

U.S. senators request to ease sanctions against Venezuela and Iran



Washington, March 29 (RHC)-- U.S. Senator Christopher Murphy and 10 other lawmakers sent a letter to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Secretary of the Treasury Steven Mnuchin urging them to alleviate the sanctions that the U.S. enforces against Iran and Venezuela amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We are writing to express our concern regarding the deteriorating humanitarian crises in countries under U.S. sanctions as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to spread. We are particularly concerned about the impact of sanctions on the COVID-19 response in Iran and Venezuela," the Democratic senators said.

"As these countries struggle to respond to their domestic health crises, U.S. sanctions are hindering the free flow of desperately needed medical and humanitarian supplies due to the broad chilling effect of sanctions on such transactions, even when there are technical exemptions," they added.

On Thursday, Attorney General William Barr announced that the United States designed Venezuela as a state sponsoring terrorism. Besides being arbitrary, this accusation makes it even more difficult for the Bolivian people and their government to buy basic goods in international markets.

The U.S. lawmakers recalled that the short term abeyance of sanctions has "ample precedent" in the U.S. foreign policy. "For instance, when a massive earthquake struck Iran in 2003 killing 26,000 people, the Bush administration temporarily suspended sanctions to send 150,000 pounds of medical supplies and more than 200 aid workers to help," Sen. Murphy and his colleagues highlighted.

Although the sanctions are not supposed to cover medicines, it is recalled that companies are refraining from making transactions with Venezuela and Iran for fear of being punished. "Our sanctions regime is so broad that medical suppliers and relief organizations simply steer clear of doing business in Iran and Venezuela in fear of accidentally getting caught up in the U.S. web sanctions," the lawmakers stressed.

In a related move earlier this week, eight countries also called on the United Nations chief to ask for the lifting of Washington's unilateral sanctions on various countries that are hindering the global fight against the new coronavirus.

The diplomatic missions of Russia, China, Iran, Syria, North Korea, Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela sent a letter to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and warned about the negative impact of the sanctions on the international efforts aimed at containing the deadly virus. They said the sanctions also had a direct impact on "the human rights to life, health and food of the peoples subjected to them."

The United States has declined to remove sanctions on such countries as Iran and Venezuela amid the coronavirus outbreak and despite global calls on Washington to do so.

The novel coronavirus, a respiratory disease known as the COVID-19, emerged in the central Chinese city of Wuhan in December last year, incrementally infecting some 185 countries across the world. More than 533,000 people worldwide have so far been infected with the virus and over 24,000 have died, according to a running count by worldometers.info.

More than 32,000 people have tested positive for COVID-19 in Iran, of whom more than 11,000 have recovered and nearly 2,400 have died, according to figures released by the Iranian Health Ministry on Friday.

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