SPECIAL PROCEDURES
UNITED NATIONS
HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

Statement by Ms. Reem Alsalem, Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences *

The following statement is in response to the article published on Geneva Solutions on the 26th of July, titled *"UN expert wants to make women's rights about biology. Campaigners warn it's anti-gender rhetoric"*

I must express my disappointment that Geneva Solutions refused my request to publish a formal right of reply, allegedly on the basis that I was offered "the chance to respond which was declined." That claim is misleading and a disservice to readers. In fact, I was not given a meaningful opportunity to respond to the questions sent to me, as I was given just 6 hours to reply on the 24th of June 2025–a day filled with many back-to-back commitments and meetings in Geneva ahead of my report presentation before the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC).

Special rapporteurs and other mandate holders are independent experts appointed by the Human Rights Council by virtue of their expertise. They are mandated to carry out their work impartially and independently and to root their analysis in international and regional human rights frameworks. I take great care to employ internationally agreed-upon concepts and terminology. Terms used in the article, such as "sex work" and "cis women," are not examples of established terms in international law or consensus.

Mandate holders like me are also independent from all actors, including UN entities, civil society, and media. The credibility and effectiveness of their work do not hinge on popularity or consensus. Yet, I note that the article fails to mention the substantial global support that my positions receive, including from hundreds of individual women and women's organizations, including on issues such as gender identity, discrimination against women and girls, and prostitution. In fact, this support was clear in the positive reception of my latest report (A/HRC/59/47) to the Human Rights Council.

I regret that the article misrepresents the findings and conclusions of my latest report. It wrongly claims that I argue that "violence faced by women and girls is ultimately rooted in their biology rather than their gender". This is false. My report reasserts the centrality of sex in shaping the women's and girls' experiences of discrimination and violence, which often intersect with other grounds. I have also explicitly stated that "acknowledging the centrality of sex in shaping the experiences of females does not

mean locking them into biological determinism", nor does it negate the concept of gender or gender-based violence, as the concept of gender is the social meaning given to the biological differences between men and women. Decades of human rights of UN standard-setting efforts to better protect and promote the human rights of women and girls have clarified that gender builds on sex and does not erase it. I remain firm in my position that, where tensions between competing rights or interests arise, international law in no way dictates the subjugation of the rights of women and girls to other considerations, including gender identity.

What I find particularly troubling however is the article's attempt to frame me within a tired, moralistic, and simplistic narrative that targets even women and girls who defend their rights: that those you disagree with are aligned with conservatism and protectionism. To label advocates for women's rights like me, and thousands of others, as mouthpieces of extremist, right-wing agendas proves precisely the point that I made in my report—women's rights defenders are often threatened, smeared and undermined for asserting their dignity and claiming their equality and safety. Ironically, the article reinforces that very dynamic.

I also would have expected the article to reflect basic professional deontology and journalistic balance with respect to my relationship with relevant stakeholders. While most of the sources for this article are anonymous, the voices of those highlighted come exclusively from those who do not support or are hostile to my work. Meanwhile, allegations made by any of the organizations cited in the article are not verified and thus go unchallenged. For example, organizations such as Sexual Rights Initiative (SRI) who claim to have "cut contact" have never sought constructive and respectful engagement - instead launching strong attacks to undermine my work and my mandate.

In closing, while I would have hoped for and expected a fair and balanced coverage, I do once again appreciate the visibility and attention that your article, as biased as it is, has brought to my work—however skewed the framing may be. I continue to have faith in the public's ability to use their own reason and common sense to discern for themselves, which is exactly what gives me hope for the future.

Brussels 21 July 2025

**** The Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, as a Special Procedures mandate of the Human Rights Council, serves in her individual capacity independent from any government or organization***