

# *International community calls on U.S. to lift sanctions on Iran as death toll rises*

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Tehran, March 18 (RHC)-- Calls on U.S. President Donald Trump to ease economic sanctions on Iran are multiplying, as the Persian country is one of the world's most affected by the coronavirus outbreak, infecting 16,169 people and killing 988 so far in the country.

Authorities in the Islamic Republic along with critics say the sanctions are hindering the government's effort to face the crisis. "Although Iran has one of the Mideast's best medical services, its hospitals appear to be overwhelmed and authorities have asked for 172 million masks from abroad," the Associated Press reported Tuesday, adding the country has also "asked the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for \$5 billion, the first such loan for Iran since 1962."

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif accused the U.S. of "medical terrorism," and said that following Washington's sanctions is "immoral." Zarif urged other countries to ignore the sanctions, echoed in his call by Ariel Gold of the U.S.-based peace group CodePink.

In an article published by Common Dreams, Gold and CodePink co-founder Medea Benjamin said that by the time the COVID-19 cases appeared in Iran "the country's economy, including its healthcare system,

had already been devastated by U.S. sanctions."

"The reimposition of sanctions after the Trump administration's withdrawal from the nuclear deal in 2018 has had a devastating impact on the economy and on the lives of ordinary Iranians. The Iranian currency, the rial, lost 80 percent of its value. Food prices doubled, rents soared, and so did unemployment," they wrote.

Reuters reported Monday that despite the ongoing humanitarian crisis and increasing concern from the international community, U.S. officials and diplomats said the Trump administration is unlikely to listen to the calls and relieve Iran.

On the other hand, and since the beginning of the crisis, China is among the countries supporting Iran with its response to COVID-19 and pressuring Trump to lift sanctions. Russia's Foreign Affairs Ministry also called on the U.S. to provide immediate relief, arguing that "the global pandemic is not a time for settling geopolitical accounts, especially those that have no basis, invented in Washington for the purpose of satisfying their own ambitions."

"Illegal unilateral U.S. sanctions, imposed since May 2018 as part of the 'maximum pressure' campaign, are a powerful obstacle to the effective fight against the infection. The reason for the many victims, caused by it, lies not only in the disease itself but also in the fact that the U.S., purposefully hinder the resistance [to the coronavirus]," the Russian statement added.

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