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**Note Verbal No. 179**

The Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland presents its compliments to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and has the honour to submit its' response to communication AL GBR 6/2024, further to the letter dated 16 May 2024 from the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences; the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders and the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls.

The Permanent Mission of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights the assurances of its highest consideration.



Geneva, 4 July 2024

Special Procedures Branch  
Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights



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## United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

### **Response to Special Procedure communications AL GBR 6/2024 from the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences; the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders and the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls.**

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Thank you for your letter of 16 May raising Dr Charlotte Proudman's allegations of online abuse, bullying and harassment in the course of her work as a barrister specialising in family law.

I am unable to comment on points 1-4 you raise in your letter. It would be inappropriate for government Ministers or officials to comment or intervene on any individual cases, complaints or disciplinary proceedings, such as Dr Proudman's. However, I would encourage anyone desiring information about a case the Bar Standards Board (BSB) is handling, to get in touch with the caseworker via [contactus@barstandardsboard.org.uk](mailto:contactus@barstandardsboard.org.uk). If Dr Proudman is unhappy with the BSB's handling of her case, she can submit a complaint to the Service Complaints team and should receive a response within 20 working days. Information on how to submit a complaint is available [here](#). The BSB has a full and due process for handling complaints and investigations. Further information on the BSB complaints process is publicly available and can be found [here](#).

In respect of the allegation raised in respect of a member of the police force, a complaint can be made to Nottinghamshire Police. Police forces must refer the most serious allegations to the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC). The IOPC has a full and due process for handling complaints. This is publicly available information and can be found on the [IOPC website](#).

With regards to point 5 in your letter, I note the serious nature of the matters you raised and would like to reassure you that the Government has taken a firm approach and multiple courses of action to tackle violence against women and girls, including crimes perpetrated online.

Under the Online Safety Act 2023 ('the Act'), all in-scope companies must take swift and effective action against criminal online abuse, rapidly removing illegal content and proactively preventing users from encountering 'priority' illegal content, including intimate image abuse, extreme pornography, and harassment and stalking. Under the Act, women and girls will be better able to report abuse and should expect to receive an appropriate

response from the platform. The Act also strengthened the criminal law on intimate image abuse which disproportionately impacts women. The Act introduced new offences that criminalise the sharing or threatening to share, intimate images (including so-called “deepfake” images) without consent. These were commenced on 31<sup>st</sup> January. The Act also includes a requirement on Ofcom, the UK’s independent communications regulator, to produce and publish guidance which summarises measures that can be taken to tackle the abuse that women and girls disproportionately face online. This guidance will ensure that it is easy for platforms to implement holistic and effective protections for women and girls, across their various duties. Ofcom is required to consult the independent Domestic Abuse Commissioner and the Victims’ Commissioner, amongst other people or organisations it considers appropriate, when creating this guidance.

I hope this information, and the clarification of our wider position, will be helpful.