaining from cooperation, engagement or peer review of publications on the grounds of exercise of extra precaution;

(d) Make sure that people enjoy access to online resources, online platforms and online databases, without any formal or substantive discrimination;

(e) Refrain from involvement in reputational pressure campaigns or any reprisals against their staff or foreign nationals, as long as the activity of such individuals is not explicitly subject to the limitations on academic freedoms as set out by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in its general comment No. 25 (2020);

(f) Ensure that their own activity is in strict conformity with academic conscience and the facts and methodology of a corresponding area of science. Academic publications, blogs and other means should not be used for the advancement of unilateral activity that is not in conformity with international law and must not be used as a means of pressure against other academics.

70. States under sanctions should:

(a) Take all possible measures to mitigate the impact of unilateral sanctions on the right to education and the right to benefit from scientific progress and academic freedoms to the maximum of resources available;

(b) Report on the impediments caused by the unilateral sanctions environment to their ability to demonstrate progress in the progressive implementation of the right to education and academic human rights, to avoid retrogression and to achieve Sustainable Development Goals 4 and 10, and other consequently and indirectly affected Goals, to the United Nations human rights treaty bodies, the universal periodic review, UNESCO, ILO, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, UNICEF and instruments for the assessment of progress on the achievement of the Goals.
