

**Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders; the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances; the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants and the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls**

Ref.: AL BGD 2/2026  
(Please use this reference in your reply)

20 April 2026

Excellency,

We have the honour to address you in our capacities as Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders; Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances; Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants and Working Group on discrimination against women and girls, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 52/4, 54/14, 52/9, 52/20 and 59/14.

In this connection, we would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government information we have received concerning the **reportedly escalating threats since January 2026 against women human rights defenders Ms. Rimas Khan and Ms. Sofia Khatun in the Rohingya refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.**

Ms. **Rimas Khan** is a Rohingya woman human rights defender and the founder and Executive Director of the community-based organization Voice of Rohingya Women and Students (VRWS), established in 2022. In this context, she worked on advancing the protection and human rights of Rohingya women, girls, and youth through dialogue, education and advocacy action, addressing issues such as domestic violence, trafficking, peacebuilding, hygiene, and girls' education. Between 2018 and 2022, she engaged in grassroots work with community members in the camps, including women and girls, to discuss and address early marriage and other women's rights issues.

Ms. **Sofia Khatun** is a Rohingya refugee and woman human rights defender working with the youth-led community-based organization Rohingya Students Unity for Rights as Women Campaign Organizer and representative of one of the camps in Cox's Bazar. Her work focuses on women's empowerment, community development and human rights advocacy within the refugee camps.

We previously raised concerns about the risks facing Rohingya refugees in refugee camps in Cox's Bazar district in communication [BGD 5/2023](#) and [BGD 2/2019](#). We regret not receiving a reply to these communications. Furthermore, we previously raised concern regarding the killing of a human rights defender in a refugee camp in Cox's Bazar in communication [BGD 5/2021](#). We thank Your Excellency's Government for its reply to this communication.

According to the information received:

*Regarding Ms. Rimas Khan*

Following the killing of a member of her family in 2019 by armed groups, Ms. Khan has repeatedly been the target of threats and intimidation.

In 2022, she was reportedly asked to work as a media spokesperson for armed actors belonging to the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), creating content legitimizing their activities and violence. After she refused, she was warned she should not work at all if she did not engage with them, which exposed her to even greater pressure and further intimidation. Ms. Khan reported these threats to personnel of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

In 2023, following the release of an interview during which she spoke about the security situation inside the camps, she reportedly started receiving intensified threats from armed groups. On 20 December 2023, she was reportedly physically attacked at night by members of the ARSA armed group. On that occasion, the Armed Police Battalion (APBN) intervened, preventing further harm. Following the attack, she was relocated to the Kutupalong Transit Centre for safety reasons. However, she reportedly continued to be the subject of harassment and restrictions on her work and her freedom of movement.

Starting from 24 January 2026, Ms. Khan received renewed, repeated threats by unknown individuals via phone and through other channels. She contacted the UNHCR to seek protection.

On 30 January 2026, Ms. Khan's 10-year-old son left his home in the camp area to go to the mosque to attend Jumma prayers. Reportedly, he did not return home and went missing, after being last seen at 3 p.m. that day. Ms. Khan immediately reported her son's disappearance, reaching out to the UNHCR and APBN authorities. The child's fate and whereabouts remained unknown until 2 February 2026, when he was returned to Ms. Khan. She was reportedly required to pay approximately BFDT 300,000 as ransom. According to the information received, it appears he might have been abducted by members of armed groups.

Reportedly, at the time of writing, she remains exposed to risks and in need of protection. Since 14 March 2026, Ms. Khan has reportedly been receiving renewed and escalating threats targeting her and her family members. Her health conditions are allegedly deteriorating as well.

*Regarding Ms. Sufia Khatun*

Since the end of 2025, Ms. Sufia Khatun has reportedly faced multiple attacks and been the subject of harassment and death threats.

On 12 November 2025, she was allegedly physically attacked during daylight in a public space in front of other people. Reportedly, the attacker also threatened Ms. Khatun's daughter and attempted to abduct her.

On 28 January 2026, while she was in the Bashur Duwan neighborhood in Dhaka during daylight, an individual reportedly approached her and attempted to forcibly drag her against her will. She managed to escape.

On 3 February 2026, she allegedly received a call on her phone and, two hours later, threatening messages on two different social media channels. She blocked the user that reportedly contacted her.

Reportedly, attacks have continued and intensified since then and, at the time of writing, Ms. Khatun and her family remain at high risk and in need of support.

Without prejudging the accuracy of these allegations, we would like to express our concern about the repeated, multiple threats received by woman human rights defender Ms. Rimas Khan and about the physical attack and threats against woman human rights defender Ms. Sufia Khatun. Their work on women's and girls' rights seems to have heightened the risks they are facing, exposing them and their family members to further intimidation and harassment that could endanger their physical safety and psychological well-being.

We are further concerned that the threats against Ms. Khan and Ms. Khatun do not appear to have happened in isolation but seem to be part of a continuing pattern of attacks, harassment and intimidation targeting Rohingya human rights defenders in refugee camps in Bangladesh. The risks for women human rights defenders are even higher, as they reportedly faced gender-specific threats and accusations aimed at silencing them and halting their advocacy. Reportedly, these attacks largely remained unpunished.

We underscore the need to ensure accountability for these attacks and adopt prompt and effective protection measures and call on Your Excellency's Government to increase their efforts to ensure Rohingya human rights defenders in refugee camps in Bangladesh can operate safely and exercise their human rights and freedoms without fear of reprisals or retaliation.

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 comments you may have on the above-mentioned allegations.
2. Please provide information on any investigation that has been conducted or is foreseen to be conducted into the reported threats against the

woman human rights defender Ms. Rimas Khan and into the enforced disappearance of her son, including the results obtained, if any. If no investigation has been carried out, please explain why.

3. Please provide information on any investigation that has been conducted or is foreseen to be conducted into the reported physical attack and threats against woman human rights defender Ms. Sufia Khatun, including the results obtained, if any. If no investigation has been carried out, please explain why.
4. Please provide information on the protection measures undertaken or that are foreseen to be undertaken to ensure immediate and durable safety of women human rights defenders Ms. Rimas Khan and Ms. Sufia Khatun and their family members given the risks they are facing, and particularly the reported gender-based risks and threats.
5. Please provide information on the measures undertaken to ensure that human rights defenders in Bangladesh, including Rohingya defenders living in refugee camps, and particularly women human rights defenders, are able to carry out their legitimate work in a safe environment, without the fear of intimidation, harassment and violence including those based on gender or related to the defence of women's and girls' human rights.

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 prevent any irreparable harm to the life and personal integrity of Ms. Rimas Khan and Ms. Sufia Khatun and their family members, 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.

We may publicly express our concerns in the near future as, in our view, the information upon which the press release will be based is sufficiently reliable to indicate a matter warranting immediate attention. We also believe that the wider public should be alerted to the potential implications of the above-mentioned allegations. The press release will indicate that we have been in contact with your Excellency's Government's to clarify the issue/s in question.

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

Mary Lawlor  
Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders

Gabriella Citroni  
Chair-Rapporteur of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances

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

Gehad Madi  
Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants

Claudia Flores  
Chair-Rapporteur of the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls

## Annex

### Reference to international human rights law

In connection with above alleged facts and concerns, concerns, we would like to draw the attention of your Excellency's Government to articles 9 and 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), acceded to by Bangladesh on 6 Sep 2000, which refer to the right to liberty and security of person and the right to freedom of opinion and expression. These rights are also guaranteed under articles 3 and 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

Article 2(1) of the ICCPR obliges States parties to respect and ensure the rights recognized in the ICCPR without discrimination, article 26 that guarantees equality before the law and equal protection of the law. In its general comment No. 31, the Human Rights Committee clarified that article 2(3) entails an obligation to conduct prompt, thorough, effective, independent and impartial investigations into alleged violations and to ensure that those responsible are brought to justice (CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add. 13, paras. 15, 18).

Article 17 of the ICCPR provides that no one shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with their privacy, family, home or correspondence. In general comment No. 16, the Human Rights Committee affirmed that States must adopt legislative and other measures to give effect to this protection and must ensure effective protection against interference by public authorities as well as by private individuals (U.N. Doc. HRI/GEN/1/Rev.1, paras. 1 and 10).

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". This right applies online as well as offline and includes not only the exchange of information that is favorable, 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, proving “in specific and individualized fashion the precise nature of the threat, and the necessity and proportionality of the specific action taken, in particular by establishing a direct and immediate connection between the expression and the threat” (CCPR/C/GC/34, para. 35). The Human Rights Committee recalled that the relation between right and restriction and between norm and exception must not be reversed. In this regard, the Human Rights Committee stated that the restrictions must be “the least intrusive instrument among those which might achieve their protective function”. (CCPR/C/GC/34, para. 34).

We recall that States have the primary obligation to prevent, investigate, and remedy enforced disappearances, irrespective of whether such acts are committed by State agents or by non-State actors acting with or without the State’s authorization, support, or acquiescence. This duty is firmly grounded in the 1992 [Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance](#), which affirms that “no State shall permit or tolerate” enforced disappearances and requires States to exercise due diligence to prevent and respond to them in all circumstances (articles 2 and 3). The [International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance](#) further reinforces these obligations, requiring States parties to criminalize enforced disappearances, ensure effective prevention, and guarantee prompt, impartial investigations whenever there are reasonable grounds to believe an enforced disappearance has occurred (articles 3, 4, and 12). In accordance with these instruments, States must adopt effective legislative, administrative, and judicial measures to prohibit enforced disappearances, protect all persons within their jurisdiction, and hold perpetrators accountable, including when non-State actors - such as armed groups - commit such acts. A failure to act with due diligence may itself constitute a violation engaging State responsibility.

We also wish to recall that the Guiding Principles for the Search for the Disappeared establish that the search for the disappeared should be undertaken without delay (principle 2); respect the right to participation of the family of the disappeared (principle 5); be considered a continuing obligation (principle 7); and be interrelated with the criminal investigation (principle 13). We emphasize that special attention must be paid to cases of disappeared children and adolescents, given their extreme vulnerability. In this regard, the authorities must design and implement specific search plans and activities, at all times respecting the principle of the best interests of the child. Where the age of the disappeared person cannot be established with certainty, it shall be presumed that the person is a child (principle 4). Finally, when the search concerns young children, the overall strategy must take into account the possibility that their identity documents may have been falsified and that they may have been removed from their family of origin and placed, under a false identity, in child protection institutions or with adoptive families. In such cases, the authorities must search for the children, adolescents, or adults they have become, ensure their identification, and restore their true identity (principle 8).

The enforced disappearance of a child constitutes in itself a serious failure by the State to comply with its obligation to prevent human rights violations and with its

duty to respect and ensure those rights. In its General Comment on children and enforced disappearances, the Working Group emphasizes that enforced disappearance and the separation of a child from his or her parents or relatives constitute a particularly severe violation of the child's physical, mental, and moral integrity. Whether as a direct victim of enforced disappearance or as a relative of a disappeared person, the child experiences profound feelings of loss, abandonment, fear, uncertainty, anguish, and pain. Family separation has specific and lasting harmful effects on the child's integrity, leaving significant physical and psychological harm. States must therefore adopt effective measures to prevent all forms of discrimination and reprisals and take into account the specific needs of children, including differences related to age, gender, disability, refugee or displaced status, as well as racial, religious, or ethnic origin. Furthermore, the enforced disappearance of a child must be recognized as a crime of extreme gravity, constituting an aggravated form of violence against children, calling for appropriate criminal sanctions, while excluding any total exemption from responsibility (A/HRC/WGEID/98/1). Moreover, we recall the importance of enforced disappearances affecting women. In its General Comment on women affected by enforced disappearances, it stresses that States must "recognize the particular forms of harm suffered by women as a result of their gender, including cases of sexual violence and forced pregnancy, as well as the psychological harm, social stigmatization, and the disruption of family structures that result therefrom" (A/HRC/WGEID/98/2).

In this regard, we recall that States have heightened preventive obligations where women and children are concerned, grounded in their specific vulnerabilities and the gendered and age-related harms they face. Prevention requires States to adopt proactive, gender- and child-sensitive measures aimed at eliminating the risk factors that lead to enforced disappearance, including discrimination, social exclusion, and targeted repression. States must establish early warning and risk assessment mechanisms, ensure effective protection for those most exposed, including women human rights defenders, political activists, pregnant women, and children, and guarantee that all deprivations of liberty are properly recorded, monitored, and subject to judicial oversight. Preventive action must also include safeguards against sexual and gender-based violence, forced pregnancy, family separation, and identity falsification, as well as measures addressing the long-term psychological, social, and familial harm suffered by women and children. In all circumstances, States must ensure that preventive policies are informed by the best interests of the child, recognize the gender-specific impact of enforced disappearances, and provide for effective access to protection, remedies, and support services, thereby fully discharging their duty to prevent enforced disappearances and the serious human rights violations that flow from them (A/HRC/WGEID/98/1; A/HRC/WGEID/98/2).

We also would like to bring to your attention the fundamental principles set forth in 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 particular we would like to refer to articles 1 and 2 of the Declaration, which state that everyone has the right to promote and to strive for the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels and that each State has a prime responsibility and duty to protect, promote and implement all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Additionally, we would like to refer to the following provisions of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders:

- Article 6 (b) and (c), which states that everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to freely publish, impart or disseminate to others views, information and knowledge on all human rights and fundamental freedoms, and to study, discuss, form and hold opinions on the observance in law and in practice of all human rights and fundamental freedoms and to draw public attention to these matters.
- Article 12, paragraphs 2 and 3, which provide that the State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection of everyone 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 Declaration.

Furthermore, we would like to further remind your Excellency's Government of its obligation under the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) through its accession on 6 November 1984, in particular article 7, which provides that States shall take appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country. Also, articles 1 to 5 of the CEDAW require States to eliminate discrimination against women and to ensure the effective protection of women's human rights. The CEDAW Committee has clarified in its general recommendation No. 19 (U.N. Doc. A/47/38) and general recommendation No. 35 which updates the previous recommendation (CEDAW/C/GC/35) that gender-based violence against women constitutes a form of discrimination (para. 1) and that States have obligations to act with due diligence to prevent, investigate, punish and provide remedies for acts of violence committed by both State and non-State actors (para 24 b).

As stressed by the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls in one of its thematic reports to the Human Rights Council (A/HRC/23/50), stigmatization, harassment and outright attacks are used to silence and discredit women who are outspoken as leaders, community workers, human rights defenders and politicians. Women human rights defenders are often the target of gender-specific violence, such as verbal abuse based on their sex, sexual abuse or rape; they may experience intimidation, attacks, death threats and even murder. Violence against women defenders is sometimes condoned or perpetrated by State actors. The Working Group recommended to accelerate efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women, including through a comprehensive legal framework to combat impunity, in order to fulfil women's human rights and to improve the enabling conditions for women's participation in political and public life.