

Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences; the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression and the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers

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(Please use this reference in your reply)

16 January 2026

Excellency,

We have the honour to address you in our capacities as Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences; Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression and Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 59/20, 52/9 and 53/12.

In this connection, we would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government information we have received **concerning Ms. Ulviyya Guliyeva's arrest and detention, including the alleged threats and violence she experienced and the denial of her right to fair trial, reportedly linked to her activity as an independent journalist, as well as worsening health conditions, exacerbated by her detention.**

According to the information received:

Travel ban, home search and arrest

On 16 January 2025, Ms. Ulviya Guliyeva, an independent journalist, correspondent of the Voice of America media outlet, known for expressing critical opinions on human rights violations in Azerbaijan, was summoned to the Baku City Police Department as a witness in the so-called "Meydan TV" case – a Berlin-based Azerbaijani independent media outlet founded in 2013 and operating from exile. She was informed of a travel ban preventing her from leaving the country. On 5 May 2025, the Khatai District Court rejected her complaint against this measure.

On 6 May 2025, at approximately 23:00, several police officers entered the rented apartment in Baku where Ms. Guliyeva was residing. Her arrest took place immediately after she had covered a hearing before the Baku Court of Appeal on 6 May 2025 in a case against an opposition politician. When she shouted to her roommate to inform others that she was being arrested, a police officer reportedly covered her mouth with his hand. For a moment, as her nose was also covered, she experienced a sensation of suffocation. Ms. Guliyeva was not assisted by a lawyer during the arrest. When she objected to certain aspects of the search, one of the witnesses who had entered the apartment with the police officers allegedly remarked that she was "too capricious."

Reportedly, while her roommate, the witnesses, and five police officers were present in the living room, two other officers were in her bedroom. Ms. Guliyeva objected to this, but was told that the search protocol was already being finalized. Only after she reiterated her objection did the investigator call

the officers back. Police officers were reportedly entering and leaving the apartment throughout the search. At a later stage, one of the officers returned and indicated his confirmation with a nod. Another officer then stated that the top of her bedroom closet needed to be checked. Following this, a wad of cash was taken from her suitcase, which was found there and that Ms. Guliyeva claimed not to have opened since 4 January 2025. She was informed that it consisted of 55 banknotes of 100 euros, 15 banknotes of 50 euros, 20 banknotes of 20 euros, and 10 banknotes of 5 euros. The money was counted by the investigator without gloves. This cash reportedly did not belong to Ms. Guliyeva, and was not in the suitcase before the search.

Allegedly, the attesting witnesses were, for the most part, present in the part of the apartment where the search was not being conducted at the relevant time. Some of the witnesses reportedly signed the search protocol before the search had been completed, and by the end of the process, only Ms. Guliyeva, her roommate, and the police officers remained in the apartment. The protocol provided only a limited number of lines for Ms. Guliyeva to record her objections, preventing her from setting them out in full. Her roommate was not permitted to add any comments to the protocol and was not allowed to enter the bedroom during the search. Both of them were nonetheless required to sign the protocol.

Charges and treatment at the police station

Following the search, Ms. Guliyeva was transferred to the Baku City Police Department (BŞBPI). One of the officers, whose mask was pulled so high that only his eyes were visible, shouted at her and demanded the passwords to her phones and computer. Another officer continued to press her to disclose the passwords and threatened her, stating: “Things you can’t even imagine may happen to you, and we won’t stop it.” Ms. Guliyeva eventually provided false passwords. When the officers realized that the passwords were incorrect, one of them began punching her in the head and instructed the others to bring a taser. Another officer threatened her, presumably with rape, saying: “I’ll take away your womanhood.” When Ms. Guliyeva later informed the inspector - who was at that time in another room - about the violence she had suffered, he reportedly responded that he had not seen anything.

In the morning of 7 May 2025, while she was still in detention, two men in civilian clothing approached Ms. Guliyeva, one of whom claimed to be from the Ministry of Internal Affairs. They demanded that she unlock her phone using Face ID. She refused and turned her head away, but they had already held the phone up to her face, and it unlocked. Approximately half an hour later, they returned and demanded the password to her Telegram account. She again refused and requested access to a lawyer. Instead, she was threatened, with one of the men stating, “You are an Azerbaijani woman, don’t play the fool. Don’t make me talk to you differently.”

Although Ms. Guliyeva was apprehended on 6 May 2025, the arrest protocol recorded the time of her arrest as 7 May 2025 at 03:50. On 7 May 2025, she was charged under article 206.3.2 of the Criminal Code (smuggling committed by a

group acting in prior collusion) as the eleventh accused journalist in the so-called “Meydan TV case” and was formally notified of the charges.

Continued pre-trial detention

Ms. Ulviyya Guliyeva has remained in pre-trial detention since 7 May 2025. At the 7 May 2025 Khatai District Court hearing on the prosecutor’s motion for pre-trial detention, Ms. Guliyeva allegedly contested the charges. She stated that the money seized in her home did not belong to her, that the search was marred by serious procedural violations and conducted without a lawyer despite her explicit request, and that she had been subjected to physical and psychological violence. On 7 May 2025, immediately following the court’s decision to order her pre-trial detention, Ms. Guliyeva’s lawyer submitted complaints to the Prosecutor General’s Office and the Medical Department of the Ministry of Justice, detailing the beatings and threats she had allegedly suffered when she was first arrested and requesting specialized medical examinations. Ms. Guliyeva’s family also lodged a complaint with the Azerbaijani Ombudsperson. Notwithstanding these submissions, the court ordered one month and twenty-nine days of pre-trial detention, and on 15 May 2025, the Baku Court of Appeal upheld that decision.

On 19 June 2025, the Deputy Prosecutor of Baku requested an extension of her detention until 6 October 2025, which the Khatai District Court granted on 24 June 2025. The defense appealed on 30 June, but on 8 July 2025, the Baku Court of Appeal dismissed the appeal, allegedly without providing reasons. By its decision of 2 September 2025, the Khatai District Court rejected the motion and refused to replace Ms. Guliyeva’s pre-trial detention with house arrest. On 5 September 2025, Ms. Guliyeva lodged an appeal before the Baku Court of Appeal against the decision of the Khatai District Court, alleging that the Court failed to examine the accusations underlying her detention. By its decision of 10 September 2025, the Baku Court of Appeal dismissed her 16-page appeal in a single sentence and upheld the decision of the Khatai District Court. On 16 September 2025, the Khatai Court extended her detention by another three months. Ms. Guliyeva’s appeal from this decision was again dismissed, and on 26 November 2025, the pre-trial detention was extended until 27 December 2025. On 8 December 2025, the Baku Court of Appeal dismissed the appeal from the decision. As the hearings held on 12 and 22 December before the Baku Grave Crimes Court did not result in any change to the preventive measure, the pre-trial detention of Ms. Guliyeva continues to remain in effect until a further decision of the court.

Conditions of arrest and pre-trial detention

Ms. Guliyeva was reportedly subjected to beatings and other forms of physical violence during her arrest. After the beatings, Ms. Guliyeva reported suffering from headaches, nausea, dizziness, and blackouts, as a result of which she had to take 2–3 painkillers every day. She feared that those beatings had affected a microadenoma tumor she already had and which is located near her pituitary gland.

On 15 May 2025, Ms. Guliyeva's lawyer requested an MRI but the Ministry of Justice's Medical Department responded only on 18 June, claiming it was unnecessary. Ms. Guliyeva also asked for a forensic examination, but the Prosecutor General's Office responded only on 23 June 2025, rejecting her complaint and refusing to open a criminal case. Although on 29 May 2025, an investigator from the Baku City Prosecutor's Office, with one other person, visited Ms. Guliyeva at the Pre-trial Detention Center, since they had arrived without any equipment and no MRI/CT facilities were available, were only able to describe her account in a notebook.

Moreover, already before detention, Ms. Guliyeva was diagnosed with a worsening insulin-resistance condition. Some tests ordered by her doctor were conducted in detention, but other required ones were allegedly not available there in its internal medical system. In addition, when Ms. Guliyeva was examined in the Baku Pre-Trial Detention Facility in early November, tachycardia was discovered in her heart, fat accumulation in her liver, and an ultrasound confirmed other new health concerns. Her request to be transferred to an external private clinic for a proper investigation was rejected, and the Head of the Detention Facility's medical unit instead proposed that blood samples could be drawn in flasks inside the facility and delivered externally.

Access to lawyer

Ms. Guliyeva repeatedly demanded access to a lawyer from the moment of the search of her apartment. The night she was arrested, at the Baku City Police Department, she requested to contact a lawyer she knew. Police officers did contact her, but she was only able to arrive the following day at around 2 p.m. The state-appointed lawyer who was present at the police station apparently remained silent, and Ms. Guliyeva had to raise all the procedural violations herself.

For more than three weeks, beginning on 4 November, Ms. Guliyeva was reportedly denied access to a lawyer. During this time, two of her lawyers attempted to visit her in the pre-trial detention facility on three separate occasions, but each time access was denied on the grounds that Ms. Guliyeva refused to undergo a manual search. This search reportedly extended beyond a body search to include the manual inspection of every page of documents, including personal correspondence and notes relating to her legal defense strategy intended for discussion with her lawyers. Ms. Guliyeva had indicated her willingness to undergo alternative, non-intrusive search methods but initially it was not accepted. This situation persisted until 30 November, when a lawyer was finally able to meet with Ms. Guliyeva, and manual searches were no longer required.

While we do not wish to prejudge the accuracy of these allegations, we would like to express our serious concern regarding the reported arrest, ill-treatment, and continued detention of Ms. Guliyeva, as well as various manifestations of the psychological and physical violence she would have experienced as a woman and an independent journalist. We are concerned that Ms. Guliyeva's arrest, detention and prosecution appear to be directly related to her critical views and exercise of his right

to freedom of expression. The allegations, if confirmed, raise a number of issues under international human rights law.

Furthermore, threats of sexual violence allegedly used against Ms. Guliyeva by law enforcement officials, if substantiated, may engage would constitute violence against women, in violation of articles 1, 2, and 5 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), as well as States' obligations to exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate, and punish acts of violence against women, whether committed by State or non-State actors.

The reported procedural irregularities surrounding the search of Ms. Guliyeva's home, the seizure of property, and the incorrect recording of the time of her arrest may implicate the right to liberty and security of person under article 9 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). The limitations placed on her ability to effectively challenge the lawfulness of the search and detention may further raise questions regarding compliance with the requirement that any deprivation of liberty be lawful, non-arbitrary, and subject to prompt and effective judicial review. Moreover, the prolonged pre-trial detention of Ms. Guliyeva and restrictions on access to a lawyer, coupled with the reported failure of domestic courts to provide individualized, reasoned decisions when extending her detention or dismissing her appeals, may be incompatible with article 14 of the ICCPR and the United Nations Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers.

The information received regarding Ms. Guliyeva's health, including the alleged denial of timely and adequate medical examinations following reported ill-treatment and the refusal to authorize specialized or external medical care, raises issues under articles 7 and 10 of the ICCPR. States have a heightened duty of care toward persons deprived of liberty, including an obligation to ensure access to appropriate medical treatment and to conduct prompt, independent, and effective investigations into credible allegations of abuse, in line with the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules). States must also comply with the United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders (the Bangkok Rules), which generally prohibit the use of force by prison staff, provide protection and support for women reporting abuse, and require prompt and independent investigation of the violations.

Finally, the apparent link between the measures taken against Ms. Guliyeva and her work as an independent journalist as well as the exercise of her right to freedom of expression under article 19 of the ICCPR, aggravated by the heightened risks faced by women journalists. If confirmed, the use of criminal charges, travel restrictions, and prolonged pre-trial detention in response to her journalistic activities may amount to an unjustified interference with the exercise of this right and may contribute to a broader chilling effect on women journalists and human rights reporting. Such an effect would contradict article 7 of CEDAW, which obliges state parties to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country.

Against this background, we urge your Excellency's Government to take the necessary and appropriate steps to ensure the physical and psychological integrity of Ms. Guliyeva, guarantee her access to adequate medical care and confidential access to

legal counsel of her choosing, conduct a prompt and impartial investigation into the allegations of violence and procedural violations, review the necessity and proportionality of her continued pre-trial detention, including consideration of non-custodial alternatives, and ensure that all measures taken against her fully comply with Azerbaijan's obligations under international human rights law, including with respect to the protection of women from sex-based violence and the right to freedom of expression.

In connection with the above alleged facts and concerns, please refer to the **Annex on Reference to international human rights law** attached to this letter which cites international human rights instruments and standards relevant to these allegations.

As it is our responsibility, under the mandates provided to us by the Human Rights Council, to seek to clarify all cases brought to our attention, we would be grateful for your observations on the following matters:

1. Please provide any additional information and/or comment(s) you may have on the above-mentioned allegations.
2. Please provide detailed information on the legal basis for Ms. Guliyeva's arrest, the search of her home, and her continued pre-trial detention, including whether and how the authorities assessed the necessity and proportionality of these measures in light of her status as a woman and as an independent journalist.
3. Please indicate whether an independent, prompt, and effective investigation has been initiated into the allegations of physical and psychological violence, including threats of sexual violence, allegedly committed by law enforcement officials, and, if so, provide information on the status and outcome of any such investigation.
4. Please clarify what measures were taken to ensure Ms. Guliyeva's immediate and unhindered access to a lawyer of her choosing from the moment of her apprehension, including the legal basis for any restrictions placed on lawyer visits or searches, including materials that should be protected by lawyer-client confidentiality.
5. Please indicate what medical examinations were carried out following Ms. Guliyeva's allegations of violence, and explain the reasons for any refusal to authorize independent or external medical care, particularly in light of her reported pre-existing and detention-related health conditions.
6. Please explain what steps were taken to ensure that Ms. Guliyeva's journalistic activities and exercise of freedom of expression, including her work as a woman journalist reporting on human rights issues, were not a factor in the measures taken against her.

This communication and any response received from your Excellency's Government will be made public via the communications reporting [website](#) within

60 days. They will also subsequently be made available in the usual report to be presented to the Human Rights Council.

While awaiting a reply, we urge that all necessary interim measures be taken to halt the alleged violations and prevent their re-occurrence and in the event that the investigations support or suggest the allegations to be correct, to ensure the accountability of any person(s) responsible for the alleged violations.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of our highest consideration.

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Annex

Reference to international human rights law

In connection with above alleged facts and concerns, we would like to draw your attention to the applicable international human rights norms and standards, as well as authoritative guidance on their interpretation.

Right to liberty and security of person

We wish to recall that article 9 of the ICCPR guarantees the right to liberty and security of person and prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention. It further specifies that the person must be informed, at the moment of the arrest, about the reasons for it, stipulates the need to bring a person promptly before a judge or other officer authorized by law to exercise judicial power and incorporates the right to initiate proceedings before a court to determine the lawfulness of the detention. Article 9(3) also provides that it must not be the general rule that persons awaiting trial be detained. As reiterated in the jurisprudence of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention as well as general comment No. 35, pretrial detention is an exceptional measure and must be assessed on an individualized basis. In addition, we wish to remind your Excellency's Government that article 9(4) of the ICCPR guarantees the right of everyone deprived of their liberty to take proceedings before a court, in order that that court may decide without delay on the lawfulness of their detention and order their release if the detention is not lawful.

In its general comment No. 35, the Human Rights Committee clarified that "arbitrariness" is not limited to unlawfulness, but includes elements of inappropriateness, injustice, lack of predictability, and due process of law. Arrest or detention as punishment for the legitimate exercise of the rights, including freedom of opinion and expression, should be considered arbitrary (CCPR/C/GC/35, paras 12 and 17). The Committee also emphasized that pre-trial detention must be exceptional and justified by individualized reasons, such as risk of flight, interference with evidence, or recurrence of crime (CCPR/C/GC/35, par. 38).

The rights to liberty and security of person, and protection from arbitrary arrest are also safeguarded in article 5 of the ECHR. The European Court of Human Rights confirmed that automatic or prolonged pre-trial detention, especially where courts fail to provide individualized reasoned decisions or consider alternatives, violates article 5 (e.g., *Savalanli and Others v. Azerbaijan*, no. 54151/11, judgment of 15 December 2022 par. 94; *Svipsta v. Latvia*, no. 66820/01, judgment of 9 March 2006, paras 131-134; *Ignatov v. Ukraine*, no. 40583/15, judgment of 15 December 2016, paras 36 and 41).

Right to a fair trial and the right to an effective remedy

We would also like to recall the right to a fair trial, safeguarded in article 14 of the ICCPR, which sets out a general guarantee of equality before courts and tribunals and the right of every person to a fair and public hearing by a competent, independent and impartial tribunal established by law. Article 14 of the ICCPR provides a set of procedural guarantees that must be made available to persons charged with a criminal offence, including the right of accused persons to have access to, and communicate with, legal counsel of their own choosing. The Human Rights Committee noted that the

right to communicate with counsel requires that the accused be granted prompt access to counsel and the possibility of private and confidential communication. It further specified that the availability or absence of legal assistance often determines whether or not a person can access the relevant proceedings or participate in them in a meaningful way (CCPR/C/GC/32, paras 10 and 34).

The guarantees of article 14 ICCPR closely correspond to article 6(1) of the ECHR, which protects the right to a fair hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal. Access to a lawyer as a component of the right to a fair trial is also included in principles 17 and 18 of the UN Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment and the United Nations Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers

Moreover, article 2(3) of the ICCPR requires States to ensure accessible and effective remedies for violations of Covenant rights. The Human Rights Committee has clarified that those remedies include the duty to investigate and bring perpetrators to justice (CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add. 13, par. 18). The ECHR analogue to article 2(3) ICCPR is article 13 ECHR, which guarantees the right to an effective remedy before a national authority. The European Court of Human Rights also requires effective investigations as part of the right to an effective remedy, particularly where serious allegations of mistreatment by state agents are raised (*e.g. Assenov and Others v. Bulgaria*, no. 90/1997/874/1086, judgment of 28 October 1998, par. 102).

Treatment of persons deprived of liberty and access to health services

We would also like to refer your Excellency's Government to article 10 of the ICCPR, which requires that persons deprived of liberty be treated with humanity and respect for their inherent dignity. Moreover, articles 12 and 2(2) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, ratified by Azerbaijan on 13 August 1992, oblige the state parties to protect the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health without discrimination. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in its general comment No. 12 noted that states are under the obligation to respect the right to health by, inter alia, refraining from denying or limiting equal access for all persons, including prisoners or detainees, to preventive, curative and palliative health services (E/C.12/2000/4, par. 34).

In addition, the Basic Principles for the Treatment of Prisoners, adopted by the General Assembly in resolution 45/111, stipulate that prisoners should have access to health services available in the country without discrimination on the grounds of their legal situation (principle 9). In the same vein, the Nelson Mandela Rules adopted by the UN General Assembly (A/RES/70/175) recognize the responsibility of States to provide health care for prisoners, free of charge without discrimination (rule 24), paying special attention to those with special healthcare needs or with health issues that hamper their rehabilitation (rule 25), and indicate that prisoners requiring specialized treatment shall be transferred to specialized institutions or to civil hospitals (rule 27).

Freedom of expression

Article 19 of the ICCPR guarantees the right to freedom of opinion and the right to freedom of expression, which includes the right “to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media.” In the same vein, article 10 of the ECHR guarantees the right to freedom of expression, including the freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority.

Any restriction on the right to freedom of expression must be compatible with the requirements set out in article 19(3) ICCPR. Under these requirements, restrictions must (i) be provided by law; (ii) pursue one of the legitimate aims for restriction, which are the respect of the rights or reputations of others and the protection of national security or of public order or of public health or morals; and (iii) be necessary and proportionate for those objectives. In its general comment No. 34, the Human Rights Committee clarified that not only should the restrictions be enacted in law, but that the language of the law should be clear, precise, accessible, and predictable. Furthermore, “necessity” implies that the restrictions must be proportionate to the objectives to be achieved. In other words, the restrictions must be the least intrusive instrument among those that might achieve the desired result. The State has the burden of proof to demonstrate that any such restrictions are compatible with the Covenant and restrictions must always be “the least intrusive instrument among those which might achieve their protective function” (*see* CCPR/C/GC/34, paras. 22, 34, 35).

The Human Rights Committee also stated that state parties to the ICCPR are required to guarantee the right to freedom of expression, including “political discourse, commentary on one’s own and on public affairs, canvassing, discussion of human rights, journalism, cultural and artistic expression, teaching, and religious discourse” (CCPR/C/GC/34, para. 11). The Committee further asserted that “nor, under any circumstance, can an attack on a person, because of the exercise of his or her freedom of opinion or expression, including such forms of attack as arbitrary arrest, torture, threats to life and killing, be compatible with article 19” and Recognizing how journalists and persons who engage in the gathering and analysis of information on the human rights situation and who publish human rights-related reports, including judges and lawyers, are frequently subjected to threats, intimidation and attacks because of their activities, the Committee stresses that “all such attacks should be vigorously investigated in a timely fashion, and the perpetrators prosecuted, and the victims, or, in the case of killings, their representatives, be in receipt of appropriate forms of redress” (CCPR/C/GC/34, para. 23).

The European Court of Human Rights repeatedly noted, especially in the cases against Azerbaijan, the chilling effect that the arrest, conviction, and imprisonment of journalists might have on freedom of expression (*Fatullayev v. Azerbaijan*, no. 40984/07, judgment of 22 April 2010, par. 128; *Khadija Ismayilova v. Azerbaijan*, nos. 65286/13 and 57270/14, judgment of 10 January 2019, paras 159, 161). Therefore, measures taken against journalists not only target them personally but are also capable of discouraging the exercise of freedom of expression more broadly, with adverse consequences for public debate and democratic oversight.

Furthermore, the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, also known as the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, in article 6 provides for the right to know, seek, obtain, receive and hold, disseminate and publish information about all human rights and fundamental freedoms. Article 9(1) of the Declaration protects the right to benefit from an effective remedy under article 12 in the event of a violation of these rights.

Freedom of movement

Article 12(2) of the ICCPR guarantees everyone the freedom to leave any country, including their own. Any restrictions on the right to liberty of movement and the freedom to leave any country, including his/her own must be compatible with article 12(3) of the ICCPR, which establishes that restrictions are only acceptable if they are provided by law, are necessary to protect national security, public order public health or morals or the rights and freedoms of others, and are consistent with the other rights recognized in the ICCPR. The imposition of travel bans as a means to limit the exercise of freedom of expression and of association is also not compatible with article 19(3) of the ICCPR on freedom of expression.

In this regard, the Human Rights Committee in its concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of Azerbaijan recommended that it should ensure that any travel ban is justified under article 12(3) of the Covenant and lift bans not in compliance with that article, refrain from imposing travel bans arbitrarily against journalists, opposition politicians, human rights defenders and lawyers and guarantee full respect for their freedom to leave the country (CCPR/C/AZE/CO/4, par. 31).

Violence against women and women-journalists

We would also like to recall that the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), ratified by Azerbaijan on 10 July 1995, in article 2(d) obliges state parties to refrain from engaging in any act or practice of discrimination against women and to ensure that public authorities and institutions shall act in conformity with this obligation. Moreover, article 5(1) of CEDAW also obliges state parties to take all appropriate measures to modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women. General recommendation No. 19 of the CEDAW Committee (1992) on violence against women defines gender-based violence as “violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately. It includes acts that inflict physical, mental, or sexual harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion and other deprivations of liberty.” Commenting on this, the CEDAW Committee in its general recommendation No. 35 (2017) noted that under the Convention and general international law, a state party is responsible for acts or omissions of its organs and agents that constitute violence against women and must establish an effective and accessible legal and legal services framework to address the violations (CEDAW/C/GC/35, par. 22).

The United Nations General Assembly, in its resolution 68/181, on the protection of women human rights defenders, called upon States to publicly

acknowledge the important role played by women human rights defenders, take practical steps to prevent threats, harassment, and violence against them, and to combat impunity for such violations and abuses. In the same vein, the General Assembly resolution 72/175 and the Human Rights Council resolution 33/2, both concerning the safety of journalists, condemn the specific attacks on women journalists in the exercise of their work, and acknowledge the specific risks faced by them, including sexual and sex and gender-based discrimination and violence, intimidation, and harassment.

Furthermore, the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls in her report on combating violence against women journalists noted that women journalists are often targeted for being highly visible and outspoken in their work and for their use of information and communications technologies (ICTs), including mobile phones and smartphones, the Internet, social media platforms or email, as such use is later weaponized against them (A/HRC/44/52 par. 18). She also stressed that sexual violence including the threats of rape might be used a tool to undermine the credibility of women journalists and discourage them from working in the media (par. 24). In her report on violence against women in politics, the Special Rapporteur further explained that women in politics, public life and journalism are often targeted with violence because they are women or because the violence affects women disproportionately. Such violence can take forms of sexual harassment, misogynistic and sexist verbal attacks, threats of rape, or online abuse (A/73/301, paras 12 and 13).

Moreover, the Special Rapporteur on the Freedom of Expression noted that one of the biggest challenges to ensuring the protection of journalists is impunity or the failure to bring to justice the perpetrators of human rights violations (A/HRC/20/17, par. 65). The Special Rapporteur also highlighted that female journalists and human rights defenders are particularly targeted for physical and psychological violence and threats, including death and rape threats, for speaking out or simply for being a woman in a leadership role. (A/76/258, par. 17).

Additionally, the specific needs of female detainees and prisoners are expressly recognized in the United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders (the Bangkok Rules), which call for the increased use of non-custodial measures for women and girls. Rule 31 prohibits the use of force by prison staff and focuses on women's specific needs of protection from varying forms of violence, and rule 25(1) states that women prisoners who report abuse shall be provided immediate protection, support and counselling, and their claims shall be investigated by competent and independent authorities, with full respect for the principle of confidentiality. Furthermore, article 3 of the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, states that women have a right to life, liberty, equality and freedom from being subjected to torture, inhuman or degrading treatment.

Finally, we wish to highlight that in the latest Universal Periodic Review (UPR) cycle when Azerbaijan was under review (May 2018 session) Azerbaijan supported the recommendation to “continue ensuring that human rights defenders and journalists are protected from any act of intimidation or reprisal or any other impediment to their work” (141.51) as well as the recommendation to strengthen the protection of freedom of expression in particular regarding human rights defenders (141.40). Azerbaijan also supported the recommendation to “continue enhancing the role of women in strengthening democracy and ensuring sustainable development” (140.109) and

recommendations to ensure women's full and equal participation in political and public life (140.125 and 140.126).