

Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on minority issues; 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 situation of human rights defenders and the Special Rapporteur on the right to privacy

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

24 April 2026

Excellency,

We have the honour to address you in our capacities as Special Rapporteur on minority issues; 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 situation of human rights defenders and Special Rapporteur on the right to privacy, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 52/5, 52/9, 59/4, 52/4 and 55/3.

In this connection, we would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government information we have received concerning the **alleged intimidation, threats, and subsequent acts of reprisal against Ms. Elçin Başol, an academic and civil society representative, reportedly linked to her participation in the eighteenth session of the United Nations Forum on Minority Issues, held in Geneva from 27-28 November 2025.**

The incident described below raises serious concerns regarding the safety of individuals cooperating with the United Nations and point to a potential case of reprisals linked to engagement with United Nations mechanisms, as defined under Human Rights Council resolutions A/HRC/RES/12/2, 24/24, 36/21, 42/28, 48/17, 54/24, and 60/23, and General Assembly resolutions A/RES/72/247 and 74/146, as well as the mandate of the Assistant Secretary-General on reprisals.

We encourage your Excellency's Government to carefully examine the allegations made in this communication and to provide detailed responses to the mandate holders with a view to remedying any potential violations of the State's obligations under international human rights law.

According to the information received:

Ms. Elçin Başol is a Turkish citizen of Abkhaz origin residing in Türkiye. She is an academic specializing in minority rights, conflict studies, and the Caucasus. She is also an accredited civil society representative of the Federation of Caucasian Associations (KAFFED). She has been publicly engaged for several years in academic research and civil society activities related to minority issues. Ms. Başol attended the Eighteenth Session of the United Nations Forum on Minority Issues held on 27-28 November 2025 as a civil society representative of KAFFED.

In the morning hours of 27 November 2025, Ms. Başol publicly shared via social media that she was attending the United Nations Forum on Minority

Issues in Geneva. Later that day, at 2.27 p.m., she announced that she would deliver a statement under Item 2 of the Forum’s agenda, focusing on “Recognizing the Full Contribution of Minorities to the Economic, Social, Cultural, Political and Institutional Fabric of Society”.¹ This Item of the agenda was scheduled to take place on Friday, 28 November 2025 from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

On 27 November 2025, around 9 p.m., while walking alone in central Geneva, Switzerland, Ms. Başol was reportedly approached by two men dressed in civilian clothing. In a brief exchange conducted in English, the men allegedly stated, “We know you.” When Ms. Başol replied that she did not recognize them, they allegedly responded, “We are from the Georgian mafia,” followed by the warning, “Watch what you would say.” When Ms. Başol objected and stated that such behaviour was illegal, the men allegedly replied, “We are only chatting.” Ms. Başol reportedly disengaged immediately and returned to her hotel.

On 28 November 2025, despite the alleged intimidation of the previous day, Ms. Başol proceeded to deliver her statement as scheduled at the Forum, under Item 2.² Ms. Başol’s statement was delivered on behalf of KAFFED, representing Abkhazians in Türkiye. During the session, the delegation of the Permanent Mission of Georgia to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva requested its right of reply, explicitly referencing KAFFED.³ Ms. Başol subsequently observed that members of the Georgian delegation were seated directly behind her during Item 2, which reportedly caused her significant distress. Due to these concerns, she remained in her hotel for the remainder of the day. Ms. Başol departed from Geneva on Saturday, 29 November 2025.

Between 2 and 3 December 2025, following her return to Türkiye, Ms. Başol reportedly experienced a serious cyber incident. Her email account was reportedly unlawfully accessed, and all documents stored in her Google Drive, including academic research materials, institutional files, and personal data, were reportedly deleted or rendered inaccessible.

Consequently, on 3 December 2025, Ms. Başol filed a formal Criminal Complaint at the Didim Chief Public Prosecutor's Office in Türkiye. The case was transferred from the Didim Chief Public Prosecutor's Office to the Cyber Crimes Division of the Aydın Provincial Police Department where an investigation is ongoing.

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- 1 The list of speakers if publicly available on the webpage of the Forum on Minority Issues: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/forums/minority-issues/session18/forum-minority-s18-list-speakers-item-2.docx>
 - 2 The statement can be viewed on UN WebTV here: [https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k1x/k1xqgz41e?kalturaStartTime=8297&config\[playback\]={\"audioLanguage\":\"en\"}&config\[ui\]={\"locale\":\"en\"}](https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k1x/k1xqgz41e?kalturaStartTime=8297&config[playback]={\)
 - 3 In the statement, Georgia indicated that Abkhazia is a part of Georgia that is occupied by the Russian Federation. Georgia indicated that Russia exercises effective control over Abkhazia and is therefore responsible for what happens in Abkhazia. The statement can be viewed on UN WebTV here: [https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k1x/k1xqgz41e?kalturaStartTime=10505&config\[playback\]={\"audioLanguage\":\"en\"}&config\[ui\]={\"locale\":\"en\"}](https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k1x/k1xqgz41e?kalturaStartTime=10505&config[playback]={\)

The intimidation directed at Ms. Başol has reportedly had direct and tangible consequences on her ability to pursue academic activities internationally. Ms. Başol was compelled to limit, interrupt, or withdraw from academic activities, not due to academic considerations, but because of concerns for her personal safety.

In the past, Ms. Başol allegedly experienced intimidation and threats linked to her academic and public activities in 2015 and 2016 in Ankara and in 2018 in Istanbul.

Without prejudging the accuracy of the information received, we express our utmost concern at the reported several incidents of intimidation and cyber-attack experienced by Ms. Başol, which appear to constitute a pattern of transnational repression. We are deeply concerned as these actions appear to have been aimed at deterring an academic and civil society representative from participating and engaging with a United Nations mechanism, intending to restrain and deter her exercise of her right to freedom of expression, targeting her previous human rights work and academic inquiry, and leading to a serious chilling effect among civil society actors and minority representatives engaging with international human rights processes. We are particularly concerned, as this case appears to illustrate the escalating risks faced by academics and civil society representatives, particularly those from minority backgrounds, when engaging with United Nations mechanisms. The reported combination of in-person intimidation, cyber interference, and the inability to safely pursue academic activities constitutes a serious attempt to impede legitimate participation in international human rights mechanisms, and creates a serious chilling effect.

We consider that this case may be inscribed in broader documented patterns of reprisals aimed at silencing members of civil society engaging in the United Nations. Various reports of the Secretary-General on cooperation with the United Nations, its representatives, and mechanisms in the field of human rights have addressed obstacles, intimidation and reprisals faced by individuals and organizations when accessing United Nations forums (A/HRC/42/30, A/HRC/45/36, A/HRC/48/28, A/HRC/51/47, A/HRC/54/61, A/HRC/57/60, and A/HRC/60/62).

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 clarify whether Ms. Başol was monitored, surveilled, questioned, or otherwise approached by State authorities or persons acting on their behalf on 27 November 2025 in Geneva, Switzerland. Please indicate all the measures taken to ascertain the potential involvement of any State agent in any such activities with regard to Ms. Başol.

3. Please indicate what measures are in place to ensure that academics, human rights defenders and civil society organizations, including those representing the Abkhazia community, can carry out their legitimate activities, exercise their freedom of expression, and engage freely and safely with the United Nations and other international or regional human rights mechanisms without fear of intimidation, harassment, or reprisals, within Georgia and abroad.
4. Please share what assurances your Excellency's Government can provide that Ms. Başol, as well as other academics and human rights activists representing the Abkhazia community, will not be subjected to intimidation or reprisals in connection with their human rights work.

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 guarantee the rights of Ms. Başol as enshrined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), ratified by Georgia on 3 May 1994, prevent any irreparable damage to her personal integrity, to halt the alleged violations, prevent their reoccurrence 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.

In light of the allegations of reprisals for cooperation with the United Nations, its representatives and mechanisms in the field of human rights, we reserve the right to share this communication – and any response received from Your Excellency's Government - with the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights in her role as senior official designated by the Secretary-General to lead the efforts within the United Nations system to address this issue.

Please be informed that a copy of this letter has also been sent to the Republic of Türkiye and Switzerland.

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

Nicolas Levrat
Special Rapporteur on minority issues

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

Mary Lawlor
Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders

Ana Brian Nougrères
Special Rapporteur on the right to privacy

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 the international standards protecting the freedom of opinion and expression, the protection of minorities, and of human rights defenders.

Article 19 of the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights \(ICCPR\)](#), ratified by Georgia on 3 May 1994, guarantees the rights to freedom of opinion and expression. 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".

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 scholars, 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, be compatible with article 19 (para. 23). Freedom of opinion is absolute, and freedom of expression is subject to limitation only in accordance with paragraph 3 of the provision. Under article 19, all restrictions must pursue a legitimate aim, in accordance with the law that is sufficiently clear, and conform to the requirements of necessity and proportionality. Attacks against individuals, such as intimidation or cyberattacks, for exercising their freedom of expression, are incompatible with the Covenant.

We also wish to refer your Excellency's Government to article 17 of the ICCPR, which protects the right to privacy by prohibiting any arbitrary or unlawful interference with one's privacy and correspondence, as well as any unlawful attacks on one's honour and reputation.

We also wish to refer your Excellency's Government to articles 21 and 22 of the ICCPR, which protect the right of peaceful assembly and the right to freedom of association with others. States not only have a negative obligation to abstain from unduly interfering with the rights of peaceful assembly and of association but also have a positive obligation to facilitate and protect these rights in accordance with international human rights standards (A/HRC/17/27, para. 66; and A/HRC/29/25/Add.1). This means ensuring that the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association are enjoyed by everyone, without discrimination on the basis of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status (A/HRC/41/41, para. 13).

We also wish to refer your Excellency's Government to article 27 of the ICCPR, which protects the rights of persons belonging to ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities. In this regard, we also wish to remind your Excellency's Government of the [1992 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities](#). The Declaration refers to the obligation of States to protect the existence and the identity of minorities within their territories and to adopt measures to that end (article 1), as well as to adopt the required measures to ensure that persons belonging to minorities can exercise their human rights without discrimination (article 4).

We also wish to refer your Excellency's Government to the fundamental principles set forth in the [1998 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, articles 1, 2, 5(c), 6, 9, and 12. Articles 1 and 2 of the Declaration 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.

Finally, we would like to refer your Excellency's Government to Human Rights Council resolutions 12/2, 13/3, 24/24, 36/21, 42/28, 48/17, 54/24, and 60/23, which reaffirm the right of everyone, individually or in association with others, to unhindered access to and communication with international bodies, in particular the United Nations, its representatives and mechanisms in the field of human rights. In these resolutions, the Human Rights Council condemns all acts of intimidation or reprisals by Governments and non-State actors and calls on States to prevent and refrain from such acts and to take all appropriate measures to prevent their occurrence. This includes the adoption and implementation of specific legislation and policies, as well as the issuance of appropriate guidance to national authorities, to effectively protect those who seek to cooperate with, or have cooperated with, the United Nations, its representatives, and mechanisms in the field of human rights from any act of intimidation or reprisal. The Human Rights Council also reaffirms the duty of all States to end impunity for such

actions by bringing perpetrators, including accomplices, to justice in accordance with international standards and by providing effective remedies for their victims.

In particular, resolution 42/28 reaffirms the right of everyone, individually and in association with others, to unhindered access to and communication with international bodies, in particular the United Nations, its representatives and mechanisms in the field of human rights, including the Human Rights Council, its special procedures, the universal periodic review mechanism and treaty bodies, as well as regional human rights mechanisms, bearing in mind that free and unhindered access to and communication with individuals and civil society are indeed indispensable to enable the United Nations and its mechanisms to fulfil their mandates.