SPECIAL PROCEDURES
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HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

"The International Community must strengthen its resolve to guarantee access to effective justice of women and girls subjected to violence," UN experts said today

On the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, the experts issued the following statement

25 November 2025

GENEVA (25 November 2025) - Across the globe, violence against women and girls continues to be at epidemic levels. Women and girls everywhere, of all ages, still face domestic and other kinds of violence at appalling levels, and thousands are killed every year in what can be described as femicide. This despite the global realization that any society cannot achieve true prosperity as long as half of society – its women and girls – are often not safe and free from exploitation and violence.

A functioning credible justice system is a fundamental prerequisite in that process. Survivors must be able to access justice — without delay, without stigma, and without fear. Nevertheless, we are extremely concerned by what we see as a regression in the ability of victims and survivors of violence to access justice in a timely, victim-centered manner. Prosecutors frequently fail to investigate sexual violence adequately, and such violence remains severely underreported, as many victims fear reprisals from their abusers and stigma in their communities. Reporting and prosecution are not victim centered, often display significant gender bias, and are not safe or confidential. Penal codes and harmful prosecutorial practices often minimize or mischaracterize sexual and gender-based crimes and wrongly impose statutes of limitations for such crimes. Furthermore, complicated procedural requirements, the lack of sufficient information, delays, and limited availability of legal aid effectively impede women's and girls' actual enjoyment of any semblance of justice and accountability. Collectively, these realities can transform legal processes into a processing of denying justice.

Harmful gender stereotypes, sexism, and discriminatory social and cultural norms persist; reproducing unequal power relations and compounding the barriers in accessing justice, as community pressures and economic dependency often deter victims from reporting violations and seeking accountability and justice. Women and girls face intersecting forms of violence, particularly women that belong to racial, ethnic, religious minorities; those that are economically disadvantaged, those living under foreign occupation, as well as older women, migrant, stateless,

internally displaced, environmental defenders and refugee women are particularly affected. Furthermore, peasant and rural women in many countries face additional risks and threats as food system workers and to their livelihood activities.

It is also concerning to us that in countries around the world, girls continue to experience forced marriage – a grave manifestation of violence against them – perpetuating a cycle of harm that robs them of their rights and opportunities, as well as their access to protection and justice.

Regrettably, many States, who have a clear duty of due diligence requiring them to prevent, investigate, prosecute, and punish acts of violence against women and girls, often continue to fail in exercising their responsibilities. These failures include: the denial of reparations to women and girls who are victims of historical gendered atrocities, as well as to their families; and the withholding of apologies for the role of the State, along with truth-seeking and memorialization measures that are essential to addressing past wrongs and ensuring non-repetition.

The austerity measures adopted by several States continue to negatively affect the ability of women and girls to access justice. Budgets linked to access to justice for sex and gender-based crimes committed against women and girls are usually among the first to be slashed. It is imperative that States invest the necessary resources in law enforcement and the justice sector to ensure that they can swiftly process complaints and prosecute those responsible for violence. Legal aid services, shelters, forensic and medical services, human rights education and awareness raising, social protection, psychosocial support, and all other necessary measures should be adequately funded, made available, and geographically accessible.

The erosion of the protections that women and girls enjoy in times of conflict, public emergencies, counterterrorism and national security contexts is particularly alarming and must be urgently reversed. We note with grave concern the gross and large-scale defiance of international human rights and humanitarian law obligations, including increased incidents of systematic gender-based crimes, many of which meet the threshold of crimes against humanity and war crimes. The cuts in Official Development Assistance and humanitarian assistance by many of the donor countries around the world, coupled with a frightening increase in militarization, have rendered women and girls who are victims of violence even more at risk and further away from effective justice. Environmental destruction and reduced access to farm, forest and grazing lands and water sources resulting from militarization and armed conflicts have exacerbated the threats that rural women and girls face in meeting food and livelihood needs.

Those responsible must be held accountable and affected women and girls must be provided with access to justice, including effective remedies. It is particularly important to ensure that irregular legal status or lack of documentation does not impede this access. Today, we remind States of their obligation to exercise due diligence to prevent and investigate acts of violence against women and girls, to punish perpetrators – whether State or non-State actors – and to combat impunity while providing protection to victims and their families.

Similarly, international accountability processes must be appropriately financed and supported. The role of independent prosecutors, judges' investigation mechanisms and courts must be upheld and protected and attacks against them must cease immediately. At the same time, it is important that these justice and accountability measures also focus on identifying, investigating, and prosecuting the gendered impact of atrocities and grave crimes on women and girls and sex and gender specific crimes, including emerging ones, which based on their scope and scale may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity.

We also note that particular attention must be given to women and girls who face additional risks, vulnerabilities and barriers that hinder their access to justice, including women and girls with disabilities, women living in poverty, older women, women affected by leprosy, deprived of liberty, in institutional settings, in remote areas with limited physical access to justice institutions, Indigenous women, gender non-conforming women and girls, women human rights defenders and adolescent girls. Remedies for them must be designed through a sex- and gender-based lens, be trauma-informed, and tailored to their specific needs. They should also be provided with reasonable accommodations and procedural flexibility whenever their circumstances require it. Women and girls are disproportionately harmed by toxic contamination and heightened exposure in care work, with barriers characteristic to toxics cases compounding the risks and harms they are exposed to.

Multiple factors give way to gender based violence also within the business sector, making it an imperative for human rights standards to be developed, implemented and enforced effectively. Beyond the risks to physical and mental integrity, income and job insecurity, unfavourable working conditions, and other forms of socio-economic marginalization exacerbate risks of business-related human rights abuses against women.

Collectively, these factors continue to contribute significantly to cementing impunity for crimes committed against women and girls in all settings. Perpetrators of violence, particularly powerful men, continue to be protected and shielded from real accountability, which contributes to the normalization of the miscarriage of justice. In the high-profile cases where accountability measures are occasionally started, they appear to be more politically motivated and instrumentalized, and victims are used as pawns. Such weaponization of the

suffering and trauma of survivors must cease. Societies at large must unequivocally pass the messages to half its populations that their lives, dignity and safety matter, and that there will be consequences for those that violate them.

Finally, we express our profound solidarity with the courage, resilience and unwavering commitment of survivors of violence; their families and women and girls' human rights defenders who work tirelessly to support women and girls subjected to violence in their pursuit of justice. We recognize that collectively they confront heightened risks, yet continue to challenge impunity, and expose discrimination. We pay tribute to their essential role in ensuring accountability, advancing the rights of women and girls, and transforming justice systems so that no survivor of violence is left unheard or unprotected.

- *Reem Alsalem, Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences*
- *Tomoya Obokata, the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences;*
- *Alice Jill Edwards, Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment;*
- *Michael Fakhri, Special Rapporteur on the right to food*
- *Mary Lawlor, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders*
- *Claudia Mahler, Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons;*
- *George Katrougalos, Independent Expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order;*
- *Cecilia M. Bailliet, Independent Expert on human rights and international solidarity*
- *Mai Sato, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic republic of Iran.*
- *Morris Tidball-Binz, Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions;*
- *Nazila Ghanea, Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief;*
- *Albert K. Barume, Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples*
- *Paula Gaviria Betancur, Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons.*
- *Richard Bennett, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan*
- *Ms. Ganna Yudkivska (Chair-Rapporteur), Mr. Matthew Gillett (Vice-Chair on Communications), Ms. Miriam Estrada Castillo (Vice-Chair on Follow-Up), Mr. Mumba Malila, and Mr. Ethan Hee-Seok Shin, Working Group on Arbitrary Detention*
- *Ms. Attiya Waris, Independent Expert on the effects of foreign debt and other related international financial obligations of States on the full enjoyment of all human rights, particularly economic, social and cultural rights.*
- *Mr. Mohamed Babiker; Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights in Eritrea.*
- *Ben Saul, Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism.*
- *Heba Hagrass, Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities;*
- *Beatriz Miranda-Galarza, Special Rapporteur on discrimination against persons with leprosy (Hansen's disease);*
- *Carlos Duarte (Chair), Shalmali Guttal, Davit Hakobyan (vice-chair), Uche Ofodile (vice chair), Genevieve Savigny, Working Group on the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas*
- *Farida Shaheed, Special Rapporteur on the right to education*
- *Eduardo Gonzalez, Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in Mali.*
- *Thomas Andrews, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar*
- *Irene Khan, Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression*
- *Astrid Puentes Riaño, Special Rapporteur on the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment*

- *Richard Bennett, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan*
- *Elisa Morgera, Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change*
- *Bernard Duhaime, Special Rapporteur on truth, justice and reparation*
- *Ana Brian Nougrères, Special Rapporteur on the right to privacy*
- *Ashwini K.P., Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance*
- *Mama Fatima Singhateh, Special Rapporteur on the sale, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children*
- *Balakrishnan Rajagopal, Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and on the right to non-discrimination in this context*
- *Bina D'Costa (Chair), Barbara G. Reynolds, Catherine Namakula, Isabelle Mamadou, Miriam Ekiudoko, Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent*
- *Gabriella Citroni (Chair-Rapporteur), Grażyna Baranowska (Vice-Chair), Aua Baldé; Ana Lorena Delgadillo Pérez, and Mohammed Al-Obaidi, Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances*
- *Elizabeth Salmón, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea;*
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