

**Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders; the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers and the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls**

Ref.: AL SDN 3/2026

(Please use this reference in your reply)

10 July 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 independence of judges and lawyers and Working Group on discrimination against women and girls, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 61/22, 53/12 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 reported judicial harassment and smear campaign against woman human rights defender and lawyer Rehab Mubarak**.

Ms. **Rehab Mubarak** is a woman human rights defender and lawyer, who has been documenting human rights violations in the context of the conflict in Sudan. She monitors abuses, provides support to victims and conducts legal analysis aimed at promoting human rights and accountability. She is also a member of the Emergency Lawyers group.

According to the information received:

On 17 April 2026, judicial authorities in Sudan charged Rehab Mubarak under Articles 51 and 66 of the Criminal Code of Sudan and initiated criminal proceedings against her. She was accused of "waging war against the state" and "spreading false news". An arrest warrant was issued against her. It is believed that she was targeted because she published reports documenting specific cases of human rights violations in different areas of the country. If convicted, she might face severe punishment, including the death penalty.

Reportedly, authorities also took steps to dismiss her from the Sudanese Bar Association for alleged breaches of work ethics.

On 18 April 2026, following the initiation of proceedings, she was the target of a smear campaign in the media and on social media platforms, where people reportedly discredited her work and called for her prosecution.

Reportedly, she had to relocate twice due to safety concerns.

This happens in a wider context of increasing reprisals against human rights defenders exposing wrongdoings in the context of the conflict in Sudan.

Without prejudging the accuracy of these allegations, we express our serious concern about the initiation of criminal proceedings against woman human rights defender and lawyer Rehab Mubarak and the use of vaguely worded legal provisions to target her. We call on the authorities to immediately drop all charges against her. These appear to be disproportionate and not pursuing a legitimate aim, in contravention with article 19(3) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and seemingly serve solely as a tool for the criminalization of dissent and human rights work. We are also concerned by the coordinated smear campaign she was subjected to, which might be an attempt to further intimidate and silence her.

The persecution of Ms. Mubarak appears to be in direct retaliation to her work of monitoring and documenting human rights violations and abuses and her advocacy role. In addition to being in violation of specific rights, these acts could constitute a direct attack on the right to promote, defend, and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms. This, in turn, risks undermining human rights protection under international human rights law and standards.

In particular, we wish to express our concern because, as a woman human rights defender, Ms. Mubarak may be exposed to gender-based attacks and smear campaigns that seek to discredit her not only because of her work, but also on the basis of discriminatory stereotypes, thereby exacerbating the risks she faces.

We are concerned about the seemingly coordinated strategy that combines judicial harassment with a public smear campaign. The initiation of criminal proceedings appears to have caused the smear campaign, creating a cycle of intimidation and isolation that might have a chilling effect not only on her but also on other women human rights defenders.

We are alarmed by the harassment of human rights defenders and independent voices reporting on conflict-related violations, which we believe might have a intimidating effect on the civic space and on defenders' ability to operate in a safe and enabling environment and exercise their right to freedom of expression.

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 legal and factual grounds for initiation of criminal proceedings against woman human rights defender and lawyer Ms. Rehab Mubarak, including for the use of vaguely worded legal provisions, and explain how these measures are compatible with international norms and standards.

3. Please provide information as to the actions taken to counter the smear campaign targeting Ms. Rehab Mubarak and prevent further harassment and intimidation against her and other human rights defenders.
4. Please provide information on the steps taken to ensure that all human rights defenders in Sudan can carry out their legitimate human rights work in a safe environment, including in exercising their right to freedom of opinion and expression, free from any form of threats and harassment, or any other form of undue restrictions.

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 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.

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

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

Margaret Satterthwaite  
Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers

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

## **Annex**

### **Reference to international human rights law**

In relation to the above-mentioned allegations, we would like to refer your Excellency' Government to articles 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), acceded to by Sudan on 18 March 1986.

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”.

Any restrictions on freedom of expression must be strictly limited and meet the high threshold set out in article 19(3) of the Covenant, following which any limitations must be determined by law and conform to the strict tests of necessity and proportionality. As underlined by the Human Rights Committee in its general comment No. 34, attacks on persons because of the exercise of their freedom of expression, including in the form of arbitrary arrest, cannot under any circumstance be compatible with article 19. As highlighted by the Committee, persons engaged in gathering, analysing and reporting on human rights are frequently subjected to such acts of intimidation because of their activities.

The Human Rights 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. 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” (CCPR/C/GC/34, para. 23).

We would also like to refer 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 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.

We would further wish to stress the following articles of the Declaration:

- article 6(a) and (b), providing for the right to know, seek, obtain, receive and hold information about all human rights and fundamental freedoms, and to freely publish, impart or disseminate to others views, information and knowledge on all human rights and fundamental freedoms; and

- article 12, paragraph 2, holding that States shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually and in association with others, 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.

We also recall that the targeting and persecution of individuals as a result of their work on documenting human rights violations may constitute retaliation and a violation of their right to communicate freely with international bodies, which is essential for the global monitoring of human rights (article 9(4) of the Declaration).

We also wish to refer to General Assembly resolution A/RES/68/181 on the promotion of the Declaration and protecting women human rights defenders, which stresses that “respect and support for the activities of human rights defenders, including women human rights defenders, is essential to the overall enjoyment of human rights”, and condemns “all human rights violations and abuses committed against persons engaged in promoting and defending human rights and fundamental freedoms”. It further highlights “the important role of women human rights defenders in promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, to which everyone is entitled without distinction of any kind, including in addressing all forms of human rights violations, combating impunity, fighting poverty and discrimination and promoting access to justice, democracy, the full participation of women in society, tolerance, human dignity and the right to development, while recalling that the exercise of these rights carries duties and responsibilities set out in the Declaration”.

Furthermore, we would like to refer to the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which provides that States shall take appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country. 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 on political and public life (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. We also recall that the Working Group on discrimination against women has stated in another one of its thematic reports to the Human Rights Council on women deprived of liberty (A/HRC/41/33), that "Women who seek to participate in political, economic, social or cultural leadership in their communities or nations may be acting in defiance of stereotypes obliging women to stay quiet and invisible and defer to male governance". Women human rights defenders face high risks of criminalization and imprisonment due to their legitimate public activism, since they are perceived as defying traditional conceptions of family and gender roles (A/HRC/41/33, para. 25).