

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 Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity

Ref.: AL LTU 1/2026

(Please use this reference in your reply)

4 May 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 Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 52/4, 52/9 and 59/5.

In this connection, we would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government information we have received concerning the **alleged physical and death threats against woman human rights defender and journalist Ms. Aleksandra (Sasha) Kazantseva, and the reported failure to conduct a prompt and effective investigation.**

Ms. **Aleksandra (Sasha) Kazantseva** is a woman human rights defender, journalist, and blogger from Russia working on LGBTQ issues. Through her blogs, she addresses matters of sexuality and gender identity and promotes access to healthcare and comprehensive sex education for Russian-speaking audiences.

According to the information received:

Ms. Kazantseva resides in Lithuania after fleeing the Russian Federation due to sustained persecution for her activism and public anti-war stance. In Russia, she was designated a "foreign agent" in February 2023, placed on a wanted list by the Ministry of Internal Affairs in March 2025, and added to the Federal Financial Monitoring Service of the Russian Federation's register of "terrorists and extremists" in October 2025. In December 2025, Khoroshevsky District Court in Moscow sentenced her in absentia to a 9-year imprisonment for publishing what the authorities described as "knowingly false information" about the Russian army's actions in Ukraine, as well as for involvement in an organisation labelled extremist in Russia (the "international LGBT public movement"), and for failing to comply with foreign-agent obligations.

Since June 2025, Ms. Kazantseva has been subjected to online threats, including in private messages and social media posts from a Telegram-based activist community [REDACTED]. Members of this group support the war in Ukraine, promote so-called "traditional values", and one of their leaders has stated that their "ultimate aim" is the "total extermination of LGBT in both online and offline spaces." In their threats, members of the group directly referred to Ms. Kazantseva's LGBTQ activism, demanded she stop, and warned

that otherwise they would come to her home, kill her, or forcibly return her to Russia.

On 24 June 2025, the same group shared a video of an unidentified individual approaching Ms. Kazantseva's residential building in Vilnius during her absence and leaving a note on her mailbox reading "greetings from the [REDACTED]". This incident indicates that those threatening her know her home address and that at least one of them may be physically present in Lithuania. After the incident, Ms. Kazantseva received messages stating that, had she been at home at the time, she would have been killed, mockingly asking, "Where is your police?" and adding "I think you understand that this was not our last meeting and what awaits you when you are back."

On 16 July 2025, Ms. Kazantseva reported the threats to the local police. Her statement was taken, but on 30 July 2025 the police refused to open a pre-trial investigation, citing "a lack of objective evidence of a real danger to her life or health." On 9 August 2025, the prosecutor quashed that decision. However, on 20 August 2025 the police again refused to initiate an investigation, stating that "there were no objective data or evidence of genuine threats sufficient to justify fear of their execution", and that "it was not possible to conclude that the author of the messages intended to incite hatred or violence against a protected group." On 22 December 2025, the prosecutor again quashed that refusal. Nevertheless, on 6 January 2026 the police once more declined to open an investigation, on the same grounds. On 23 January 2026, the prosecutor again quashed this decision.

Following these repeated reversals, a pre-trial investigation was finally opened on 23 January 2026 under articles 145(2) (threats to kill or cause serious harm) and 170(2) (incitement against a protected group) of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Lithuania. However, according to the information available, the investigation, to date, has produced no tangible results.

At the same time, Ms. Kazantseva worked with investigative journalists to identify the perpetrators. They established that, while the leader of the group resides in Russia, at least one individual allegedly responsible for the physical intimidation resides in Lithuania. On 21 December 2025, Ms. Kazantseva submitted the findings of this investigation to the State Security Department of the Republic of Lithuania, which on 7 January 2026 transferred them to police. Despite this, the investigation allegedly remains ineffective, and the alleged perpetrator residing in Lithuania ([REDACTED]), whose identity and involvement have been established through journalistic investigation, has allegedly not even been questioned.

According to the information received, the threats have continued since June 2025 and intensified in particular following the publication of a journalistic investigation in November 2025.

While we do not wish to prejudge the accuracy of these allegations, we wish to express our deep concern regarding the threats against Ms. Kazantseva in connection with her advocacy for the rights of LGBTQ people and her exercise of freedom of

expression in that regard. The ability to exercise freedom of expression without fear or intimidation is essential to the protection and advancement of the human rights of LGBTQ people, especially given that many of those Ms. Kazantseva reaches (particularly her audience based in Russia) have severely restricted access to such information.

We are gravely concerned by the significant delay in opening a criminal case and the alleged lack of effective investigation, particularly in the context of ongoing and escalating death threats. We underscore the urgent need for action in this and other cases involving threats against human rights defenders in Lithuania.

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 any protective measures taken to ensure Ms. Kazantseva's physical and psychological safety and integrity, particularly in light of the continuing and escalating threats against her.
3. Please indicate what measures have been taken to ensure that human rights defenders, including those working in exile and facing risks of transnational repression, are able to carry out their legitimate work in Lithuania in a safe and enabling environment, without fear of harassment, threats, attacks, or acts of intimidation of any kind against them or their families.

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 against Ms. Kazantseva 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 against her.

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.

Andrea Bolaños Vargas
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

Graeme Reid
Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual
orientation and gender identity

Annex

Reference to international human rights law

In connection with above alleged facts and concerns, we would like to draw the attention of your Excellency's Government to the following human rights standards.

We draw the attention of your Excellency's Government to article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), acceded to by Lithuania on 20 November 1991, which guarantees the right to life. As interpreted by the Human Rights Committee in general comment No. 36 (CCPR/C/GC/36), deprivation of life involves an intentional or otherwise foreseeable and preventable life-terminating harm or injury, caused by an act or omission; and it goes beyond injury to bodily or mental integrity or threat thereto (paragraph 6).

States parties must ensure the right to life and exercise due diligence to protect the lives of individuals against deprivations caused by persons or entities, whose conduct is not attributable to the State (paragraph 7). The obligation of States parties to respect and ensure the right to life extends to reasonably foreseeable threats and life-threatening situations that can result in loss of life (Id.). States parties may be in violation of article 6 even if such threats and situations do not result in loss of life (Id.). The duty to protect the right to life also includes an obligation for States parties to adopt any appropriate laws or other measures in order to protect life from all reasonably foreseeable threats, including from threats emanating from private persons and entities (paragraph 18). States parties must enact a protective legal framework which includes effective criminal prohibitions on all manifestations of violence or incitement to violence that are likely to result in a deprivation of life, such as, among others, death threats and violent hate crimes (paragraph 20).

Importantly, the duty to protect the right to life requires States parties to take special measures of protection towards persons in situation of vulnerability whose lives have been placed at particular risk because of specific threats or pre-existing patterns of violence (paragraph 23). These include human rights defenders and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and inter-sex persons, among others (Id.). States parties must respond urgently and effectively in order to protect individuals who find themselves under a specific threat, by adopting special measures such as the assignment of around-the-clock police protection, the issuance of protection and restraining orders against potential aggressors and, in exceptional cases, and only with the free and informed consent of the threatened individual, protective custody (Id.).

Investigations into allegations of violation of article 6 must always be independent, impartial, prompt, thorough, effective, credible, and transparent, and in the event that a violation is found, full reparation must be provided, including, in view of the particular circumstances of the case, adequate measures of compensation, rehabilitation, and satisfaction (paragraph 28). States parties are also under an obligation to take steps to prevent the occurrence of similar violations in the future (Id.).

The Human Rights Committee also emphasised that States parties must take the necessary measures to respond to death threats and to provide adequate protection to

human rights defenders, including the creation and maintenance of a safe and enabling environment for defending human rights (paragraph 53).

Similarly, we would also like to refer your Excellency's Government to article 9 of the ICCPR, which states that everyone has the right to security of person. It is highlighted in general comment No. 35 (CCPR/C/GC/35) that this obliges States parties to take appropriate measures in response to death threats against persons in the public sphere, and more generally to protect individuals from foreseeable threats to life or bodily integrity proceeding from any governmental or private actors (paragraph 9). States parties must respond appropriately to patterns of violence against categories of victims such as intimidation of human rights defenders and violence against persons on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity (Id.).

We would also like to refer your Excellency's Government to article 19 of the ICCPR, which requires the States parties to guarantee the right to freedom of expression, including the right to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas of all kinds. As emphasised by the Human Rights Committee in general comment No. 34 (CCPR/C/GC/34), such information and ideas include discussion of human rights and commentary on one's own and on public affairs (paragraph 11). All forms of expression and means of their dissemination are protected (paragraph 12).

Restrictions on the right to freedom of expression must be compatible with the requirements set out in article 19(3) of the ICCPR. This means that they must be "provided by law"; be necessary for respect of the rights or reputations of others or for the protection of national security or of public order (*ordre public*), or of public health or morals; and conform to the strict tests of necessity and proportionality (para. 22).

Under no circumstance, can an attack on a person, because of the exercise of his or her freedom of opinion or expression, including such forms of attack as arbitrary arrest, torture, threats to life, and killing, be compatible with article 19 (paragraph 23). It is the States parties' duty to put in place effective measures to protect against attacks aimed at silencing those exercising their right to freedom of expression (Id.). All such attacks should be vigorously investigated in a timely fashion, the perpetrators be prosecuted, and the victims receive appropriate forms of redress (Id.).

Furthermore, we would like to refer your Excellency's Government to 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 Recognised Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted on 9 December 1998 (also known as the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders). Article 1 of the Declaration states that everyone has the right to promote and strive for the protection and realisation of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels. Article 6 provides for the right to freely publish, impart, or disseminate to others views, information, and knowledge on all human rights and fundamental freedoms, as provided for in human rights and other applicable international instruments. Likewise, we would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government article 12, 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 their legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the

Declaration. In this connection, everyone is entitled to be protected effectively under national law in reacting against or opposing, through peaceful means, activities, and acts, including those by omission, attributable to States that result in violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and acts of violence perpetrated by groups or individuals that affect the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Finally, we would like to draw the attention of your Excellency's Government to the report on the death threats and killings of human rights defenders (A/HRC/46/35), in which the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders emphasised that many killings are preceded by a threat (paragraph 14). The Special Rapporteur stressed that States can and should intervene to prevent killings by responding more effectively to threats against human rights defenders; such interventions include taking action to stop threats aimed at defenders, which make them more vulnerable to attacks (paragraph 103). The States should, among other steps, ensure that State officials issue regular and public recognition of the value of the work of human rights defenders and publicly denounce threats against them (paragraph 104(b)) and support existing efforts to increase accountability for killings and other attacks on defenders (para. 104(g)).