



## Security Council

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### **Letter dated 4 December 2020 from the Permanent Representative of China to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council**

I have the honour to refer to the virtual Arria-formula meeting of the Security Council on the theme “End unilateral coercive measures now”, co-hosted by the Permanent Missions of China, the Niger, the Russian Federation, South Africa and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to the United Nations on 25 November 2020.

It would be appreciated if the present letter and the Co-Chairs’ summary of the meeting (see annex) could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

*(Signed)* **Zhang Jun**  
Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the  
People’s Republic of China to the United Nations



## **Annex to the letter dated 4 December 2020 from the Permanent Representative of China to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council**

### **Virtual Arria-formula meeting of the Security Council on the theme “End unilateral coercive measures now”**

#### **Co-Chairs’ summary**

##### **Background**

1. On 25 November 2020, the Permanent Missions of China, the Niger, the Russian Federation, South Africa and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to the United Nations co-hosted a virtual Arria-formula meeting of the Security Council on the theme “End unilateral coercive measures now”. The meeting was attended by more than 70 countries and chaired by Ambassador Zhang Jun, Permanent Representative of China to the United Nations.

2. Ms. Alena Douhan, Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights, Mr. Fermín Quiñones, President of the Cuban United Nations Association, Mr. Khaled Erksoussi, Secretary-General of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, and Dr. Nhamo Mhiripiri, Associate Professor at Midlands State University in Zimbabwe, gave briefings on the serious consequences of unilateral coercive measures.

3. Unilateral coercive measures usually refer to one State’s economic measures to compel changes in the policy of another State. Examples of such measures include trade sanctions in the form of embargoes and the interruption of financial and investment flows between senders and target countries. Unilateral coercive measures are contrary to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and international law, and severely hamper the economic development and health capacity of affected countries. In the context of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, their negative influences have drawn more attention and concerns from Member States than ever. The General Assembly has adopted a biennial resolution entitled “Unilateral economic measures as a means of political and economic coercion against developing countries” since 1989 alongside resolutions entitled “Necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba” every session since 1992 and resolutions entitled “Human rights and unilateral coercive measures” annually since 1997. Recently, both the Secretary-General and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights called for waiving sanctions that undermine countries’ capacity to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. At the general debate of the seventy-fifth session of the General Assembly, many leaders called for the lifting of unilateral coercive measures. On 5 October 2020, 26 countries made a joint statement at the general debate of the Third Committee of the General Assembly, calling for the complete and immediate lifting of unilateral coercive measures. This meeting was the first ever Arria-formula meeting on unilateral coercive measures.

##### **Remarks and key points by the co-hosts**

4. Ambassador Abdou Abarry, Permanent Representative of the Niger to the United Nations, said that unilateral sanctions do not guarantee scrupulous respect for human rights and international law, nor is there any guarantee that they are not political weapons at the sole service of the sanctioning State. Their impacts on populations are very often negative, and their scope and impact on third parties are counterproductive, as is the case with bans on maintaining relations with a sanctioned

country. He called for lifting the sanctions affecting human rights in the context of COVID-19.

5. Ambassador Jerry Matthews Matjila, Permanent Representative of South Africa to the United Nations, said that unilateral coercive measures imposed by one State or a group of States infringe the sovereignty of affected States, defy international law and impede nations' efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Under Article 41 of the Charter of the United Nations, the Security Council is the only entity that has the right to impose coercive measures necessary to ensure compliance with international law. South Africa regrets that Security Council resolution [2532 \(2020\)](#) did not take into consideration the necessary action to alleviate the impact of unilateral coercive measures on national efforts to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic and the humanitarian situation in affected countries. He reiterated the position of the African Union that economic sanctions against Zimbabwe and the Sudan should be lifted to allow their Governments to respond adequately to the pandemic. It is imperative that we remain faithful to our global commitment to leave no one behind.

6. Ambassador Halimah DeShong, Deputy Permanent Representative of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to the United Nations, said that all forms of unilateral coercive measures, no matter what their stated aims and intentions are, are contrary to the purposes of the Charter of the United Nations and inimical to multilateral cooperation, and gravely contravene the principles of international law. In the midst of a global pandemic, when multilateral cooperation is needed most, these contradictions, in purpose and in principle, undermine global unity. She called on all powerful countries to withdraw their unilateral coercive measures and prejudicial constraints on weaker nations.

7. Ambassador Vassily A. Nebenzia, Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations, said that the Russian delegation to the United Nations had always stressed the importance of global solidarity, mutual respect in multilateralism and joint efforts. But those are the things we are unlikely to reach as long as many developing countries of the world face unilateral coercive measures. It is never enough to repeat that such measures take place in violation of the Charter of the United Nations. They also undermine the right to development. The "humanitarian exemptions" do not work effectively on the ground. He drew attention to the initiative of President Vladimir Putin to establish so-called "green corridors", primarily for essential goods, foods, medicines and personal protective equipment needed to fight the pandemic. As a follow-up to this call, he recalled the recent Russian initiative on introducing monitoring by the United Nations system, with the help of the reinvigorated resident coordinator system, of the impact of unilateral coercive measures on the post-COVID-19 recovery of programme countries.

8. Ambassador Zhang Jun, Permanent Representative of China to the United Nations, said that the application of unilateral coercive measures contradicts the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and international law. They inflict heavy blows to social and economic development and hinder the well-being of the population in the affected countries. Unilateral coercive measures also impede humanitarian operations in vulnerable countries and undermine the affected countries' health capacity and their ability to mobilize resources to fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. As the illegal nature and negative impacts of unilateral coercive measures are very explicit, the international community must act quickly to end such measures now.

#### **Main points from the discussion**

9. Ms. Douhan stressed that unilateral sanctions undermine existing regional and bilateral cooperation mechanisms. For countries that depend on food imports,

unilateral sanctions disrupt existing food supply and payment chains and result in increasing prices for food and medicine. The countries imposing unilateral sanctions measures cannot be expected to guarantee human rights by violating human rights. The COVID-19 pandemic has made negative humanitarian effects of unilateral sanctions more obvious and more disastrous. She noted that unilateral sanctions are changing, with emerging new types, means, methods and purposes, including cybermeans. The right to life and the right to development are badly affected, with women, children, refugees and migrants being the most vulnerable. She suggested that the unilateral sanctions be minimized, with their humanitarian impact taken into account, and preferably under the control of the United Nations.

10. Other briefers also noted that civilians were the biggest victims of unilateral coercive measures. Unilateral coercive measures imposed by the United States of America and the European Union impede access to health care, education, drinking water and basic services, have a serious impact on the flow of funds, the procurement of goods and the health facilities of humanitarian agencies, hamper reconstruction and economic development and exacerbate poverty, especially in conflict-affected countries. Unilateral coercive measures also restrict the normal movement of people to and from the affected countries. The so-called humanitarian exemptions do not work at all. All the briefers called for the immediate lifting of unilateral coercive measures.

11. Most delegations who participated in the meeting welcomed the initiative to convene the meeting and highlighted the following points:

(a) It should be a matter of concern for all that some States and international actors continue to ignore their obligations under the Charter of the United Nations and international law when resorting to unilateral coercive measures to secure their own objectives;

(b) Unilateral coercive measures contradict the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and international law. Some countries use unilateral coercive measures to suppress legitimate sovereign Governments and even attempt regime change. Such practices go against the basic norms of international relations and are extremely harmful to multilateralism, and thus threaten international peace and security;

(c) The negative impact of unilateral coercive measures has been repeatedly affirmed in numerous resolutions of the General Assembly as well as by the Human Rights Council. Unilateral coercive measures seriously undermine the socioeconomic development of the affected countries and the well-being of their people and violate the right to life, health and a decent living of the people in the affected countries. Unilateral coercive measures, in almost all cases, worsen the humanitarian situation, and even create a grave socioeconomic and financial crisis;

(d) Sanctions regimes of the Security Council should also be constantly reviewed so as to avoid humanitarian consequences;

(e) They called on all States to choose dialogue over confrontation and mutual respect over unilateral acts and coercion. Unilateral coercive measures only drive parties concerned further apart, leaving deep-seated scars for long-term rapprochement and conciliation;

(f) They called for the removal of unilateral coercive measures, which adversely affect countries' socioeconomic development and people's livelihoods. This culture of unilateral coercive measures must end immediately without preconditions, especially during the difficult circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic;

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(g) The Security Council, the General Assembly, Member States, United Nations resident coordinators and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs should pay close attention to the negative impacts of unilateral coercive measure on relevant countries and their people, and heed the appeals of the Secretary-General and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights with concrete actions. Non-governmental organizations, civil society, humanitarian workers and the media are encouraged to collect information on the challenges brought by unilateral coercive measures and make it known to the world in a joint effort to bring down the unfair practices.

12. Several delegations noted that unilateral coercive measures are appropriate, effective and legitimate measures that are fully compliant with international law and the Charter of the United Nations, as one part of a comprehensive and proportionate strategy. Economic sanctions are a legitimate way to achieve foreign policy, security and other national and international objectives. There is no evidence in support of the humanitarian exemptions being ineffective. Most delegations, however, disagreed with their arguments.

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