

U.S. continues to block Iranian assets needed to buy medical equipment



Tehran, March 28 (RHC)-- Iran rejects reports that the United States has agreed to grant sanctions waivers to certain countries in order to open up the way for the Islamic Republic to access frozen assets and buy medical supplies and equipment needed to fight the pandemic of the new coronavirus.

A senior Iranian Foreign Ministry official said on Saturday that Washington continues to block Iranian assets needed to purchase medicines and equipment to contain the COVID-19 pandemic. The official made the remarks in response to some reports claiming that Washington had granted waivers to some countries allowing them to release frozen Iranian assets to help Tehran buy urgent medical supplies.

"The efforts of some countries have led to the release of some of the Iranian central bank's money," a source told London-based Middle East Eye news outlet on Friday. "Those countries will receive a sanctions waiver [for releasing Iran's frozen assets], this has been granted and we are following this issue," the source added.

Grappling with the coronavirus outbreak, Iran is facing sweeping American sanctions targeting every aspect of the Iranian economy. Many world leaders, figures and groups have called on the US to

suspend the sanctions that have negatively impacted Iran's efforts to curb the outbreak.

Washington, however, has rejected the calls, denying recent reports that it seeks to scale back sanctions against Iran.

Iran has sought to counter the U.S. bans restricting much needed aid by stepping up the development of its own necessary medical equipment and supplies. Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif on March 7th lashed out at U.S. President Donald Trump for tightening the illegal sanctions against Iran, saying such a move is aimed at draining the Islamic Republic's resources required in the fight against the novel coronavirus.

He added that the world can no longer keep silent as Washington's economic terrorism is "supplanted by its medical terrorism." The United States on Thursday imposed new sanctions against 20 companies, officials and individuals in Iran and Iraq, despite growing global pressure on the US to end sanctions on Iran as the country battles the coronavirus pandemic.

The U.S. Treasury Department said in a statement the sanctions freeze any U.S.-held assets of those designated and generally bar Americans from doing business with them.

Iranian First Vice President Es'haq Jahangiri also said on Saturday that Washington is telling lies that its sanctions against Tehran do not include medicines and basic commodities. Speaking at a meeting with managers and physicians of a headquarters tasked with battling the coronavirus in Tehran, Jahangiri added that the U.S. blocks the transfer of money, medicines and basic commodities to Iran by imposing oil, banking, insurance and transportation sanctions on the Islamic Republic.

He noted that Iran needs an annual budget of up to three billion dollars to supply required medicines and some 14 billion dollars for basic commodities. Despite facing certain problems and unlike many countries, Iran has provided adequate goods for its people, the vice president said.

Kianoush Jahanpour, the head of public relations and information center of the Iranian Ministry of Health, said on Saturday that 35,408 individuals have been confirmed to be infected with the disease, 2,517 of whom have lost their lives. As many as 11,679 individuals have also recovered from the virus.

Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Abbas Mousavi on Saturday hailed an "unprecedented" move by eight countries who called for the immediate lifting of unilateral sanctions imposed mainly by the United States and the European Union on the Islamic Republic, saying the world should stand against the US' unilateralism and its violation of international regulations.

"Unfortunately, the Americans have found the courage during the recent years to impose their own internal regulations and cruel sanctions on other countries," Mousavi said in an interview with the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB).

He added that the United States is pursuing specific objectives by imposing some restrictions on independent countries and expressed hope that nations facing Washington's sanctions and those independent states that oppose Washington's unilateralism would set up a union and adopt measures to resist its bullying.

Earlier this week, eight countries sent a letter to UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, warning about the negative impacts of unilateral sanctions on international anti-coronavirus efforts.

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