

Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders; the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association; the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants and the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences

Ref.: AL UGA 3/2026
(Please use this reference in your reply)

2 April 2026

Excellency,

We have the honour to address you in our capacities as Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders; Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association; Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants and Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 52/4, 52/9, 59/4, 52/20 and 59/20.

In this connection, we would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government information we have received concerning **physical attacks against a number of woman human rights defenders from the organization Espoir et Dignité des Femmes du Kivu (EDF-Kivu) in relation to their human rights advocacy and activities for Congolese women refugees in Uganda.**

Espoir et Dignité des Femmes du Kivu (EDF-Kivu) is a non-governmental, community-based organization founded in Kivu in 1998, which is dedicated to promoting the rights of women and girls and combating gender-based violence in their communities. It promotes girls' education, as well as providing legal, psychosocial and community support to victims of gender-based violence. The organization carries out activities in Kivu in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and also for Congolese women refugees in Uganda. The organization is women-led and women-run, comprised of 36 members.

Ms. **Marie Chantal Machozi Shabani** is a woman human rights defender and the founder and Executive Director of EDF-Kivu. Originally from the DRC, Ms. Shabani was forced to seek asylum in Uganda after several assassination attempts against her in connection with her advocacy for women's rights.

Ms. **Grace Neema Nshombo** is a woman human rights defender and works with EDF-Kivu to promote education for girls, and that they remain in school and complete their education, through carrying out awareness-raising activities with their families about the importance of education.

Ms. **Chabusiku Rumena** is a woman human rights defender working with EDF-Kivu as the organization's Community Activities Coordinator, responsible for implementing outreach and community support activities. In 2019, Ms. Rumena's husband, also a human rights defender was killed. The perpetrator has yet to be held to account.

Ms. **Shabani Chantal Marie** is a women's and LGBTIQ+ rights defender who works as the Administrative Secretary for EDF-Kivu.

Concerns regarding allegations of repeated attacks over a number of years against human rights defenders at the Nakivale refugee settlement were raised with your Excellency's Government by several Special Procedures mandate holders in a communication sent on 24 May 2022 (AL [UGA 3/2022](#)). We regret that no response was received to this communication.

According to information received

Concerning Ms. Marie Chantal Machozi Shabani

On 24 January 2026, Ms. Marie Chantal Machozi Shabani went to Nyakabande transit camp to raise awareness amongst women refugees in the camp about their rights and to urge them to denounce corruption and abuse when they come across it. Upon leaving the camp and on her way back to the town of Mbarara, Ms. Marie Chantal Machozi Shabani was violently attacked by a group of men in police uniforms.

Following the attack, Ms. Marie Chantal Machozi Shabani reported the attack to the police. In doing so, she mentioned the fact that the men had been in police uniform. The police reportedly did not meaningfully address this aspect of the incident, to clarify as to whether the men were indeed police officers or potential impersonators.

At the time of writing, Ms. Marie Chantal Machozi Shabani has yet to be informed of any actions taken by the police following the attack, nor has she been provided with any protection measures by the police in the wake of the attack.

Concerning Ms. Chabusiku Rumena

On 25 January 2026, Ms. Chabusiku Rumena delivered an awareness raising session to women vendors in the market of the Navikale refugee camp on the topic of discrimination against LGBTIQ+ individuals. At around 8 p.m., as she was returning home, Ms. Rumena was violently attacked by a group of men. The men were known to Ms. Rumena for their hostility towards LGBTIQ+ individuals and human rights defenders who advocate for greater respect for their rights. Ms. Rumena was hospitalized following the attack, due to the injuries she had sustained.

On the evening of 17 February 2026, Ms. Rumena was physically attacked by a group of five individuals - three women and two men – outside the entrance to her property. Ms. Rumena was hit strongly in the face and head, leaving her with significant bruising and cuts to her face.

Ms. Rumena reported the attack to the police. At the time of writing, she is yet to receive any information regarding investigations into the attacks or possible protective measures for her.

Concerning Ms. Shabani Chantal Marie

On 3 February 2026, at around 11 a.m., Ms. Shabani Chantal Marie was violently attacked by a group of unknown men at the Kityaaza market in the Nakivale refugee settlement. The men attacked Ms. Shabani Chantal Marie whilst she was conducting an awareness raising activity at the market, using a megaphone to raise awareness amongst the vendors about equality between men and women. The attack reportedly caused great anxiety amongst the market vendors, who witnessed it take place in the middle of the public space.

Following the attack, Ms. Shabani Chantal Marie was hospitalized for the injuries she sustained. After leaving the hospital, she went to report the incident to the police. Whilst at the police station, Ms. Shabani Chantal Marie recognized a man in police uniform as one of the men who had attacked her. She included this information in the report she gave to the police, registered under reference SD REF: 43/10/02/1016. The police reportedly did not meaningfully address this detail, and Ms. Shabani Chantal Marie had not received any information from the police regarding actions taken or potential protection measures at the time of finalising this communication.

Concerning Ms. Grace Neema Nshombo

On 6 February 2026, at approximately 11 p.m., a group of men armed with machetes forcibly entered the home of Ms. Grace Neema Nshombo. The men physically [REDACTED] assaulted Ms. Grace Neema Nshombo [REDACTED]. They reportedly accused her of “believing herself to be equal to men”, contrary to the “divine order”. The home was also ransacked by the men. [REDACTED] Ms. Grace Neema Nshombo [REDACTED] immediately hospitalized after the attack.

The attack was reported to the police, yet at the time of writing Ms. Grace Neema Nshombo is yet to receive any information from police regarding actions taken or developments to bring the perpetrators to justice. Nor has she received any information about the provision of protection measures for her [REDACTED] [REDACTED] since the attack.

While we do not wish to prejudge the accuracy of the information we have received, we express our grave concern about the physical attacks against Ms. Marie Chantal Machozi Shabani, Ms. Chabusiku Rumena, Ms. Shabani Chantal Marie and Ms. Grace Neema Nshombo.

That these attacks were carried out in such quick succession is cause for further concern, as it may indicate a concerted effort to intimidate and threaten these women human rights defenders from carrying out their critical human rights work, advocating for and raising awareness about the rights of women and girls in the settings of refugee settlements.

[REDACTED]

This concern is significantly compounded by the alleged lack of action taken by police in response to this attack, and the physical attacks against Ms. Marie Chantal Machozi Shabani, Ms. Chabusiku Rumena and Ms. Shabani Chantal Marie, not only in terms of investigations into the attacks to hold the perpetrators to account, but also reported failure to provide any protection measures to these women human rights defenders.

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. Provide detailed information regarding the investigations into the physical assaults of women human rights defenders Ms. Marie Chantal Machozi Shabani, Ms. Chabusiku Rumena and Ms. Shabani Chantal Marie, and the outcomes so far, if any, of such investigations and any actions taken as a result. If no investigation has been carried out, please explain why.
3. Please provide detailed information regarding the investigations into the physical [REDACTED] assault of Ms. Grace Neema Nshombo [REDACTED]. If no investigation has been carried out, please explain why.
4. Please provide detailed information regarding the protective measures that have been provided to Ms. Marie Chantal Machozi Shabani, Ms. Chabusiku Rumena, Ms. Shabani Chantal Marie, Ms. Grace Neema Nshombo [REDACTED] in response to the attacks against them, in order to ensure their physical and psychological integrity. If no such measures have been undertaken, please provided detailed information as to why, and how this fulfills the obligations of your Excellency's Government's in accordance with its obligations under international human rights law.

This communication, and any response received from your Excellency's Government, will be made public via the communications reporting [website](#) at the 60 days mark. Should Your Excellency's Government respond within 60 days, both the communication and the response, may be published before the 60 days mark. The communications and responses will also be made available in the subsequent periodic 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.

Mary Lawlor
Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders

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

Gina Romero
Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association

Gehad Madi
Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants

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

Annex

Reference to international human rights law

In connection with above alleged facts and concerns, we would like to remind your Excellency's government of its obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), ratified by Uganda on 21 June 1995.

Article 19 of the ICCPR guarantees the right to hold opinions without interference 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". This right applies online as well as offline and includes not only the exchange of information that is favourable, but also that which may criticize, shock, or offend. In its [general comment No. 34](#), the Human Rights Committee stated that States 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 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 (para. 23). 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" (para. 23).

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 (*ordre public*), or of public health or morals; and (iii) be necessary and proportionate for those objectives. 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" ([CCPR/C/GC/34, para. 34](#)). Article 19(3) may never be invoked to justify the muzzling of any advocacy of democratic tenets and human rights (para. 23). Nor, under any circumstance, can an attack on a person, because of the exercise of their freedom of opinion or expression, including such forms of attack as arbitrary arrest and torture, be compatible with article 19 (para. 23).

We wish to refer to articles 21 and 22 of the ICCPR, which guarantee the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association. Article 22 (2) further indicates that no restrictions may be placed on the exercise of this right other than those which are prescribed by law and which are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, public order (*ordre public*), the protection of public health or morals or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others. The Human Rights Committee further affirmed that recognition of the right of peaceful assembly

imposes a corresponding obligation on States parties to respect and ensure its exercise without discrimination (CCPR/C/GC/37, para. 8).

We would like to further emphasise that human rights are universal and apply to everyone, irrespective of their sexual orientation or gender identity. The principles of equality and non-discrimination are part of the foundations of the rule of law and human rights. They are reaffirmed in article 2 (1) of the ICCPR. The Human Rights Committee emphasised that States have a legal obligation to ensure everyone the rights recognised by the ICCPR without discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity (CCPR/C/GC/35, paragraph 3).

Article 26 of the ICCPR further states that all persons are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection of the law. In this respect, the law shall prohibit any discrimination and guarantee to all persons equal and effective protection against discrimination on any ground such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

In the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights' report to the Human Rights Council (A/HRC/29/23), he reiterated that all human beings, irrespective of their sexual orientation and gender identity, are entitled to enjoy the protection of international human rights law with respect to the freedom of expression and association, as well as all other civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights (paragraph 9) and States have well-established obligations to respect, protect, and fulfil the human rights of all persons within their jurisdiction, including LGBT and intersex persons (paragraph 10).

The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly resolution 48/104 of 20 December 1993, states that women are entitled to the equal enjoyment and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field. Especially, we would like to bring to your attention article 4(c and d) of the Declaration, which calls for due diligence to prevent, investigate and, in accordance with national legislation, punish acts of violence against women, whether those acts are perpetrated by the State or by private persons.

Moreover, article 4(g) notes the importance of ensuring that women subjected to violence and, where appropriate, their children have specialized assistance, such as rehabilitation, assistance in child care and maintenance, treatment, counselling, and health and social services, facilities and programmes, as well as support structures, and should take all other appropriate measures to promote their safety and physical and psychological rehabilitation.

In this context, we also like to recall that the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in its general recommendation No. 19 (1992), updated by general recommendation No. 35 (2017), defines gender-based violence against women as impairing or nullifying the enjoyment by women of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and constitutes discrimination within the meaning of article 1 of the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women, ratified by Uganda on 22 July 1985, whether perpetrated by a State official or

a private citizen, in public or private life. [REDACTED]

The CEDAW Committee considers that parties are under an obligation to act with due diligence to investigate all crimes perpetrated against women and girls, to prosecute and punish perpetrators, and to provide effective reparations without delay. In general recommendation No. 35, the Committee clarifies that parties are responsible for acts or omissions of its organs and agents that constitute gender-based violence against women.

This includes the acts or omissions of officials in its executive, legislative and judicial branches. Furthermore, parties are responsible for investigating, prosecuting and applying appropriate legal or disciplinary sanctions, as well as providing reparation, in all cases of gender-based violence against women, including those constituting international crimes, and in cases of failure, negligence or omission on the part of public authorities. The Committee also indicates that gender-based violence against women, [REDACTED] can amount to torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment in certain cases, and that some forms of gender-based violence may constitute international crimes (see also general recommendation No. 30 on this).

[REDACTED]

We would also like to refer to 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 (A/RES/53/144, adopted on 9 December 1998), also known as the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders. In particular, we would like to draw your attention to article 1 and 2 of the Declaration which state that everyone has the right to promote and to strive for the protection and realisation of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels. Articles 5 and 6 guarantee the right to meet or assemble peacefully; as well as right to freely publish, impart or disseminate to others views, information and knowledge on all human rights and fundamental freedoms, while each State has a prime responsibility and duty to protect, promote and implement all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

We also wish to refer your Excellency's Government to the following articles of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders:

- article 5 (b), which states that everyone has the right “to form, join and participate in non-governmental organizations, associations or groups”;
- article 6 (b), which provides that everyone has the right “to publish, impart or disseminate to others views, information and knowledge on all human rights and fundamental freedoms”;
- article 9 (1), which states that everyone has the right “[...]to benefit from an effective remedy and to be protected in the event of the violation of those rights”.
- article 12(2), which provides that “The State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually and in association with others, against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration”.

Finally, under international law, the right to freedom of expression extends to everyone, including all migrants regardless of their status. The rights to freedom of expression and freedom of association for migrants and migrants rights defenders is essential to express their needs, protect their right to life and defend their economic, social, cultural and other human rights. As emphasised by the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants in his report on the right to freedom of association of migrants and their defenders, the work of migrants rights defenders and support from civil society organizations is crucial for migrants, particularly for those in an irregular situation or with vulnerabilities (A/HRC/44/42). Given the interconnected nature of human rights, restrictions on migrants' and their defenders' freedom of expression and association further hinder migrants' enjoyment of other rights. In this report, the Special Rapporteur also urged States to ensure that criminal justice laws are not misused to punish migration-related humanitarian acts or to harass civil society organizations that work with migrants.