

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

May 22, 2020

The Honorable Steven T. Mnuchin  
Secretary of the Treasury  
Department of the Treasury  
1500 Pennsylvania Ave. NW  
Washington, DC 20220

Dear Secretary Mnuchin:

We write to urge the United States to ease sanctions on African nations in a manner designed to permit them to more adequately respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. The United States should take immediate action to temporarily ease sanctions on Sudan and Zimbabwe and expand licensing of sanctions-exempt items to ensure that these countries can access essential humanitarian resources during the pandemic. We urge you to do so consistent with American efforts to protect the people of these countries from threats to their basic human rights and civil liberties.

Over the past few weeks, my office has received reports that highlight the impact of sanctions on access to essential medicines and equipment, such as respirators and personal protective equipment for healthcare workers. As the world attempts to contain the spread of the new coronavirus, it is critical to ensure that countries are in the best position to tackle the impact of the virus on their populations, healthcare workers, and healthcare and public health systems. Countries with some of the most advanced healthcare systems nearly toppled as increased numbers of patients required critical care and medical professionals required essential personal protective equipment. Because African countries are now dealing with increased numbers of cases, and we know that these countries have weak healthcare systems, it is critical that the global community do all that it can to contain the spread of the virus and save lives.

United Nations leadership has called for rolling back international economic sanctions regimes around the world because sanctions heighten the health risks for millions of people and weaken the global effort to contain the spread of COVID-19. The United Nations Secretary General António Guterres made the call in a letter to the G-20 member countries arguing that the move would allow for the access of essential medical equipment required to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, Hilal Elver, UN special rapporteur on the right to food, noted that, "The continued imposition of crippling economic sanctions severely undermines the ordinary citizens' fundamental right to sufficient and adequate food." Both Sudan and Zimbabwe have experienced food shortages in recent years.

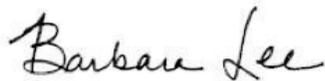
The United States can reduce restrictions and facilitate countries' access to medicine, critical medical equipment, and technology that will enable them to deal with the impact of COVID-19 in a way that does not undermine American efforts to protect and expand human rights and civil liberties. The temporary lifting of sanctions will also prevent a hunger crisis as countries grapple with the economic impact of the pandemic. Humanitarian exemptions to sanctions measures should be authorized for essential medical equipment and supplies to avoid the collapse of healthcare systems, and to save lives across the continent. The populations of African countries are in no way responsible for the policies being targeted by sanctions. I expect that the United States will firmly send the message that human rights must be respected, and repression should not be used as an excuse for dealing with the pandemic.

Easing economic sanctions as the world grapples with the COVID-19 pandemic is a matter of humanitarian urgency for global public health reasons, and to support the rights and lives of millions of people in sub-Saharan Africa.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Karen Bass in black ink.

Karen Bass  
Member of Congress

Handwritten signature of Barbara Lee in black ink.

Barbara Lee  
Member of Congress