

**Statement by Minister Osman Saleh at the
Geneva Conference on Unilateral Sanctions**

**GENEVA, Switzerland
9-10 April 2026**



Excellencies, Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen, At the outset, allow me to convey Eritrea's sincere appreciation to the organizers of this timely and consequential conference. We commend Professor Alena Douhan, the Special Rapporteur on the Negative Impact of Unilateral Coercive Measures on the Enjoyment of Human Rights and Professor Attiya Waris, the Independent Expert on the effects of foreign debt for advancing a principled and evidence-based discourse on what has become one of the most pressing, yet insufficiently scrutinized, features of the contemporary international system.

We gather at a moment of profound significance. The international order is increasingly characterized by the normalization, expansion, and quiet institutionalization of unilateral coercive measures. Their scope has widened, their application intensified, and their reach extended far beyond national jurisdictions. This evolution has unfolded largely outside the framework of multilateral legitimacy and in tension with the foundational principles of international law, sovereign equality, non-interference, and the importance of the Charter of the United Nations.

Excellencies,

Eritrea's encounter with sanctions regimes spans nearly two decades. The imposition of United Nations Security Council sanctions from 2009 to 2018, grounded in unsubstantiated claims and geopolitical expediency, marked a period of significant constraint on the country's development trajectory. Although these measures were eventually lifted, their residual effects persist.



More critically, they have been supplanted, and in certain respects deepened, by an expanding architecture of unilateral coercive measures imposed by influential state actors. The cumulative impact of these measures has produced what can only be described as systemic financial exclusion. Eritrea, while formally part of the global economy, faces persistent barriers in conducting routine financial transactions essential for trade and development. Payments are delayed, denied, or subjected to excessive scrutiny. This is further compounded by a pervasive culture of over-compliance among financial institutions, which, seeking to mitigate risk, often exceed formal requirements, transforming restrictions into far more severe de facto barriers.

A central paradox lies at the heart of this system. These measures are often justified as tools to promote and protect human rights. In practice, however, they undermine the very rights they purport to advance. In Eritrea, their consequences are concrete and far-reaching.

In the health sector, access to life-saving medicines, diagnostic equipment, and essential technologies is routinely impeded by formal restrictions, disrupted

financial channels and supplier hesitancy, thereby affecting the realization of the right to health.

In agriculture, constraints on financing and logistics limit access to inputs and machinery, undermining food security and rural livelihoods. Across infrastructure sectors, water, energy, and transport, difficulties in securing financing and procuring equipment impose structural limitations on development.

These represent systemic impediments to the realization of the right to development and the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals. Distinguished Participants,

Equally concerning is the growing gap between the formal articulation of humanitarian exemptions and their practical implementation. While such exemptions exist in principle, their effectiveness is undermined by the reluctance of financial institutions to process even permissible transactions.

The fear of secondary sanctions, regulatory penalties, and reputational risk creates an adverse impact. As a result, transactions that are legally allowed become practically impossible. Access to essential goods is thus obstructed not through explicit prohibition, but through the cumulative weight of financial and administrative barriers. This divergence between legal frameworks and operational reality raises serious questions about the credibility of existing safeguards.

Excellencies,

The enforcement of unilateral coercive measures has also diffused responsibility across a complex network of state and non-state actors. Decisions with profound humanitarian consequences are increasingly made within opaque compliance systems, often without transparency, explanation, or recourse.

This diffusion of agency has fragmented accountability, making responsibility obscure. Affected states and populations are left with limited avenues for redress. The current legal lacuna, wherein harm is evident but redress is elusive, cannot be sustained if the international system is to regain its normative coherence.

Distinguished Participants,

Eritrea is of the considered view that addressing these challenges requires a principled and collective response.

First, there must be a reaffirmation of the centrality of the Charter of the United Nations. Measures with far-reaching humanitarian consequences must be anchored in multilateral legitimacy and collective accountability, not unilateral discretion.

Second, the phenomenon of over-compliance must be addressed through greater regulatory clarity, safe harbor provisions, and the establishment of protected humanitarian financial channels.

Third, the international community must move toward enforceable frameworks of responsibility that encompass both state and non-state actors, ensuring that those affected have access to meaningful remedy.

Finally, it is imperative to reassess the underlying assumptions that sustain the widespread use of unilateral coercive measures. Policies that claim to advance human rights must be evaluated against their actual, lived impact.

Excellencies,

Allow me to conclude with a reflection. Unilateral coercive measures are often portrayed as targeted and temporary. In reality, their effects are expansive, indiscriminate, and enduring. They shape economies, constrain development, and affect the daily lives of ordinary people in profound ways.

If the international community is to remain faithful to its commitment to human rights, it must confront these contradictions with clarity and resolve. Eritrea stands ready to engage constructively in this effort, guided by the principles of genuine multilateralism and mutual respect.

I thank you.

On Apr 9, 2026