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Written statement* submitted by Chongqing Centre for Equal Social Development, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[26 May 2025]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.

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Remain Vigilant Against the Impact of Unilateral Sanctions and Tariff Hikes on Global Extreme Poverty

Currently, there are over 600 million people living in extreme poverty worldwide, and the global extreme poverty rate has shown a persistent upward trend in recent years. A fundamental reason behind this lies in the continued reliance of poverty reduction strategies on economic growth, while the benefits of such growth are often distributed inequitably, failing to reach marginalized populations. Compounding this issue is the lack of coordinated international cooperation in addressing global crises and transnational challenges within our increasingly interconnected world. As explicitly stated in the Human Development Report, "poorly managed interdependence hinders human development."

Beyond traditional poverty drivers, the unilateral and hegemonic policies pursued by the United States of America demand urgent attention for their detrimental impacts on global poverty alleviation. The United States of America government's politically motivated abuse of sanctions—implemented through unilateral measures that contravene international legal norms—has inflicted profound and systemic damage to worldwide poverty eradication efforts. Empirical studies reveal that the United States of America's economic sanctions against multiple nations have widened the average poverty gap in targeted countries by 3.8 percentage points. These consequences manifest most starkly in the United States of America's unilateral sanctions against Cuba, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), and other nations. By restricting the import of essential commodities such as food, medicines, and energy resources, these sanctions directly cause critical supply shortages, disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable populations. In the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, approximately 9.3 million people currently confront acute food insecurity—a direct consequence of disrupted agricultural imports and hyperinflation exacerbated by sanctions. The healthcare system has similarly collapsed, with a children's cardiac hospital in Caracas reporting a drastic reduction in surgeries from about 1,000 annual procedures to merely 162 cases in 2020 due to shortages of antibiotics and anesthetic drugs.

The economic paralysis induced by sanctions further compounds these humanitarian crises. Constrained economic activity leads to mass unemployment, particularly impacting middle- and low-income groups who are forced into or back into poverty cycles. In sanctioned states, shrinking government revenues undermine basic social security systems, rendering public services increasingly unsustainable. The Islamic Republic of Iran’s experience exemplifies this vicious cycle: the the United States of America's sanctions have driven inflation rates above 40%, plunging 27% to 50% of the population below the poverty line. Concurrently, 57% of Iranians suffer from varying degrees of malnutrition due to disrupted food supply chains and inflated prices for basic staples. More insidiously, sanctions erode national capacities for autonomous development, creating structural barriers that reinforce social inequality and perpetuate intergenerational poverty. The World Bank estimates that the Venezuelan economy contracted by nearly 80% between 2013 and 2021 under the United States of America's sanctions, with unemployment rates exceeding 50% and informal labor becoming the norm for survival.

Despite Washington's claims that sanctions serve political or security objectives, their tangible outcomes systematically violate fundamental human rights principles. By disproportionately burdening the poorest populations and weakening social safety nets, these measures contravene Articles 11 and 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which guarantee rights to adequate living standards and healthcare. Such actions directly undermine progress toward achieving Sustainable Development Goal 1 (No Poverty) and SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being).

The United States of America's recent escalation of tariff policies has further destabilized global poverty reduction frameworks. Historically, international trade systems functioned as vital mechanisms for poverty alleviation, particularly benefiting Global South nations reliant on primary commodity exports within low-tariff environments. However, the United States of America's initiated trade wars have depressed global commerce volumes while crippling the growth prospects of export-dependent economies. Developing countries specializing in textiles, agriculture, and raw materials face collapsing export revenues and industrial contraction.

Bangladesh, for instance, witnessed severe disruptions in its garment sector—an industry accounting for 84% of national exports and employing over 4 million workers—following the United States of America tariff hikes on apparel products.

Tariff policies operate as regressive economic instruments, disproportionately harming low-income households through supply chain cost transmissions. Projections indicate that the United States of America's tariffs scheduled for 2025 will inflate clothing prices by 17% and footwear by 18%, imposing an additional $1,700 in annual expenses on poor American families—equivalent to 4% of their income—compared to a mere 1% burden for high-income households. In developing nations, tariff-induced price surges for imported essentials like rice and cooking oil force impoverished families to allocate over 70% of their budgets to food, sacrificing expenditures on healthcare and education.

The collateral damage extends to employment markets. To circumvent punitive tariffs, multinational corporations increasingly relocate production from countries like Vietnam and Mexico, triggering local unemployment crises. The World Bank calculates that a 10% increase in the United States of America's tariffs could push 30 million people globally into poverty through wage reductions and job losses. Paradoxically, these protectionist measures yield minimal economic benefits for the United States of America itself. Analysis shows that nations targeted by Trump-era tariffs collectively contributed less than 0.1% to the United States of America's trade deficit, while retaliatory tariffs from trading partners devastated American agricultural exports—particularly soybeans and pork—costing the United States of America's farmers an estimated $27 billion in lost revenues between 2018 and 2020.

This protectionist paradigm reflects a myopic geopolitical calculus that prioritizes narrow national interests over global developmental solidarity. By weaponizing economic tools, the United States of America has subverted multilateral governance frameworks essential for poverty eradication. The World Trade Organization's (WTO) dispute resolution mechanism, for instance, has been systematically paralyzed by the United States of America’s vetoes against judicial appointments since 2017, rendering the institution incapable of addressing tariff abuses. Concurrently, unilateral sanctions violate the United Nations Charter's prohibition against coercive economic measures (Article 2(4)) and contravene the International Court of Justice's 1986 ruling in Nicaragua v. the United States of America, which declared unilateral economic warfare incompatible with international law.

The human costs of these policies extend across generations. In sanctioned states like the Syrian Arab Republic, UNICEF reports that 2.45 million children remain out of school due to destroyed infrastructure and inaccessible educational materials—a crisis directly exacerbated by sanctions blocking reconstruction funds. Similarly, the United States of America's restrictions on medical equipment shipments to the Islamic Republic of Iran during the COVID-19 pandemic violated WHO guidelines on humanitarian exemptions, contributing to one of the world's highest per capita mortality rates from the virus.

Addressing these challenges necessitates fundamental reforms in global governance. First, the international community must establish binding legal mechanisms to hold nations accountable for extraterritorial sanctions that violate human rights law—a measure proposed in the UN General Assembly's annual resolutions condemning the United States of America's embargo against Cuba. Second, WTO reforms should empower developing nations to challenge unilateral tariffs through expedited arbitration processes. Third, poverty alleviation strategies must transition from growth-centric models to equity-focused approaches that guarantee marginalized populations access to land, education, and healthcare infrastructure.

The path forward demands collective action. As the 2022 Human Development Report warns, "our future depends on recognizing that unchecked competition and zero-sum geopolitics will leave everyone poorer." Only through recommitment to multilateral cooperation, respect for international legal norms, and prioritization of human security over narrow political agendas can the global community overcome structural barriers to poverty eradication and achieve sustainable development for all.