



**United Nations Human Rights Council
(UNHRC)**

Topic:

**Addressing the impact of economic sanctions on Cuban
citizens Human Rights.**

Chairs:

Regina Cervantes Ramírez

Iñaki Molina Caballero



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Committee Background:

The **Human Rights Council (HRC)** is one of the principal organs of the United Nations responsible for promoting and protecting human rights worldwide. It was established in 2006 to replace the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, which had been criticized for its inability to effectively address human rights abuses. The HRC consists of 47 member states and meets at least three times a year to review and discuss pressing human rights issues.

The primary goal of the HRC is to provide a forum for governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and other international actors to address human rights challenges, promote accountability, and ensure respect for international human rights standards. The council conducts regular reviews of human rights practices in all member states through the **Universal Periodic Review (UPR)** process, where each country's human rights situation is evaluated every four years. In addition to this, the HRC monitors and addresses human rights violations in countries around the world through resolutions, special procedures, and commissions of inquiry.

The HRC plays a critical role in ensuring that international human rights standards are upheld and that victims of human rights violations receive justice. The importance of the council lies in its ability to raise awareness of human rights abuses and provide a platform for global cooperation to resolve these issues. It is a key international body for holding governments accountable for their human rights records and works to protect the dignity and equality of individuals worldwide.

Background Information:

Topic: *The Impact of Economic Sanctions on the Human Rights of Cuban Citizens*

Economic sanctions are policies imposed by governments or international organizations to influence the behavior of another country, usually in response to perceived violations of international law or human rights. The case of Cuba is unique



in that the sanctions imposed, particularly by the United States, have been in place for over six decades and have profoundly affected the lives of ordinary Cuban citizens.

The U.S. sanctions against Cuba began in the early 1960s after the Cuban government, led by Fidel Castro, nationalized American-owned businesses and aligned itself with the Soviet Union during the Cold War. The U.S. government initially imposed a trade embargo, which has since expanded to include financial and travel restrictions. The stated goal of the sanctions was to force the Cuban government to transition from a communist system to a democratic one while promoting respect for human rights.

However, despite the enduring sanctions, the Cuban government has remained in power, and the situation for ordinary Cuban citizens has worsened. The embargo has severely limited Cuba's access to goods, including food, medicine, and technology, which has had a detrimental impact on public health, education, and the economy.

Causes:

The primary cause of the sanctions is the longstanding ideological and political conflict between Cuba and the United States, stemming from the Cuban Revolution in 1959. The Cuban government's alignment with the Soviet Union and its adoption of communist policies led the U.S. to impose economic sanctions as a means of isolating Cuba and weakening the regime. Over time, U.S. policies toward Cuba have been shaped by concerns over the Cuban government's human rights record, lack of political freedoms, and its support for other authoritarian regimes in Latin America and beyond.

Consequences:

The sanctions have led to numerous consequences for Cuban citizens, particularly in terms of economic hardship, public health, and political freedoms:

- **Economic Hardship:** The sanctions have made it extremely difficult for Cuba to trade freely with other countries, leading to shortages of essential goods,



including food, medicine, and consumer products. This has created widespread poverty and economic inequality.

- **Public Health Impact:** Cuba's healthcare system, once a source of pride for the country, has been severely impacted by the sanctions. Despite Cuba's efforts to maintain a robust public health system, the shortage of medical supplies, equipment, and medicines due to the sanctions has affected the quality of care.
- **Limited Freedoms and Repression:** The Cuban government has used the sanctions as a pretext to justify political repression and curtail civil liberties. The regime has continued to limit freedom of expression, suppress political dissent, and imprison activists and journalists critical of the government.

The issue:

The core problem is whether the sanctions, which are intended to pressure the Cuban government to respect human rights and transition to a democratic system, have been effective. While the U.S. government argues that the sanctions are necessary to promote democratic change, critics contend that the sanctions have harmed the Cuban people, rather than the government. The humanitarian impact of these sanctions on ordinary citizens raises important questions about the effectiveness of such policies in achieving their intended goals.

Why is this Important?

This topic is important because it raises critical questions about the balance between international pressure and the protection of human rights. While sanctions are often used as tools of diplomacy, they can have unintended consequences for the civilian population. Understanding the impact of economic sanctions on human rights is crucial for evaluating the effectiveness of such policies and considering alternative approaches to international relations and conflict resolution.



Timeline of Key Events:

- **1959:** Cuban Revolution, Fidel Castro takes power and nationalizes U.S.-owned businesses.
- **1960:** U.S. imposes the first economic sanctions on Cuba, following the nationalization of American properties.
- **1961:** The U.S. breaks diplomatic relations with Cuba, and the embargo on Cuba becomes more severe.
- **1992:** The Torricelli Act further strengthens the embargo, limiting U.S. investments in Cuba and restricting travel.
- **1996:** The Helms-Burton Act codifies the embargo into U.S. law, making it more difficult for future U.S. administrations to lift restrictions.
- **2009:** President Barack Obama begins easing some restrictions on Cuba, including allowing more remittances and family travel.
- **2014:** The Obama administration announces a historic thaw in U.S.-Cuba relations, allowing for more trade and diplomatic engagement.
- **2017:** President Donald Trump reverses many of Obama's policies, re-imposing some sanctions and restricting U.S. travel to Cuba.
- **2020:** The Trump administration increases sanctions, targeting Cuba's military, financial, and energy sectors.
- **2021-Present:** The Biden administration continues some sanctions but also seeks dialogue, although tensions remain high.

Position of Nations:

United States:

As the primary actor in imposing sanctions on Cuba, the United States has long justified these measures as a means to promote human rights and democracy in Cuba. U.S. officials argue that the Cuban government's lack of political freedoms, its suppression of dissent, and its ties to other authoritarian regimes make sanctions necessary. However, the U.S. has also faced criticism for the humanitarian toll the



sanctions have taken on the Cuban population, with many arguing that the sanctions disproportionately harm ordinary citizens rather than the ruling government.

Cuba:

Cuba views the sanctions as an unjustified act of aggression by the United States and a violation of its sovereignty. The Cuban government has consistently argued that the sanctions have hindered the country's economic development and caused widespread suffering among its people. However, the Cuban government has also used the sanctions as a rallying cry to unite the population against external threats, strengthening its grip on power and further limiting political freedoms.

European Union:

The European Union has taken a more moderate approach to the issue. While the EU supports the lifting of sanctions on Cuba, it also has concerns about human rights abuses within Cuba. The EU has pursued diplomatic engagement with Cuba, supporting its integration into the international community while calling for improvements in the human rights situation.

Key Terms:

- **Economic Sanctions:** Officially imposed restrictions on trade, financial transactions, or other economic activities by one or more countries to influence the behavior of a target country.
- **Embargo:** A government-imposed ban on trade with a specific country or group of countries.
- **Torricelli Act (1992):** U.S. law that extended the trade embargo to include foreign subsidiaries of U.S. companies and limited U.S. citizens' travel to Cuba.
- **Helms-Burton Act (1996):** U.S. law that codified the Cuban embargo and made it harder for the U.S. to lift sanctions without Congressional approval.
- **Universal Periodic Review (UPR):** A process of reviewing the human rights practices of all UN member states every four years.



Guiding Questions:

1. How have U.S. economic sanctions impacted the daily lives of Cuban citizens in terms of access to food, healthcare, and basic services?
2. Are economic sanctions an effective tool for promoting human rights and political change, or do they disproportionately harm civilians?
3. What alternative approaches could be considered to improve the human rights situation in Cuba without causing widespread economic harm?
4. How can international actors, such as the United Nations, play a role in mitigating the impact of sanctions on the Cuban population?
5. Should the international community seek to lift or modify sanctions against Cuba in light of their humanitarian consequences?

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