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Professor Sari Hanafi, Distinguished President of International Sociological Association

Professor Marta Soler-Gallart, Distinguished President of European Sociological Association

Professor Christine Williams, Distinguished President of American Sociological Association

Professor Dina Rizk Khoury, Distinguished President of Middle East Studies Association

Dear Colleagues,

I am writing to you on behalf of the board and members of the Iranian Sociological Association to share our concern at the continued sanctions imposed by the US against Iran and their escalation, and to call upon you to join our voice and take a stand for easing the sanctions at this very critical moment in view of the global COVID-19 pandemic.

With the pandemic sweeping through Iranian society and the escalation of sanctions, the economy has entered a deep recession, jeopardizing the livelihoods of 80 million Iranians. Sanctions have affected everybody, but have hit low income people harder as the threat of losing their livelihoods has forced them to work under unsafe conditions in the midst of a fully fledged public health crisis.

Studies conducted by our colleagues on the trends of Iranian state budget show that a part of the resources, made available after the lifting of the sanctions as a result of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, known commonly as the Iran nuclear deal, was invested in the health sector and towards the expansion of health insurance coverage. The withdrawal of the United States from the Iran nuclear deal and the new sanctions imposed by President Trump Administration have resulted in the diversion of resources from these sectors, adversely affecting public health infrastructure and the public health insurance safety net. To this untimely and negative development, one needs to add the crippling effect economic sanctions have had on Iranian banking and trade relations and, by extension, the disruption inflicted to access to ordinary humanitarian aid, medicine, and medical equipment at this critical juncture.

Needless to say, amid this maelstrom, Iranian sociologists are suffering as members of the broader society. Yet, here, I would like to draw your attention to the combined impact of the sanctions and COVID-19 on sociology as a profession:

Just as in the case of the country's health infrastructure, university education has suffered as a result of the shortfall in financial resources. We anticipate a drastic reduction of investment in higher education, with the social sciences taking a disproportionate hit in comparison to research and education in other fields deemed pivotal for the economy of the country. To this,



one needs to add the overreliance of the sector on the hiring of adjuncts and part-time faculty and staff, who are most likely the first to be made redundant due to the anticipated shortfall of public investment in education. Furthermore, the COVID-19 crisis has already imposed strains in the delivery of quality education in the social sciences at a time when critical thinking is crucial in addressing the political and societal challenges faced by Iran. As the pandemic has led to the closure of universities and prompted plans for a rapid move of teaching and learning to online platforms, universities are unprepared and lack the infrastructure required to continue offering students a meaningful learning experience. Although all universities providing social science education are hard hit, the ones based in provincial towns disproportionately bear the impact of these challenges. As the critical space in universities that Iranian sociologists have fought hard to create and sustain shrinks, a new generation of students becomes deprived of and disconnected from such spaces. As such the damage to sociology departments and Iranian society becomes irreparable.

From its very inception, the Iranian Sociological Association, has been addressing and analyzing societal challenges, including those pertaining to democratic governance and public health, through the tools available to it within a public sphere already riddled with risks and constraints. As such, we are quite aware of the domestic limitations and inefficiencies and have always contributed with critical and constructive interventions. Yet, the sanctions, particularly in this conjuncture, further diminish our capacity to remain a critical, constructive and socially relevant influence.

Today, more than ever, we need human solidarity and concerted action. The more the world becomes interconnected, the more our problems turn to be interrelated, and the more we need to move toward global collaboration to address them. The Iranian Sociological Association as a beneficiary of the common heritage of social sciences and their underlying concern for peace, justice and human welfare, looks forward to the support of international colleagues in its call to mitigate the current situation and to help sustain the role of the Iranian sociological community at the face of adversity.

Sincerely,

Seyed Hossein Serajzadeh,

President of Iranian Sociological Association