

Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences; the Working Group on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises and the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression

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(Please use this reference in your reply)

4 February 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; Working Group on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises and Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 59/20, 53/3 and 52/9.

In this connection, we would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government information we have received **concerning the systematic technology-facilitated violence reportedly directed at representatives of Collective Shout, an Australian women's rights advocacy organization, following their public advocacy in July 2025 related to video games depicting violence against women and girls, including depictions of rape, child abuse, incest and sexual torture.**

According to the information received:

Alleged threats of rape, sexual violence and death

In July 2025, the representatives of the organization Collective Shout and its staff, Melinda Tankard Reist., L Swanson Kennedy, Renee Chopping, Caitlin Roperm, and Coralie Alison who engaged in public advocacy against the availability and monetization of certain video games depicting violence against women and girls, including child abuse, rape, incest, and sexual torture. They published an open letter to intermediaries facilitating payment for such monetization, and issued a media release, leading journalists to contact payment processors for comment. Following these actions, they discovered that a significant number of violent games have been removed from the platform.

When gamers realized that members of the Collective Shout were behind the efforts to remove violent games, they began sending threats of rape, sexual assault, and death, via social media platforms such as X/Twitter, the Collective Shout's website, online forums, direct messages, and emails to individual staff, subjecting them to large-scale, coordinated harassment. The language of many messages was sexually violent and sought to humiliate them on the basis of their sex. Others explicitly called for their deaths—for example, one post published on X stated that they needed to be “Kirk'd,” referencing the killing of an American activist and yet the platform refused to remove the post, stating that it did not violate its safety policies. It is further reported that some abusive content was amplified through reposting, quote-posting, and coordinated

tagging, and that the volume and persistence of communications created an atmosphere of intimidation and fear.

Alleged doxxing threats and intimidation of family members

Representatives of the Collective Shout were allegedly threatened with disclosure of their personal information, including residential and workplace addresses and other identifying details. It is further reported that some communications referenced their relatives, threatened targeting them with violence and sought to intimidate or pressure victims through perceived risks to their family members' safety.

Alleged sexual, digital forgery material, image-based abuse, and dissemination of pornography

Information received alleges the creation and dissemination of manipulated and synthetic sexually explicit material ("deepfakes") depicting representatives of Collective Shout. It is further reported that victims received sexually explicit images and content, including pornography.

It is further reported that a significant portion of the sexually explicit "deepfake" material was disseminated primarily through an account on X (formerly Twitter) identified as "the American rapist" (handle: **@Americanrapist_**). This account allegedly posted and re-shared sexually explicit images in which the faces of Collective Shout leaders were digitally superimposed onto bodies of women depicted as victims of rape, as well as other AI-generated or manipulated images in which they were portrayed as subjected to sexual violence and extreme physical violence, including mutilation.

Alleged impersonation, disinformation and reputational attacks

Some perpetrators reportedly created accounts impersonating Collective Shout representatives and disseminated false or misleading statements, including allegations intended to damage reputations, undermine advocacy work, and incite further harassment. Information received further alleges coordinated disinformation designed to portray victims as criminals or as posing threats to children, thereby exposing them to heightened hostility and risk.

Reported notifications to authorities and regulatory bodies

Victims and the organization reportedly notified Australian authorities and sought assistance through relevant channels, including law enforcement and the Office of the eSafety Commissioner, and reports were also made to relevant online platforms. The information received indicates that victims sought protection measures and content removal, which in many cases did not take place, and attempted to preserve evidence for investigative purposes.

Cross-border elements

Certain abusive communications may have involved cross-border elements, including suspected perpetrators and/or accounts operating from outside Australia, and/or the use of platforms and hosting or messaging infrastructure located in third States. If confirmed, such elements may necessitate timely international cooperation for identification, evidence preservation, and accountability.

Without prejudging the accuracy of the allegations described in this letter, we would like to express my serious concern regarding the reported pattern of technology-facilitated violence directed at women engaged in public advocacy.

The allegations described, if confirmed, suggest a sustained campaign of intimidation, harassment and sexualized abuse targeting women human rights defenders and may constitute forms of violence against women and girls within the meaning of international human rights law. The reported conduct appears to have had the purpose of silencing women, undermining their participation in public life, including by creating a chilling effect, intimidation, and exposing them to heightened risks of physical and psychological harm.

These allegations raise serious concerns in relation to international human rights standards, including the rights to privacy, security of person, freedom from violence and intimidation, access to justice and effective remedy. We wish to recall that States have an obligation under international human rights law to act with due diligence to prevent, investigate, punish and provide remedies for acts of violence against women and girls, whether committed by State or non-State actors, including when such violence is perpetrated or facilitated through digital technologies.

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 any complaints concerning acts of violence, harassment, or abuse directed against representatives of Collective Shout that were received by competent authorities, including the Office of the e-Safety Commissioner. Please describe the steps taken, also through international assistance and cooperation, to respond to those complaints, including any measures to identify and hold accountable both direct perpetrators and, where applicable, the online platforms or intermediaries through which such abuse was facilitated.

3. Please indicate what protection measures were offered to the representatives of Collective Shout. Please specify whether such measures were provided in a timely manner and, if not, explain the reasons for any delays and outline the steps taken to ensure that similar delays will be avoided in the future.
4. Please provide information on the national legal and policy framework in place to prevent, investigate, and sanction technology-facilitated violence against women and girls, including but not limited to coordinated online harassment, threats of sexual violence, doxxing, impersonation, deepfakes, and image-based abuse. Please indicate, in particular, how such a framework ensures protection for women against reprisals linked to their engagement in social or human rights-related activities.
5. Please provide information on the procedures in place to ensure the preservation of digital evidence and the timely removal of abusive online content, as well as measures to ensure confidentiality, data protection, and the safety of victims throughout these processes.
6. Please highlight the steps that your Excellency's Government has taken, or is considering taking, including policies, legislation, and regulations, to ensure that business enterprises within its territory conduct effective human rights due diligence to identify, prevent, mitigate and account for how they address their impacts on human rights throughout their operation.
7. Please highlight the appropriate steps that your Excellency's Government has taken, or is considering taking, to ensure, through judicial, administrative, legislative or other appropriate means, that when human rights abuses occur within their territory and/or jurisdiction those affected have access to effective remedy, as set forth by the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

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.

Reem Alsalem

Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences

Damilola S. Olawuyi
Chair-Rapporteur of the Working Group on the issue of human rights and
transnational corporations and other business enterprises

Irene Khan
Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion
and expression

Annex

Reference to international human rights law

In connection with above alleged facts and concerns, we would like to refer Your Excellency's Government to its legal obligations under the international treaties it has ratified, as well as to broader international human rights standards.

We wish to refer to article 2(3)(a) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), ratified by Australia on 13 August 1980, which affirms that victims of human rights violations—including those perpetrated by private actors—have the right to an effective remedy. In connection with this, articles 7, 14, 17 and 24 of the Covenant respectively establish that no one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; that all persons shall have equal access to justice; that no one shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with their privacy or unlawful attacks on their honour and reputation; and that every child is entitled to the protection measures required by their status as minors.

We further recall that under article 3 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), States parties are required to ensure the equal enjoyment of Covenant rights by women and men. Moreover, under articles 17 and 19 of the ICCPR concerning the right to privacy, family, home, correspondence, honour, and reputation, and the right to freedom of expression, women human rights defenders are also entitled to specific protections, including the right to participate in public affairs without fear of violence or reprisal.

Furthermore, in connection with article 19 ICCPR, the Human Rights Committee asserts that there is a duty of States to put in place effective measures to protect against attacks aimed at silencing those exercising their right to freedom of expression. Recognizing how persons who engage in the gathering and analysis of information on the human rights situation and who publish human rights-related reports 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”, the perpetrators prosecuted, and the victims be in receipt of appropriate forms of redress (CCPR/C/GC/34, para. 23).

We also wish to refer to general comment No. 20 of the Human Rights Committee, which interprets article 7 of the ICCPR and clarifies that each State party has a duty to protect all individuals from torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, including when such treatment is perpetrated by private individuals. Likewise, general comment No. 16 and general comment No. 17, interpreting articles 17 and 24 of the ICCPR, recall that the right to privacy and the rights of children require States to adopt legislative and other measures to protect these rights in practice. In addition, general comment No. 31 recalls that States parties must exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate, punish and redress harm caused by private persons or entities where such harm would impair the enjoyment of Covenant rights.

Article 20(2) of the ICCPR establishes that any advocacy of national, racial, or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility, or violence shall be prohibited by law. This prohibition requires the fulfillment of three requirements that

must be met jointly: (a) advocacy of hatred; (b) advocacy that constitutes incitement; and (c) incitement that may give rise to discrimination, hostility, or violence (A/67/357, para. 43).

Furthermore, we wish to recall the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), ratified by Australia on 28 July 1983. CEDAW defines discrimination against women and requires States parties to pursue, by all appropriate means, policies aimed at eliminating discrimination against women, including gender-based violence as a form of discrimination. 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.” In this regard, the CEDAW Committee has clarified, including in general recommendation No. 35 (CEDAW/C/GC/35), that gender-based violence against women may occur in public or private spheres, including in technology-mediated environments, and that States must exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate, punish and provide reparation for such violence, including when perpetrated by non-State actors, both territorially and extraterritorially. The general recommendation No. 35 of the CEDAW Committee further reaffirms that States must ensure that justice systems are accessible, effective and gender-sensitive, that investigations are prompt and impartial, that victims are protected from retaliation and secondary victimization, and that adequate reparations are available. These principles apply equally to technology-facilitated forms of sex and gender-based violence and harassment.

In this regard, we would like to draw your attention CEDAW, to articles 1, 2, 3, and 5, which require States to eliminate discrimination against women in all its forms, to take appropriate measures to prevent violence, and to modify social and cultural patterns that perpetuate harmful stereotypes. I would also like to highlight that, in line with the recommendation of the CEDAW Committee, article 1 of CEDAW is to be understood as prohibiting violence directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately, including violence committed through digital means (HRI/GEN/1/Rev.6, par. 6).

We wish to recall the Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences on online violence against women and girls from a human rights perspective (A/HRC/38/47). That report recognizes that technology-facilitated violence can take multiple forms, including harassment, threats, stalking, doxxing, non-consensual sharing of intimate images, and other forms of image-based abuse, and emphasizes that States should adopt comprehensive legal, policy and institutional measures to prevent and respond to such violence, ensure accountability, and provide access to effective remedies and support services for victims. Particularly, the report establishes in its recommendations that states should, in accordance with the principle of due diligence and international human rights standards, enact new laws and measures to prohibit new emerging forms of online violence against women and girls, and protect all their human rights online, including the right to life free from violence, freedom of expression and access to information, and the right to privacy and data protection. Moreover, recognizing the harms of technology-facilitated violence, the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, in her report A/HRC/56/48, recommends that states adopt regulations that comprehensively target pornographic

content and explicitly criminalize the possession, production or hosting of material as they violate the right to life and dignity, and constitute torture or inhumane or degrading treatment.

Additionally, in her report on gender-based disinformation, the Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression drew attention to this common strategy aimed at silencing the free expression of women and people who do not conform to gender stereotypes, which constitutes a serious threat to their safety and health, as well as a possible form of online gender-based violence. Emphasizing that there can be no trade-offs between women's right to safety and their right to express themselves, the Special Rapporteur promotes a “gender-responsive response” to online threats, including by addressing the underlying factors that drive gender-based disinformation and gender-based violence (A/78/288).

In addition we wish to refer to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), ratified by Australia on 17 December 1990, which requires States to ensure that the best interests of the child are a primary consideration in all actions concerning children (article 3), to protect children from all forms of violence (article 19), and to protect children from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse (article 34). Where allegations involve the circulation or transmission of material that may constitute child sexual abuse material, these obligations require prompt and effective preventive and investigative measures and child-sensitive victim support. The Committee on the Rights of the Child recognizes that “sexual offenders may use digital technologies to solicit children for sexual purposes and to participate in online child sexual abuse, for example, by the live video streaming, production and distribution of child sexual abuse material” and therefore stresses states’ obligation to protect children from technology-facilitated sexual exploitation and to provide remedies for children who are victims (CRC/C/GC/25, paras 25 and 81). This regulatory framework is important, given that the organization is allegedly being targeted for its advocacy for the rights of children, especially in relation to the use of child sexual abuse material.

We also wish to highlight the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (Palermo Protocol), ratified by Australia in 2005. The Palermo Protocol obliges States parties to prevent and combat trafficking in persons, protect and assist victims with full respect for their human rights, and promote cooperation among States. While the present allegations concern technology-facilitated violence, to the extent that online spaces, criminal networks or digital platforms may be used to facilitate sexual exploitation and the distribution of exploitative material, including involving children, the State’s obligations of prevention, investigation and cooperation are of particular relevance.

In addition, 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 (Declaration on Human Rights Defenders), adopted by the General Assembly in resolution 53/144, recognizes the defense of human rights as a right in itself and affirms the entitlement of everyone, individually and in association with others, to promote and strive for the protection and realization of human rights. In the same vein, the General Assembly, in its resolution 68/181, on the protection of women human rights defenders, calls 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 this connection, we further refer to the report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders on the persisting impunity for violations committed against human rights defenders (A/74/159), which underscores that impunity facilitates the recurrence of violations, weakens trust in the rule of law, and has a chilling effect on civic space by discouraging others from engaging in human rights work. The report emphasizes that States have heightened obligations to ensure a safe and enabling environment for human rights defenders and to combat impunity through prompt, thorough, independent and effective investigations—conducted *ex officio* when warranted—leading, as appropriate, to the identification of all those responsible and to access to comprehensive reparations. The report further notes that digital environments are frequently used to target human rights defenders through threats (including threats of sexual violence), and it highlights that women human rights defenders face gender-specific risks and barriers to access to justice, including stigmatization, sexist and misogynistic attacks, and failures by authorities to treat allegations seriously—dynamics that can lead to revictimization. Accordingly, it stresses the importance of adopting a differentiated and intersectional approach in prevention, protection and investigation measures, with particular care in cases involving sexual and gender-based violence.

We further wish to highlight the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, unanimously endorsed by the Human Rights Council in resolution A/HRC/RES/17/31 (2011). These Principles rest on three foundational pillars: (a) the State duty to protect against human rights abuse by third parties, including business enterprises; (b) the corporate responsibility to respect human rights; and (c) the need for access to effective remedy. In line with these Principles and relevant treaty obligations, States should take appropriate steps to prevent, investigate, punish and redress human rights abuse involving business enterprises, including where online platforms and other intermediaries may be linked to harassment, threats, impersonation, and image-based abuse directed at women and girls.