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Statement by

Ms. Reem Alsalem, Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls*

11 May 2026

The following statement is based on a letter sent by the Special Rapporteur Reem Alsalem to the President of ANTRA Brazil on 8 May in response to its letter of 2 March 2026[1].

In the letter, ANTRA calls on me to revisit positions it perceives as restrictive and to explicitly reaffirm that my mandate protects all women, "including trans women", in line with international human rights standards; issue a public clarification to dispel so-called concerns that about my work; avoid framing protections as a conflict between "cis and trans women" and encourage continued dialogue with trans organizations to promote an inclusive and cohesive approach to combating violence.

I note the respectful tone of this letter, which could be taken by readers, including me, to signal a departure from the long-standing aggressive attacks that ANTRA launched against me.

However, this letter does not represent any departure from ANTRA's hostile attitude towards me and my work, considering the intense lobbying that ANTRA engaged in ahead of my academic visit to Brazil to undermine my visit.

It has come to my attention during my visit that ANTRA had circulated a document to many interlocutors and stakeholders in Brazil, particularly in government and official institutions, to discourage them from meeting with me. In doing so, ANTRA has successfully managed to pressure judges in the Supreme Court of Brazil from meeting with me and from attending the seminar in which I spoke at the University of Brazilia on the 3rd of March 2026.

Some of these false allegations and misinformation were repeated in the document issued by ANTRA following my visit entitled: "Sexuality Policy Watch, *Dossier on Anti-Trans Policies*" (May 2026)"

As the documents illustrate, ANTRA has once again disseminated misinformation and disinformation about my positions and statements. Since my positions are extensively documented and elaborated, such misrepresentation cannot be accidental.

I take the opportunity to correct the misinformation briefly again here:

I. On ANTRA's erroneous description of my visit to Latin America and Brazil

[1] ANTRA also referred to the content of the letter sent to me here publicly: https://ANTRAbrasil.org/2026/03/03/ANTRA-envia-carta-a-relatora-especial-da-onu-sobre-violencia-contra-mulheres-e-meninas/

ANTRA makes mistakes and errors in describing the nature of my visit to Latin America, including Brazil. ANTRA claims that my visit was deliberately and wrongly being described as an official visit.[2] The visit is official in the sense that everything we do as mandate holders has an official aspect to it. We do it in our capacity as mandate holders and not as private individuals. This was, however, an academic visit and not a country visit. Academic visits, which are visits to countries to participate in conferences, are visits that we are fully allowed to carry out. Many mandate holders carry out such visits regularly.

I was invited by different universities and not only Catholic ones. In Colombia, for example, the event I spoke at was hosted by three different universities: La Sabana, La Javeriana and Externado. The timing of the visits was based on the timing of the events organized by my hosts and had nothing to do with the elections in any country.

I had informed the permanent missions of all three countries that I was carrying out these visits. We are only under duty to inform the missions of the host countries, which I have done. The visits were therefore held in a transparent manner, unlike what ANTRA insinuates in its document.

ANTRA claims that my trip was "sponsored" by MATRIA and that therefore it is not transparent. My flight tickets to Brazil and my accommodation in Brazil was paid for by the funds of the mandate (except for one internal flight). Nevertheless, and even if an NGO or academic institution had paid for my travel and accommodation, doing so would not be contrary to the code of conduct or the methods of work, as long as this is indicated upfront.

In all three countries, including Brazil, I have managed to meet some government officials, and engage the Senate either as a whole or as a subsidiary commission. The same applies to Brazil. Contrary to what ANTRA claims, I did have meetings in Brazil with Government officials other than Chief Justice Carmen Lucia.[3]

ANTRA also continues to repeat the false allegation that I had been granted the opportunity to carry out a country visit by only the Bolsonaro Government[4], in the continued attempt to paint me as right-wing. As I have repeatedly clarified, both the Bolsonaro Government and the Lula Government had each approved a country visit to Brazil, which were postponed on two occasions.

II. On the Gender Recognition Act of Scotland

ANTRA states that in 2022, I sent a communication to the Scottish Parliament contesting the content of the proposed reform of the Gender Recognition Act. With regards to the Act, I acknowledge that according to human rights standards, "States have a core obligation to facilitate the legal recognition of gender diverse people, in a manner consistent with the rights to freedom from discrimination, equal protection before the law, privacy, identity and freedom of expression. However, a right to legal gender recognition

[2] "Sexuality Policy Watch, *Dossier on Anti-Trans Policies*" (May 2026)", p. 14.
[3] Ibid, p. 15
[4] Ibid, p. 14.

does not imply a right to unregulated self-identification of gender identity without appropriate safeguarding and risk assessment."[5]

III. On transgender participation in sport and sex screening

ANTRA wrongly claims I support the exclusion of transgender athletes from sports and the return of sex testing.

I do not support the exclusion of transgender athletes from sports. I emphasize the right of all persons to participate in sport but stress the importance of ensuring that everyone plays in the category of their sex. Females who are transgender (i.e., who do not identify as females) are entitled to play in the female category. I have spelled out this position continuously and consistently over the years, including in my last press release of the 2nd of April on the International Olympic Committee's change of policy limiting eligibility for any female category at the Olympic Games and in other reports, particularly "Violence against women and girls in sport" (A/79/325). As for sex testing, to be more precise, I support SRY gene screening and clearly state that further tests may be needed for rare cases involving specific differences in sex development conditions. As experts have mentioned, and which I support, "current technology enables a reliable sex screening procedure through a simple cheek swab that ensures non-invasiveness, confidentiality and dignity".[6]

IV. On conversion therapies

ANTRA wrongly claims that I support practices of sexual and gender reorientation, known as conversion therapies.

Unlike what ANTRA states, I do not support conversion therapies. My position is expressed in this interview and reports such as the report on my visit to the United Kingdom in 2024. It aligns with the recommendations of many experts, including child experts, as well as women organizations. I also have a strong record of advocating for the rights, safety and non-discrimination of same-sex attracted women.[7]

It is now widely recognized that transitioning children, particularly medically, is harmful. The most extensive study to date, published in April 2026, demonstrated that among adolescents who underwent medical gender reassignment, psychiatric morbidity increased three to five times.[8]

Research shows that children and adolescents with autism spectrum, particularly girls, are more likely to be diagnosed with gender or bodily dysphoria. It also shows that girls "..are particularly vulnerable to the socially contagious stereotyped roles as coping strategy, placing them at risk of erroneously adopting stereotypes as their core identity while experiencing dissociation from their sexed bodies. The long-lasting and harmful

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[5] Statement by Ms. Reem Alsalem, Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls*, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/women/sr/activities/SR-VAWG-statement-response-SRI.pdf

[6] See thematic report entitled "Violence against women and girls in sport" (A/79/325), para. 30.

[7] See e.g. thematic report entitled Sex-based violence against women and girls: new frontiers and emerging issues (A/HRC/59/47), para 15, 33-35.

[8] https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/apa.70533

consequences of social and medical transitioning of children, including girls, are being increasingly documented. They include persistence or intensification of psychological distress; persistence of body dissatisfaction; infertility, early onset of the menopause and an increase in the risk of osteoporosis; sexual dysfunction; and loss of the ability to breastfeed in cases of breast mastectomy (to mention a few). …Allowing children access to such procedures not only violates their right to safety, security and freedom from violence, but also disregards their human right to the highest standards of health and goes against their best interests. Children are also not able to provide informed consent for such procedures. In situations in which such procedures have been found to have caused grave and lifelong harm, consent would be meaningless for both adults and children"[9].

On this issue, I also noted in the same paragraph that the above-mentioned findings have rightly led several countries, such as ANTRA's own country, Brazil, as well as the Kingdom of the Netherlands and the United Kingdom to mention a few - to change course and restrict children's access to puberty blockers, cross-sex hormones and surgery on sexual and reproductive organs.[10]

I have therefore recommended strongly the need to "uphold the rights of children, including girls, to be free from all forms of physical and mental violence and to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, including through the prohibition of legal and social transitioning of children who claim to experience gender dysphoria, as well as their subjugation to experimental, irreversible medical interventions related to gender reassignment, while ensuring comprehensive, evidence-based assessments for them to address underlying neurodevelopmental, psychological or other conditions before any intervention" However I have gone beyond that to also urge States to "establish legal and policy frameworks providing effective remedies, accountability mechanisms and robust support services for all harmed by such interventions, including those seeking to detransition, ensuring access to individualized care and support services, rehabilitation and access to alternative health and care providers, irrespective of prior treatment."[11]

V. On the conflation of sex, gender and gender identity

ANTRA states that I take the position that there is a "confusion" between the terms sex, gender and gender identity, which I consider a disregard for the "material reality" of biological sex.

I do assert that there is a deliberate conflation between sex, gender and gender identity that does not adhere to nor uphold the UN definitions of these terms. My concern about this conflation, which includes a disregard for the material reality of biological sex, is that it leads to the erasure of women and girls in law and in practice; disregards the centrality of sex in their experiences, including of discrimination and violence in contravention to international law, and undermines targeted policies that are meant to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls. I acknowledge that males and females can be

[9] See thematic report entitled Sex-based violence against women and girls: new frontiers and emerging issues (A/HRC/59/47), para 22.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid para 62 (c)

subjected to gender-based violence, stressing that the term "gender" builds on the term "sex" and does not negate it.

VI. On the UK Supreme Court Decision of April 2025

ANTRA states that I welcomed the April 2025 decision of the UK Supreme Court stating that trans women are not women.

I have indeed welcomed the UK Supreme Court decision, however ATRA misrepresents what the decision consists of. Accuracy and precision are important. In its judgment, the Court determined that, for the purposes of the UK's Equality Act 2010, 'sex' is binary, and must be understood as bearing its ordinary meaning as biological sex and that the terms 'woman' and 'man' are to be understood as referring to biological females and males respectively. The Court also ruled that the Scottish Government is acting unlawfully by treating men who identify as women and who hold a Gender Recognition Certificate (GRC) as women for the purposes of a law aimed at improving the inclusion of women on public boards.[12] By welcoming the decision, therefore, I affirmed the women's and girls' right to tailored protections, and single-sex safe spaces, where their existence is legitimate, proportionate and necessary.

VII. On "sex work"

ANTRA claims that I recently recommended removing the term "sex work" from documents of the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

I do not know what ANTRA refers to with the above allegation. My position on the term "sex work," is clear - I do not use it as "the term is neither recognized nor defined in international law." In addition, the term wrongly depicts prostitution as an activity as worthy and dignified as any other work; it fails to take into account the serious human rights violations that characterize the prostitution system and "gaslights" victims and their experiences."[13]

VIII. On funding to the mandate

ANTRA claims that when asked by AzMina magazine about the funding that my mandate receives, I had "refused" to respond. This is not accurate. I requested the interviewer to contact the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) as I did not know if this information was already public. Any funds that have been received by the mandate have been used through the usual official channels similar to all other special procedures that may receive extra-budgetary funds. They are officially disclosed by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

It is worth mentioning that both the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, including Saudi Arabia fund different United Nations agencies, including the OHCHR and other special

[12] Press release dated 2 May 2025, Special Rapporteur welcomes landmark UK judgment on sex-based protections
[13] See thematic report Prostitution and violence against women and girls (A/HRC/56/48), para. 6

procedures and their activities. Is ANTRA suggesting that they are also wrong or anti-gender to receive money from these donors?

IX. Malicious slander

The most disturbing part of ANTRA's letter is its continued unfounded accusation that I adopt positions aligned with those defended by the far right and radical social groups that "flirt with transphobia." ANTRA cites the AWID letter that was written criticising my views, while failing to recall that more than 510 organizations, and 5,655 individuals signed in February 2025 a letter of support for me in the face of AWID's attacks. These organizations and individuals come from all walks of life, and include those that are lesbian, gay and transgender. In October 2025, 215 non-governmental organizations from 40 countries signed a letter of support for my thematic report on surrogacy.

In doing so, ANTRA seeks to again discredit my work as an independent expert and to undermine the sound basis of my work and my standing. Such unfounded accusations – while they cannot deter me from continuing my work – risk (or perhaps aim at) creating a chilling effect on independent human rights analysis, where experts may be prevented from addressing complex or contested issues for fear of reputational attack rather than substantive engagement.

X. On engaging with specific non-governmental organizations

In exercising my mandate, I receive information and engage with stakeholders of different backgrounds and positions. Many of those also have consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council.[14]

I also note that many of the organizations and feminists that I met with in Brazil actively advocates for the rights of women and girls against discrimination and violence as well as the erasure of women in law and in practice. They continue to be often been unfairly vilified and attacked for their advocacy and human rights work, including by ANTRA[15]. As ANTRA is aware "I am disturbed by the frequent tactic of smear campaigns against women, girls and their allies on the basis of their beliefs on non-discrimination based on sex and same-sex relations".[16]

At the same time, I wish to emphasize once again that I engage with all actors including non-governmental organizations around issues. While my engagement does not necessarily constitute an endorsement of the program of any particular organization as a whole, I draw ANTRA's attention to the fact that United Nations Resolution 1994/95 of 1994 establishing the mandate asks the mandate holder "to seek and receive information on violence against women, its causes and consequences from […] non-governmental

[14] Having consultative status establishes a formal relationship between a non-governmental organization (NGO) and the United Nations, offering significant access, advocacy opportunities, and credibility, along with specific obligations. Granted under ECOSOC Resolution 1996/31, this status enables NGOs to contribute to the UN's work on economic, social, environmental, and human rights issues

[15] See for example: Associação Nacional de Travestis e Transexuais (ANTRA), *Dossiê Mátria* (Brazil, 2025).

[16] Reem Alsalem, *"Allow Women and Girls to Speak on Sex, Gender and Gender Identity without Intimidation or Fear'*, 22 May 2023.

organizations, including women's organizations, and to respond effectively to such information ».[17]

ANTRA not only attacks and smears my mandate, but also other civil society organizations, including for engaging with me and my mandate.

It is worth mentioning that the Human Rights Council condemns intimidation and reprisals against individuals, NGOs, and activists engaging with Special Procedures. Through resolutions (e.g. A/HRC/RES/16/21), the Council works to protect those who share information or cooperate with mandate holders, reporting annually on incidents of harassment.

XI. Conclusion

In conclusion, ANTRA continues to attack me, smear me, and undermine my work as an independent expert engaged by the United Nations Human Rights Council. I therefore urge ANTRA to stop these attacks, defamation, and spreading of misinformation and disinformation about my positions and my work.

While non-governmental organizations, including ANTRA, enjoy the protected right to freedom of expression and to engage with UN mechanisms, that right must be exercised in good faith, in accordance with the standards governing interaction with Special Procedures, including by refraining from personal attacks, smear campaigns, and intimidation. ANTRA's conduct departs from these standards by substituting substantive engagement with reputational allegations. The concern for this trend has been recently voiced by the Coordination Committee of the Human Rights Council.

Finally, I close by also noting that even though ANTRA stated in its 2 March 2026 letter to me that it "remain[s] available for constructive and collaborative dialogues…" ANTRA has not reached out to me during my presence in Brazil to ask for a meeting.

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* The Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls is an independent expert appointed by the United Nations Human Rights Council, also referred to as a Special Procedures mandate holder. Special Procedures mandate holders work on a voluntary basis; they are not UN staff and do not receive a salary for their work. While the UN Human Rights office acts as the secretariat for Special Procedures, the experts serve in their individual capacity and are independent from any government or organization, including OHCHR and the UN. Any views or opinions presented are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the UN or OHCHR.

[17] UN Commission on Human Rights, *Question of Integrating the Rights of Women into the Human Rights Mechanisms of the United Nations and the Elimination of Violence against Women*, UN Doc. E/CN.4/RES/1994/45 (4 March 1994), para. 7(a)