

Mandate of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences

Ref.: AL NGA 3/2026

(Please use this reference in your reply)

2 July 2026

Excellency,

I have the honour to address you in my capacity as Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 59/20.

In this connection, I would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government information I have received concerning the alleged mass sexual violence against women and girls in the context of the Alue-Do festival in Nigeria, discriminatory restrictions on women's movement, the alleged inadequate responses to the violations, and the lack of full access to justice for victims.

According to the information received:

Alue-Do festival and the requirement for women and girls to stay home

On 19 March 2026, the Alue-Do festival observed by the Uruamudhu community within Ozoro Kingdom, Isoko North Local Government Area (LGA), Delta State, Nigeria, reportedly descended into what has since been described as a scene of mass sexual violence. The Alue-Do festival is allegedly a traditional fertility rite held once every three to four years, intended to offer prayers and blessings for women seeking to conceive. Its central symbolic practice involves the playful dragging and pouring of sand on married individuals without children.

A significant aspect of the festival's customary rules is the requirement that unmarried girls and women remain indoors during certain stages of the ritual. This tradition is allegedly communicated informally without official notice. The festival on 19 March 2026 was also reportedly organized without informing the traditional ruler, the school authorities of Southern Delta University, the Student Union Government, or the Delta State Police Command about the said "requirement." It is alleged that no institutional safety infrastructure was present during the gathering.

Sexual assaults

The sexual assaults on women and girls by groups of men reportedly began on Thursday, 19 March 2026, around midday and continued into the evening. Videos surfacing on social media from 19-20 March 2026 demonstrate various patterns of violence. One of such clips shows a woman seated on a motorcycle being forcibly dragged to the ground and physically assaulted by a group of young men, her clothing torn, and another a woman fleeing whilst her attackers pulled at her dress, leaving her partially exposed. In another video, a woman is

visibly distressed while clutching torn clothing, surrounded and groped by multiple men. There are reports of multiple instances of women being chased by groups of men, stripped in public spaces, and subjected to physical harassment throughout the community.

Students of Southern Delta University were, allegedly, among the confirmed victims. The Student Union Government (SUG) President, Oribelua Precious, confirmed to the press on 20 March 2026 that some had been admitted to a local hospital. A doctor on duty at the hospital stated that no student confirmed penetrative rape, while acknowledging that sexual assault and molestation had occurred and constituted serious violations. It is reported that under the Nigerian Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPP) 2015, which has been domesticated in Delta State, sexual assault, including non-penetrative acts of sexual violence, forced public exposure, and degrading treatment, constitutes a criminal offence.

Official response to the assaults

The exact total number of victims and the full range of acts committed remain unverified. Reportedly, the police had, as of 23 March 2026, conducted formal interviews with only four victims. As of July 2026, while arrests and investigations have been reported in connection with the sexual violence committed during the Ozoro festival in Delta State, no publicly available information indicates that any suspect has yet been formally charged or brought to trial. No civil society organization or legal aid body has been publicly confirmed as having been formally engaged to represent survivors in criminal proceedings and the timeline for prosecution remains unknown. The gap between documented violence and the number of victims identified suggests that many survivors have not come forward. Moreover, social media footage showed bystanders filming and, in some cases, appearing to cheer during assaults. No accountability measures have been publicly announced targeting those who facilitated or observed without intervening.

It is reported that the authorities, including the Minister of Women Affairs and Social Development, Hajiya Imaan Sulaiman-Ibrahim and the First Lady, Senator Oluremi Tinubu, the Delta State Government, community leaders and civil society organizations have issued statements condemning the attacks. Additionally, the Alue-Do festival has been formally banned.

Some support measures, including covering medical costs for survivors or providing them with psychosocial care and legal aid, have been announced by government authorities, but it is unknown to what extent these commitments have been operationalized on the ground. In particular, it remains unknown whether survivors have been systematically connected to Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs) or specialized psychosocial services. As Ozoro, is not a major city, it is alleged that access to services there may be limited. Moreover, while many student survivors returned to their home communities, there is no public information on whether the university administration or the Delta State government specifically reached out to them. Allegedly, no government statement to date has addressed the need for witness protection and

confidentiality demanded by the Nigerian Federation of Business and Professional Women in their petition submitted to the Delta State Government.

While I do not prejudge the accuracy of these allegations, I have to express my serious concern at the reported acts of sexual violence against women and girls, the enforcement of discriminatory practices restricting women's freedom of movement, and the alleged gaps in ensuring access to justice for survivors. I wish to recall that under articles 2 and 5 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), states have an obligation to exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate, punish, and provide redress for acts of sex-based violence against women, whether perpetrated by State or non-State actors. I would also like to emphasize that the right of women to live free from violence is closely linked to the rights to bodily integrity and access to an effective remedy, as recognized in international human rights law.

Although I note certain measures taken by the government to assist the victims, I wish to stress that such measures must be accompanied by prompt, thorough, independent and impartial investigations, the prosecution and punishment of all those responsible. The assistance provided has to be comprehensive, effective and survivor-centered. Ensuring confidentiality and the protection of witnesses and victims from any forms of retaliation are crucial in this regard. Additionally, it must be emphasized that all forms of sexual violence, including those not involving penetrative rape, must neither be minimized nor dismissed, but rather treated with the utmost seriousness. The State cannot rely on the absence or low number of formal complaints, but, both in this case and going forward, it must work to create conditions in which women and girls feel safe and supported in coming forward, including by addressing stigma and removing barriers to reporting.

I further recall that portraying women's presence in public during a festival as an invitation to harm reinforces the notion that their mobility, conduct, and dress are legitimate subjects of male control and discipline. Confining women and girls to home during such events represents an illegitimate restriction of their freedom of movement, contrary to international human rights law, in particular article 12 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Such attitudes constitute a harmful social practice that must be actively challenged. It is therefore important to emphasize that, under article 2(f) of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), States are required to "take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to modify or abolish existing laws, regulations, customs and practices which constitute discrimination against women."

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 my responsibility, under the mandate provided to me by the Human Rights Council, to seek to clarify all cases brought to my attention, I 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 what immediate measures were taken by law enforcement authorities on 19 March 2026 once the incidents began, including response times, deployment of personnel, and actions taken to stop the ongoing violence.
3. Please provide detailed information on the current status of all investigations of sexual violence in connection with Alue-Do Festival, including whether any suspects have been formally charged or prosecuted. Please also explain whether any investigations have been initiated into the conduct of bystanders who filmed the incidents and subsequently posted them online and whether they faced barriers to reporting or fear of retaliation.
4. Please detail the medical, psychological, and legal support services that have been made available to survivors, including whether follow-up care has been ensured for student victims who returned to their home communities.
5. Please clarify whether any measures are being taken to review and regulate similar customary practices that impose restrictions on women's movement, including the requirement for unmarried women and girls to remain indoors during specific periods of time.
6. Please provide information on any public awareness or community engagement initiatives undertaken or planned to address harmful stereotypes, victim-blaming attitudes, and tolerance of sexual violence.

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, I 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 my highest consideration.

Reem Alsalem
Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences

Annex

Reference to international human rights law

In connection with above alleged facts and concerns, I would like to refer Your Excellency's Government to its legal obligations under the international treaties it has ratified, as well as to broader international human rights developments.

I remind your Excellency's Government that under article 3 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), ratified by Nigeria on 29 July 1993, state parties must undertake to ensure the equal rights of men and women. Article 12 of the ICCPR guarantees the right to freedom of movement, and any restrictions on this right must be lawful, necessary, and non-discriminatory. The Human Rights Committee further clarified in its general comment No. 27 that such restrictions have to be consistent with the other rights guaranteed in the Covenant and with the fundamental principles of equality and non-discrimination, in particular on the basis of sex (CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.9, para. 18).

Moreover, the right to access to justice for women and girls in cases of human rights violations is closely linked to the obligation under article 2(3) of the ICCPR to ensure an effective remedy. Similarly, article 8 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights safeguards the right of everyone to an effective remedy by competent national tribunals for acts violating fundamental rights. In its general comment No. 31, the Human Rights Committee clarified that article 2(3) of the ICCPR requires States parties not only to provide remedies in law, but also to ensure effective investigative and judicial mechanisms capable of establishing the facts and identifying those responsible (CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.13, para. 15).

I further draw attention to Nigeria's obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), ratified by Nigeria on 13 June 1985. Under article 2(f) of CEDAW, states must "take all appropriate measures... to modify or abolish existing laws, regulations, customs and practices which constitute discrimination against women," which requires active efforts toward abolishing harmful cultural practices. The CEDAW Committee, together with the Committee on the Rights of the Child, in their joint General Recommendation, noted that harmful practices are "often associated with serious forms of violence or are themselves a form of violence against women and children," expressing also concern that they are sometimes justified under the guise of "protection" or control of women and children (CEDAW/C/GC/31-CRC/C/GC/18., paras. 6-7).

Regarding the protection from sexual violence and provisions of effective remedies for victims article 2 of CEDAW requires States parties to pursue, without delay, a policy of eliminating discrimination against women. General recommendation No. 19 of the CEDAW Committee (1992) on violence against women, in paragraph 6, defines gender-based violence as "violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately." Such violence "includes acts that inflict physical, mental, or sexual harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion and other deprivations of liberty."

In the general recommendation No. 33 on women's access to justice, the CEDAW committee noted that "discrimination against women, based on gender stereotypes, stigma, harmful and patriarchal cultural norms and gender-based violence" has an adverse impact on the ability of women to gain access to justice on an equal basis with men (CEDAW/C/GC/33, para. 8). Specifying the corresponding states obligations, in the general recommendation No. 35, the CEDAW Committee clarified that States may be responsible for private acts if they fail to act with due diligence to prevent, investigate, punish and provide reparation for such acts (CEDAW/C/GC/35, para. 24(2)). The Committee further emphasized that investigations into violence must be impartial, timely, victim-centred and free from stereotypes, and must guarantee survivors' safety, dignity and privacy (CEDAW/C/GC/35, paras. 31-33). States, therefore, are required to ensure access to justice mechanisms that do not re-traumatize victims and that are responsive to the specific dynamics of sexual violence.

Furthermore, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol), ratified by Nigeria on 18 February 2005, especially articles 2 and 8, is particularly relevant to the violations and assaults during the Alue-Do festival. Article 2 obliges States to adopt legislative, institutional, and policy measures to combat discrimination and to modify social and cultural patterns that perpetuate inequalities. To that end, States should, in particular, adopt measures aimed at eliminating "harmful practices which endanger the health and general well-being of women." Article 8 of the Maputo Protocol is further crucial in relation to access to justice, as it guarantees women's right to equal protection and equal benefit of the law. Additionally, I wish to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government the obligations of Nigeria under the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), ratified on 22 June 1983, which enshrines key protections in articles 2, 3, 4, and 5. These provisions prohibit discrimination, guarantee equality before the law, safeguard the right to life and personal integrity, and protect human dignity.

I would also like to refer to the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993), which affirms that violence against women constitutes a violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms. It also specifies that such violence includes physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community, such as rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment, as well as traditional practices harmful to women. Under article 4 of the declaration, States are required to pursue, by all appropriate means and without delay, a policy of eliminating violence against women; to exercise due diligence in preventing, investigating, and punishing acts of such violence; and to provide access to just and effective remedies for victims (A/RES/48/104).

The UN Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law (A/RES/60/147) stress that states have an obligation to "investigate violations effectively, promptly, thoroughly and impartially and, where appropriate, take action against those allegedly responsible in accordance with domestic and international law" (para. 3(b)). The Guidelines further note that "Victims should be treated with humanity and respect for their dignity and human rights, and appropriate measures should be taken to ensure their safety, physical and psychological well-being and privacy (para. 10). To this this end "States should

ensure that their domestic laws ... minimize inconvenience to victims and protect against unlawful interference with their privacy, as appropriate, and against intimidation and retaliation (para. 12(b)).”

In the same spirit, the Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power (A/RES/40/34) provides that victims should be treated with compassion and respect for their dignity and should have access to mechanisms of justice and prompt redress. Similarly, the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls has repeatedly emphasized that sexual violence must be addressed through survivor-centred approaches that ensure safety and access to justice and that failures to investigate or communicate with victims may amount to secondary victimization (*see e.g.* A/HRC/35/30).

Finally, I wish to highlight that in the 2024 Universal Periodic Review (UPR) cycle, when it was under review, Nigeria supported a number of recommendations from other states on combatting violence against women and girls, including sexual violence, and ensuring victims’ access to justice. To this end, Nigeria also made a commitment to combat patriarchal gender stereotypes (rec. 152.254) through, among others, conducting public awareness campaigns (rec. 152.38).