

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 and the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment

Ref.: AL LBR 1/2026

(Please use this reference in your reply)

30 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 and Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 52/4, 52/9 and 52/7.

In this connection, we would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government information we have received concerning **the alleged physical attack against human rights defender Jonathan M.D. Yanzee on 15 March 2026**.

Mr. **Jonathan M.D. Yanzee** is the Executive Director of the Campaign for Human Rights and Development (CHRD), a youth-led civil society organization working on the advancement of justice, the strengthening of the rule of law, and the protection of human rights.

According to the information received:

On Sunday 15 March 2026 between 7 and 9 p.m., while he was in the 1405 community of Barnesville Township to congratulate those elected in the community election he had observed, Mr. Jonathan M.D. Yanzee was violently attacked. He was reportedly beaten up by officers of the Anti-Robbery Unit of the Liberia National Police, who were in the area to conduct an operation related to an alleged electricity theft involving some members of the community.

The attack happened after Mr. Jonathan M.D. Yanzee asked community members what was happening, while reportedly observing from a distance. Allegedly, an officer directed a flashlight toward his face and started punching him.

Shortly after, Mr. Jonathan M.D. Yanzee was reportedly forced into what was believed to be a police vehicle, where he was allegedly subjected to further abuse, including death threats, verbal attacks and physical assault, which resulted in eye bleeding and blood in his cough. Officers in the car were reportedly aware that he is a human rights defender and threatened him, saying they would "deal with him" before he advocates for other people. While in the car, officers also allegedly searched his pockets and took 360 USD from him.

Mr. Jonathan M.D. Yanzee was reportedly taken to the Liberia National Police Headquarters and released a couple of hours later, after a community member

allegedly paid 30 USD to the police. Reportedly, a picture of the human rights defender was taken by police at the station.

On 17 March 2026, Mr. Jonathan M.D. Yanzee reported the case to the Professional Standards Division of the Liberia National Police.

On 20 April 2026, the Deputy Head of the Professional Standards Division informed that the investigation unit started an investigation.

On 24 April 2026, the Professional Standards Division visited the site where the incident occurred. Reportedly, the police also took statements from both the complainant and the alleged perpetrators.

Without prejudging the accuracy of these allegations, we express our most serious concern about the violent physical attack against human rights defender Mr. Jonathan M.D. Yanzee. It is alleged he might have been targeted for exercising his right to freedom of expression and due to his role as a human rights defender in observing human rights compliance of police action in Barnesville and Gardnerville areas.

We would like to stress your Excellency's Government's obligation to act with due diligence under international human rights law to investigate the incidents and hold perpetrators to account. We call for an independent and impartial investigation into the incident reported above and for steps to be taken to prevent further acts of intimidation and reprisals of human rights defenders in Liberia in order to ensure they can operate in a safe and enabling environment.

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 information on the measures taken by your Excellency's Government to conduct an effective, prompt, impartial and independent investigation into the reported physical attack against Mr. Jonathan M.D. Yanzee, with a view to ensure accountability for this incident.
3. Please provide detailed information on the measures that have been put in place or are planned to be undertaken to ensure the protection of Mr. Jonathan M.D. Yanzee from further threats and attacks, as well as to prevent the re-occurrence of these allegations. Please also provide details on the specific measures that have been put in place to ensure that human rights defenders can carry out their legitimate work in a safe and

enabling environment, without fear of threats, attacks or intimidation by both state and non-state actors.

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 your Excellency's Government to undertake all necessary measures to protect Mr. Jonathan M.D. Yanzee from further risks and ensure his physical safety and that of other human rights defenders in the country. We also urge that all necessary interim measures be taken to prevent the re-occurrence of such violations 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

Alice Jill Edwards

Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment

Annex

Reference to international human rights law

In connection with above alleged facts and concerns, we wish to draw the attention of your Excellency's Government to articles 5 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR); article 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), ratified by Liberia on 22 September 2004; and at least articles 1, 2 and 16 of the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment (Convention against Torture), also ratified in 2004, which prohibit torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. The prohibition on torture has attained the status of a peremptory norm of international law for which no exceptions or derogations are permissible.

Attached to such prohibition are obligations to criminalize and investigate all acts of torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, to prosecute or extradite suspects, to punish those responsible and to provide remedies to victims.¹

States parties to the Convention against Torture have explicit treaty duties to establish all acts of torture as offences under domestic law (art. 4), to exercise jurisdiction over said offences (art. 5), to receive complaints and examine them promptly and impartially (art. 13), and to investigate those allegations promptly and impartially (art. 12).

Defendants cannot rely on orders of a superior or public authority, or states of emergency, to exonerate their actions (art. 2(3) and 2(2)), while any legal mechanisms which interfere with that obligation, such as statutes of limitations, immunities or amnesties, are considered contrary to the non-derogable nature of the prohibition (art. 2(2)). Amnesties provided at domestic law do not remove criminal liability pursuant to international tribunals or universal jurisdiction. Prosecutors and courts have a duty to refuse evidence obtained, or suspected of having been obtained, through torture or other illicit means (art. 15).

Victims are to be protected from reprisals or intimidation during said investigations (art. 13) and they have an enforceable right to fair and adequate compensation including the means for as full rehabilitation as possible (art. 14).

States are to establish jurisdiction over all acts of torture on territoriality, flag State, active nationality, passive nationality and universal jurisdiction principles (art. 5). The Convention against Torture further imposes duties to extradite alleged offenders when they are not prosecuted (arts. 5(2) and 7(1)).

At no time shall torture be used to extract information or a confession (art. 1), and any statement which has been obtained via such methods, shall be excluded from

¹ For full explanation of the obligations to criminalize, investigate and prosecute the crimes of torture and related ill-treatment, see Report of the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (A/77/502): <https://documentsddsny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N22/610/77/PDF/N2261077.pdf?OpenElement>

any proceedings except against a person accused of torture as evidence that the statement was made (art. 15).

States parties to Convention against Torture have overarching obligations to prevent torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment via effective legislative, administrative, judicial and other measures (articles 2 and 16), to educate and train relevant personnel including military officials on the prohibition (article 10) and to keep all rules, instructions, methods and practices relating to interrogation, custody and treatment under systematic review (article 11).

We also wish to recall articles 6 and 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), ratified by Liberia on 22 September 2004, which guarantee the right to life and security of the person and the right to freedom of expression. The same rights are enshrined in articles 3 and 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

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, protects the freedom of the press as one of its core elements 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 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).

The Committee further noted that prosecuting journalists, researchers, environmental activists, human rights defenders, or others, for having disseminated information of legitimate public interest that does not harm national security is not compatible with paragraph 3 of article 19 of the ICCPR. Additionally, the Committee underlines that “defamation laws must be crafted with care to ensure that they comply with paragraph 3, and that they do not serve, in practice, to stifle freedom of expression” (para. 47).

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).

In its resolution 12/16, the Human Rights Council called on States to refrain from imposing restrictions that are not consistent with article 19(3), including: discussion of government policies and political debate; reporting on human rights; engaging in peaceful demonstrations or political activities, including for peace or democracy; and expression of opinion and dissent, religion or belief, including by persons belonging to minorities or vulnerable groups (A/HRC/RES/12/26).

Furthermore, 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, also known as the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders. In particular, articles 1 and 2 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. We would also like to bring to the attention of your Excellency’s Government the following provisions of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders:

- Article 6(b), which states that everyone has the right to freely publish, impart or disseminate views, information and knowledge to others on all human rights and fundamental freedoms;
- Article 12, paragraphs 2 and 3, which provides 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.