

Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation; the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association; the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders; the Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity; the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism and the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls

Ref.: AL RUS 5/2026

(Please use this reference in your reply)

26 June 2026

Excellency,

We have the honour to address you in our capacities as Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation; Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association; Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders; Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity; Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism and Working Group on discrimination against women and girls, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 60/21, 59/4, 61/22, 59/5, 58/14 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 designation of LGBTQ+¹ Group "Vykhod" ("ComingOut") as "extremist" and prohibition of its activities within the territory of the Russian Federation, and the resulting risks of criminalization, arbitrary detention and other serious human rights violations.

According to the information received:

"Vykhod" is a non-profit initiative founded in 2008 in Saint Petersburg, and has been providing legal, psychological, and career support to LGBT persons, documenting discrimination and violence, and conducting advocacy. In December 2021, "Vykhod" was designated a "foreign agent".

By early February 2026, the Main Directorate of the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation for Saint Petersburg and the Leningrad Region had filed an administrative claim with the Saint Petersburg City Court seeking to have the LGBTQ+ Group "Vykhod" recognized as an extremist association and its activities banned within the territory of the Russian Federation.

On 3 March 2026 the Saint Petersburg City Court in closed proceedings granted the Ministry of Justice's application and recognized LGBTQ+ Group "Vykhod" as an extremist association and banned its activities within the territory of the Russian Federation. The designation of "Vykhod" appears to be the first

¹ Throughout the present communication, the acronym "LGBT" should be read as inclusive of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and other gender-diverse persons.

instance of a specific organization being individually classified as “extremist” under this framework.

Later, the same pattern of treating legitimate LGBT human rights, information and community support work as extremist activity was extended to other key Russian LGBT organisations and media/community initiatives. On 23 and 27 April 2026, Russian courts also designated as extremist the LGBT Network, the LGBT Community Centre in Yekaterinburg, the media project Parni PLUS, and the LGBT organisation Irida. We are further informed that proceedings against additional LGBT organizations are ongoing.

This designation follows the decision of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation on 30 November 2023 to recognize the so-called “international LGBT movement” as “extremist” and to prohibit its activities throughout the country. This ruling, reportedly issued following a request by the Ministry of Justice and conducted in a closed session, introduced a broad and vague classification that may encompass any real or perceived association with LGBT identities or advocacy.

The broad and ambiguous nature of the “extremism” designation reportedly allows for arbitrary interpretation and enforcement, exposing individuals associated with LGBT communities, including activists, human rights defenders, lawyers, journalists and ordinary citizens, to criminal liability. The scope of activities designated as “propaganda of “non-traditional sexual relations” or “extremism”” has reportedly expanded significantly, to cover acts including the display of personal photographs depicting kissing or embracing, maintaining personal blogs about same-sex relationships, hosting private gatherings for LGBT persons, participating in LGBT tourist trips, or posting comments in private social media channels. By current law, individuals accused of involvement in “extremist organizations” may face criminal penalties of up to 10 years of imprisonment. Leaders of these organizations are being criminally prosecuted (facing up to 12 years of imprisonment) for “organizing an extremist organization’s activities” – even before an organization itself is designated “extremist” by court.

While article 6.21 of the Code of Administrative Offences was initially aimed at preventing so-called “propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations” its application in 2025 was expanded to target works of fantasy literature, bookstores and publishing houses that sold books which had previously been legally published, and online streaming and gaming platforms. Raids and censorship to enforce this article have targeted not only LGBT spaces but also book festivals, private apartments, political party events, and educational institutions.

While we do not wish to prejudge the accuracy of these allegations, we are seriously concerned that the designation of LGBT organizations as “extremist”, coupled with the expanded use of the law on so-called “propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations” may:

- Criminalize the legitimate exercise of the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, and the right to take part in public affairs;
- Lead to arbitrary arrest, detention and prosecution of individuals based solely on their real or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity;
- Prevent LGBT persons from accessing essential health services;
- Contribute to the stigmatization and economic marginalization of LGBT persons, as well as of civil society organizations and activists carrying out legitimate human rights work;
- Expose individuals to heightened risks of discrimination, harassment, violence, and ill-treatment;
- Have a chilling effect on civil society, including human rights defenders working on issues related to equality and non-discrimination.

Should the above allegations be true, they would constitute serious violations of customary international law, and of corresponding rights under applicable treaty law, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), ratified by the Russian Federation on 16 October 1973, in particular, articles 14 (right to a fair trial), 15 (principle of legality), 17 (right to privacy and reputation), 19 (right to freedom of opinion and expression), 21 (right to freedom of peaceful assembly), and 22 (right to freedom of association). They would further be inconsistent with articles 2 and 26 of the ICCPR, which guarantee the enjoyment of all rights without discrimination of any kind and equal protection of the law. These guarantees prohibit both direct and indirect discrimination, including on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, and preclude the use of broadly defined legislation to target specific groups.

Overbroad restrictions, invoked to suppress advocacy of human rights, including for groups in marginalized situations, their designation as ‘extremist’ and activity bans underscore the political motivation behind their prosecution and reinforces the urgent need for the amendment of laws and revamping of practices, guarantees of non-repetition and other remedies, including compensation. As noted by the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, “the term ‘extremism’ has no purchase in binding international legal standards and, when operative as a criminal legal category, is irreconcilable with the principle of legal certainty; it is therefore per se incompatible with the exercise of certain fundamental human rights” (A/HRC/43/46, para. 14). It must therefore never be used as the basis for proscribing any group.

We also concerned that such measures may disproportionately affect women and children, including lesbian, bisexual and transgender women and girls, as well as gender-diverse persons, compounding existing patterns of discrimination. We recall the obligations of the Russian Federation under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which it ratified on 16 August 1990, in particular articles 2 and 3, which guarantee the right to non-discrimination and require that the best interests of the child be a primary consideration in all actions concerning children. We also recall articles 13 and 15, which protect children's rights to freedom of expression and association. The reported prosecution of children for activities linked to identity or peaceful expression would appear to be incompatible with these obligations.

We recall that Special Procedures mandate holders previously raised concerns regarding the Supreme Court's 30 November 2023 decision to ban the so-called "LGBT movement" as an "extremist organization" in communication OL RUS 28/2023. That communication highlighted the risk that such a vague and sweeping designation could lead to the effective criminalization of LGBT identity and expression, as well as legitimate human rights work. Additionally, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation raised concerns regarding the arbitrary arrest and detention of Andrei Kotov and Viskhan Tazurkaev, following the designation of the "international LGBT movement" as "extremist" and their death in custody (see AL RUS 5/2025). We regret that, up to date, no reply to these communications has been provided by your Excellency's Government.

We further note that this development appears to occur within a broader pattern of increasing repression of dissent and civil society in the Russian Federation, including through the abuse of national security legislation, as well as counter-terrorism and extremism-related legislation, to target individuals for the peaceful exercise of their rights. Reports indicate that such legal frameworks have been systematically used to suppress freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, and to target groups vulnerable to discrimination, including LGBT persons.

As documented by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation in her reports to the Human Rights Council ([A/HRC/60/59](#), [A/HRC/54/54](#) and [A/HRC/57/59](#)) and the General Assembly ([A/79/508](#) and [A/80/382](#)), the evolution of the systematic repression of LGBT persons in the Russian Federation reached unprecedented levels since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. These reports highlight that individuals perceived as dissenters or belonging to groups in marginalized situations, including those targeted on the basis of their sexual orientation and gender identity, face a heightened risk of harassment, arbitrary arrest, detention and severe punishment.

The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation further documented, since the Supreme Court's November 2023 decision, a "coordinated campaign of repression against LGBT individuals and organizations", criminal prosecutions under extremism-related articles, raids on LGBT-friendly venues and the targeting of cultural institutions for distributing LGBT-themed literature ([A/80/382](#), 16 September 2025, paras. 103 and 142)... Civil society organizations and informal groups advocating for LGBT rights have been systematically dismantled through the application of "foreign agent", "undesirable organization" and "extremism" legislation, leading to forced closures, exile of activists and the near-total eradication of

independent civic space for LGBT activism and advocacy ([A/HRC/60/59](#), 15 September 2025, paras 111-116).

The designation has also enabled the criminalization of private life, identity and expression. LGBT persons, including survivors of sexual and gender-based violence and crimes in the name of honor from regions such as Chechnya, Dagestan and Ingushetia, have been subjected to torture, ill-treatment, persecution and abuse by private persons, often with the acquiescence or direct involvement of State actors.

We also note that such targeting appears to form part of a broader State-sponsored strategy of discrimination, whereby LGBT persons are portrayed as threats to “traditional values” and “national identity”, thereby legitimizing their persecution and exclusion from public life. This pattern appears to extend to prosecuting and imprisoning children.

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 the legal basis and justification for the designation of the “international LGBT movement” and specific organizations such as “Vykhod” as “extremist”. Please explain how such designations comply with international legal standards, including the requirement of legal certainty under article 15 of the ICCPR.
3. Please indicate what measures are in place to ensure that such designations are not applied in an arbitrary or discriminatory manner. Please detail what legal remedies are available to challenge these designations and explain how these conform with international law, including the right to an effective remedy under article 2 of the ICCPR.
4. Please provide information on steps taken to ensure that individuals are not subjected to arrest, detention or prosecution solely for exercising their rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly.
5. Please indicate what safeguards exist to protect LGBT persons, human rights defenders and civil society actors from violence, discrimination and reprisals.
6. Please provide information about the steps taken or envisaged to repeal the category of “extremism” in national 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, prevent their recurrence, and ensure the protection of all individuals at risk. In particular, we urge the immediate cessation of similar proceedings, as there are grounds to believe that the case and subsequent sentence may have been politically motivated, aimed at punishing individuals for their legitimate human rights work related to sexual orientation and gender identity. We further call for the protection of all LGBT organizations, their members and supporters, as well as any individuals targeted on the basis of their real or perceived diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression).

In the event that the investigations support the allegations or suggest that they are well-founded, we urge the authorities to ensure prompt, thorough and impartial investigations, and to hold those responsible accountable.

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 to clarify the issues in question.

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

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Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Russian Federation

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

Andrea Bolaños Vargas
Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders

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

Ben Saul
Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism

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

Annex

Reference to international human rights law

We wish to recall that the Russian Federation is bound by its obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, ratified by the Russian Federation on 16 October 1973, notably articles 2, 9, 19, 21, 22, and 26 which guarantee the rights to non-discrimination, liberty and security of person, freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association. Any restrictions on these rights must comply with the principles of legality, necessity and proportionality.

“Extremist” designations of the LGBT organizations, prohibition of their activity and criminal persecution of related individuals solely on the basis of their identity and legitimate exercise of fundamental freedoms – including freedom of association – and LGBT rights work is unlawful, in accordance with the Human Rights Committee’s general comments No. 34 (2011) on freedom of expression, No. 37 (2020) on peaceful assembly and No. 18 (1989) on non-discrimination.

Abuse of anti-extremism legislation

We remind your Excellency’s Government that any measures taken to combat terrorism or violent extremism must comply with the obligations of States under international law, in particular international human rights law, refugee law and international humanitarian law.² Further, according to the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, “the term ‘extremism’ has no purchase in binding international legal standards and, when operative as a criminal legal category, is irreconcilable with the principle of legal certainty; it is therefore per se incompatible with the exercise of certain fundamental human rights” (A/HRC/43/46, para. 14). Counter-terrorism and counter-extremism legislation must not be invoked to suppress or penalize peaceful expression or association, including advocacy for the human rights of marginalized groups.

The requirement of legal certainty under article 15(1) of the ICCPR requires that criminal laws are sufficiently precise so that it is clear what types of behaviour and conduct constitute a criminal offence and what would be the legal consequences of committing such an offence. This principle recognizes and seeks to prevent ill-defined and/or overly broad laws which are open to arbitrary application and abuse, including to target civil society on political or other unjustified grounds (A/70/371, para. 46(b)) and suppress the exercise of fundamental rights and freedoms (A/HRC/40/52).

Human rights defenders

The criminalization of LGBT organizations and their activities appears to directly contravene the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, in particular articles 1, 5 and 6, which protect the right of individuals and groups to promote and

² Security Council resolutions 1373 (2001), 1456 (2003), 1566 (2004), 1624 (2005), 2178 (2014), 2242 (2015), 2341 (2017), 2354 (2017), 2368 (2017), 2370 (2017), 2395 (2017) and 2396 (2017); Human Rights Council resolution 35/34; and General Assembly resolutions 49/60, 51/210, 72/123 and 72/180, among others.

advocate for human rights, including through association, as well as article 12(2), which requires States to ensure protection against retaliation and persecution for such activities.

As documented by the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association in her report on protecting these rights from stigmatization, the use of “hostile discourse” portraying associations as “enemies” or threats to “security” or “values” constitutes one of the global trends fuelling the rise of authoritarianism and the closure of civic space (A/79/263, para. 1).

Equality and non-discrimination

Article 2 of the ICCPR requires that States respect and ensure to all individuals within their territory and jurisdiction the rights protected under the Covenant without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Article 26 of the ICCPR further provides that all persons are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection of the law. It requires that the law “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.”

We further recall the findings of the Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity in his report to the 56th session of the Human Rights Council focusing on unlawful restrictions on the rights to freedom of assembly, association, and expression based on sexual orientation and gender identity (A/HRC/56/49). The report documented that narratives framing LGBT persons as threats to “traditional values” and national identity are instrumentalized by States to legitimize discrimination, criminalization and the dismantling of civic space. Such narratives have been identified as key drivers of violence, persecution and the targeting of LGBT human rights defenders. The Expert also noted that discriminatory laws, such as those prohibiting consensual same-sex conduct or cross-dressing, or in some jurisdictions a ban on the public display of same-sex affection and public display of diverse gender expressions, have an inhibiting effect on freedom of expression. These laws contribute to a climate in which discrimination and even violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity are seen to be acceptable, with States perceived to provide tacit sanction (para. 22).

The Independent Expert further explained that “discriminatory restrictions on LGBT groups are frequently a bellwether for restrictions on other civil society organizations that are perceived as oppositional or as posing a threat to the status quo. Restrictive laws, policies and practices imposed by States have a stifling effect on the activities of organizations, causing them to be afraid of falling foul of the law by offering specialized services benefiting LGBT persons or including equal rights for LGBT persons within their purview. In some cases, overly broad laws may be used as a pretext to shut down civil society groups that are deemed undesirable by States. Restrictions imposed on LGBT groups can thus be a precursor to a wider clampdown on civil society” (para. 40).

With respect to the Russian Federation's legislation on so-called "propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations", the Independent Expert concluded that the law "had a stifling effect on self-expression, contributed to an uptick in violence, has been used by the Government to stifle LGBT-related events, to restrict the activities of organizations and to shut down online media outlets seen to contravene the law" and "has been used to arrest and prosecute activists and media workers, to deny permission to hold public events on LGBT issues, to prosecute event organizers and to block or severely restrict websites with sexual orientation and gender identity content" (para. 28). The Independent Expert recalled that "the law has been widely condemned by human rights bodies. The Committee on the Rights of the Child, in its concluding observations on the Russian Federation in 2014, expressed concern that the 2013 legislation, justified in terms of protecting children, actually served to inflict harm on individuals, including children, and recommended its repeal. The European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) found that the law amounted to discrimination as it unreasonably and without objective criteria singled out homosexuality as a prohibited topic. The Human Rights Committee found in the case of *Fedotova v. Russian Federation* that a conviction under the law was a violation of the rights to freedom of expression and equal protection of the law" (para. 29).

Furthermore, we recall the obligations of the Russian Federation under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), ratified by the Russian Federation on 23 January 1981. The CEDAW Convention obliges States to eliminate discriminatory laws and harmful gender stereotypes. It establishes obligations for States parties to take all appropriate measures to eliminate prejudices, customary practices and all other practices that are based on the notion of the inferiority or superiority of either sex, or on stereotyped roles for women and men (article 5), as well as to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in political and public life (article 7). The CEDAW Committee, in its general recommendation No. 28 on the core obligations of States parties under article 2 of the Convention (equality and no-discrimination), underscored that discrimination against women is inextricably linked to other factors affecting their lives (para. 9). It further explicitly acknowledged, in general recommendation No. 35 on gender-based violence against women, that such factors include being lesbian, bisexual, transgender or intersex, and emphasized the need for appropriate legal and policy responses to address such discrimination (para. 12). Under CEDAW, States parties have an obligation to eliminate discrimination against women in law and in practice, to ensure women's equal protection before the law, and to guarantee that women can exercise their human rights and fundamental freedoms without intimidation, harassment, or acts of retaliation. These obligations extend to women human rights defenders, who must be protected from gender-specific forms of intimidation, harassment and reprisals, including in contexts where national security or counter-terrorism frameworks are invoked. In this regard, we recall the landmark UN General Assembly resolution 68/181 (18 December 2013) on protecting women human rights defenders, and UN General Assembly resolution 72/247 (2017) on the twentieth anniversary of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, para. 11.

We would also like to draw the attention of your Excellency's Government to the reports of the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls (A/HRC/29/40, A/HRC/23/50 and A/HRC/50/25), which highlight that women and girls who do not conform to dominant gender norms, including lesbian, bisexual and

transgender persons, face heightened risks of discrimination, violence and criminalization. These reports further underline that lesbian, bisexual and transgender women and girls engaged in human rights advocacy are particularly exposed to attacks on their rights and personhood, especially in contexts of intolerance and backlash against gender equality, including through laws that restrict or criminalize LGBT persons and their activism.

Right to an effective remedy

Article 2(3) of the ICCPR enshrines the right to an effective remedy. It provides that States parties have the obligations to ensure that: (a) any person whose rights or freedoms are violated have an effective remedy, notwithstanding that the violation has been committed by persons acting in an official capacity; (b) any person claiming such a remedy has such right determined by competent judicial, administrative or legislative authorities, or by any other competent authority provided for by the legal system of the State, and to develop the possibilities of judicial remedy; and (c) the competent authorities enforce such remedies. The right to an effective remedy is a key element of the full enjoyment of human rights. Without access to an effective remedy, human rights violations go unpunished, and victims may be deprived of justice, compensation and their human dignity.

Freedom of peaceful assembly and of association

Article 21 and 22 ICCPR stipulate the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, respectively. We wish to recall that States not only have a negative obligation to abstain from unduly interfering with these rights, 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 they 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).

In this sense, the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association has identified the stigmatization and criminalization of civil society organizations and activists, particularly those belonging to historically marginalized communities, as a major threat not compatible with States' obligations under international human rights law (A/80/219, paras. 37 and 73).

We furthermore wish to highlight that the former Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association indicated that “[t]he suspension and the involuntarily dissolution of an association are the severest types of restrictions on freedom of association. As a result, it should only be possible when there is a clear and imminent danger resulting in a flagrant violation of national law, in compliance with international human rights law. It should be strictly proportional to the legitimate aim pursued and used only when softer measures would be insufficient” (A/HRC/20/27, para. 75).

Freedom of expression

We recall that article 19 of the ICCPR guarantees the right to hold opinions without interference and the right to freedom of expression, which 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. Any restriction on this right must be strictly compatible with the requirements set out in article 19(3) ICCPR and be “the least intrusive instrument among those which might achieve their protective function” (CCPR/C/GC/34, para. 34). The Committee has made similar clarifications regarding necessity and proportionality with respect to articles 21 and 22 of the Covenant (CCPR/C/GC/37, para. 36). Furthermore, “statements that restrict the exercise of the rights listed in paragraph 2 of article 19 must not only comply with the strict conditions set out in paragraph 3 of article 19 of the Covenant, but must also be compatible with the provisions, aims, and objectives of the Covenant,” including “the provisions of the Covenant that prohibit discrimination ” (CCPR/C/GC/34, para. 26) which include discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation (CCPR/C/GC/37, para. 36).