

Mandates of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances; the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association; the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders and the Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence

Ref.: AL TUR 12/2025

(Please use this reference in your reply)

3 November 2025

Excellency,

We have the honour to address you in our capacities as Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances; Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association; Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders and Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 54/14, 53/4, 59/4, 52/4 and 54/8.

In this connection, we would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government information we have received concerning **alleged threats and online harassment against members of the human rights group Saturday Mothers/People**.

Saturday Mothers/People (Cumartesi Anneleri/İnsanları) is a human rights group consisting of human rights defenders and relatives of victims of enforced disappearances and political killings during the 1980s and 1990s who gather for a peaceful vigil every Saturday at noon in Galatasaray Square, Istanbul. The group was the subject of joint communications AL TUR (7/2021) and AL TUR (10/2023), as well as a Prompt Intervention Letter transmitted by the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances on 23 November 2023. We thank your Excellency's Government for the responses received dated 8 July 2021 and 30 December 2024. However, we remain concerned by the harassment that members of this group continue to face as a result of carrying out their peaceful and legitimate work in defence of human rights.

According to the information received:

On 5 October 2025, Saturday Mothers/People published a post on their official X (formerly known as Twitter) account denouncing the sale of a series of t-shirts featuring pictures of white Renault Toros and offensive messages targeting victims of enforced disappearance in Türkiye. White Renault Toros have been considered to be synonymous with enforced disappearance and extrajudicial killings carried out mainly by members of the Gendarmerie Intelligence and Anti-Terrorist Units (JİTEM), particularly in the eastern and south-eastern regions of Turkey, mostly against persons of Kurdish origin. The t-shirts were being sold by a company named Ötüken Online, the name of which ostensibly refers to a location and symbol with nationalistic connotations in Türkiye.

Subsequent to the Saturday Mothers'/People's post, which was widely circulated and which prompted additional objections from other human rights groups and defenders in Türkiye, Saturday Mothers/People received dozens of harassing and threatening messages, including from anonymous accounts, among which replies showing yellow body bags, an image frequently used in death threats made against Kurdish activists and politicians.

These incidents are not isolated, but follow previous attacks against Saturday Mothers/People, including past instances of judicial harassment against its members, as well as violent interference in their weekly vigils. The allegations received point to a pattern of intimidation, harassment and reprisals against relatives of disappeared persons, human rights defenders and civil society organizations representing them, working to clarify the fate and whereabouts of forcibly disappeared individuals.

Without wishing to prejudge the accuracy of the abovementioned allegations, we express our serious concern regarding these allegations of threats, including potential death threats, and online harassment against members of Saturday Mothers/People, which appear to have been solely motivated by the legitimate exercise of their right to freedom of opinion and expression, their right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association, in defence of human rights and in the interest of protecting victims of enforced disappearance. We recall the State obligation 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.

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 accuracy of allegations as set out above.
2. Please provide the details, and where available the results, of any investigation, which may have been carried out in relation to the allegations of the threats, including of death, and online harassment of members of Saturday Mothers/People. If no investigation has taken place, or if it has been inconclusive, please explain why.
3. Please provide full details of any protective measures put in place to ensure the physical and psychological security and integrity of members of Saturday Mothers/People.
4. Please provide information on the measures your Excellency's Government has taken to publicly condemn threats and harassment disseminated through public posts and comments on on-line platforms.

5. Please provide information concerning any national legislation providing protection to victims of online violence.
6. Please indicate what measures have been taken to ensure that human rights defenders, and particularly women, are able to carry out their legitimate work in Türkiye, to exercise their right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association, in a safe and enabling environment without fear of harassment, threats, attacks or acts of intimidation of any kind towards them and their families.

This communication and any response received from your Excellency's Government will be made public via the communications reporting [website](#) within 60 days. They will also subsequently be made available in the usual report to be presented to the Human Rights Council.

While awaiting a reply, we urge that all necessary interim measures be taken to prevent any irreparable harm to the life and personal integrity of the members of Saturday Mothers/People, 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.

Gabriella Citroni
Chair-Rapporteur of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances

Morris Tidball-Binz
Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions

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

Mary Lawlor
Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders

Bernard Duhaime
Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence

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

Annex

Reference to international human rights law

We would like to refer your Excellency's Government to articles 6, 9, 17, 19, 20 and 26 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), ratified by your Excellency's Government on 23 September 2003, read alone and in conjunction with article 2.3, which guarantee the right to life, the right to liberty and security of person, the right to privacy and not to be subjected to unlawful attacks on one's honour and reputation, the right to freedom of opinion and expression, the right to freedom of association, and the right to equal protection by the law. We would also like to draw the attention of your Excellency's Government to articles 7 and 17, read alone and in conjunction with article 2.3 of the ICCPR, in relation to relatives of disappeared persons.

In particular, we would like to refer your Excellency's Government to the interpretation of the right to freedom of opinion and expression by the Human Rights Committee in general comment No. 34 (CCPR/C/GC/34), which underscores that it is the States' duty to put in place effective measures to protect against attacks aimed at silencing those exercising their right to freedom of expression (paragraph 23). An attack on a person, because of the exercise of their freedom of opinion or expression, including such forms of attack as threats to life and killing, can under no circumstance be compatible with article 19 (paragraph 23). All such attacks should be vigorously investigated in a timely fashion, and the perpetrators prosecuted, and the victims be in receipt of appropriate forms of redress (Id.).

We would also like to recall your Excellency's Government of articles 21 and 22 of the ICCPR which provide that the right of peaceful assembly shall be recognized. No restrictions may be placed on the exercise of this right other than those imposed in conformity with the law and which are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, public order (ordre public), the protection of public health or morals or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others" (ICCPR, art. 21)

"Everyone shall have the right to freedom of association with others, including the right to form and join trade unions for the protection of his interests" (ICCPR, art. 22 (1)). "No restrictions may be placed on the exercise of this right other than those which are prescribed by law and which are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, public order (ordre public), the protection of public health or morals or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others. This article shall not prevent the imposition of lawful restrictions on members of the armed forces and of the police in their exercise of this right" (ICCPR, art. 22 (2)).

We would also like to refer your Excellency's Government to article 6 of the ICCPR that guarantees the right to life. According to its interpretation by the Human Rights Committee in general comment No. 36 (CCPR/C/GC/36), States have a duty to protect the right to life and must enact a legal framework and other measures that ensure the full enjoyment of that right (paragraph 18). Importantly, the duty to protect the right to life requires States to take special measures of protection for persons in vulnerable situations whose lives are at risk as a result of specific threats or pre-existing patterns of violence, including human rights defenders (paragraph 23). States 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 (Id.). Investigations into alleged violations of the right to life must be independent, impartial, prompt, thorough, effective, credible and transparent. Where it is found that a violation has taken place, there must be full reparation provided, including adequate compensation, rehabilitation and satisfaction in view of the particular circumstances of the case (paragraph 28). Moreover, article 6 reinforces the obligations of States to protect individuals against reprisals for promoting and striving to protect and realise human rights. The States 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).

We further refer to Human Rights Committee general comment no. 35 which states that the right to personal security obliges States 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. It further notes that States must take both measures to prevent future injury and retrospective measures, such as enforcement of criminal laws, in response to past injury.

We remind your Excellency that States have a positive obligation to exercise due diligence and ensure the protection of individuals against violations of rights, which may be committed not only by its agents, but also by private persons or entities (CCPR /C/103/D/1862/2009) and that it is incumbent upon States to provide “effective protection through judicial or other means to individuals and groups who are in danger of extra-legal, arbitrary or summary executions, including those who receive death threats,” (paragraph 4 of the Principles on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions, adopted by the Economic and Social Council resolution 1989/65).

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 Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted on 9 December 1998 (also known as the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders). Articles 1 and 2 of 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.

Likewise, we would 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) and (c), which provides for the right to freely publish, impart or disseminate to others views, information and knowledge on all human rights and fundamental freedoms; and to study, discuss, form and hold opinions on the observance, both in law and in practice, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms and to draw public attention to those

matters;

- Article 9 (1), which establishes that in the exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the promotion and protection of human rights, everyone has the right to benefit from an effective remedy and to be protected in the event of the violation of those rights; and
- Article 12 (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 their legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the Declaration. In this connection, everyone is entitled, individually and in association with others, 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.

The General Assembly in resolutions 74/146 (A/RES/74/146), 72/247 (A/RES/72/247), 70/161 (A/RES/70/161) and 68/181 (A/RES/68/181), as well as the Human Rights Council in resolutions 31/32 (A/HRC/RES/31/32) and 22/6 (A/HRC/RES/22/6) expressed their particular concern about systemic and structural discrimination, violence and harassment faced by women human rights defenders, including sexual and gender-based violence as well as defamation and smear campaigns, both online and offline, and called upon States to take appropriate, robust and practical steps to protect women human rights defenders and to integrate a gender perspective into their efforts to create a safe and enabling environment for the defence of human rights.

In the report on the situation of women human rights defenders (A/HRC/40/60), the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders noted that women continue to face systematic discrimination, marginalization and repression (paragraph 107). The Special Rapporteur pointed out additional gendered risks and obstacles women human rights defenders face, including public shaming, stigmatization, attacks on honour and reputation, the threat of violence, including sexual violence, online harassment, violence and attacks (paragraphs 37-39, 42, 45). The Special Rapporteur recommended the States, inter alia, to:

- Protect the rights of women defenders, including by taking a public stand against all State and non-State actors who violate these rights, ceasing all attacks and threats against women defenders and investigating all that occur, ensuring that impunity does not prevail;
- Ensure that women defenders enjoy a safe and enabling environment to exercise their rights, considering their specific and diverse needs;
- Prioritize the protection of women defenders in online spaces and adopt laws, policies and practices that protect their right to privacy and protect

them from libel and hate speech; and

- Assess protection practices for women defenders against the seven principles underpinning good protection practices and examine ways of strengthening those practices (paragraph 108).

In the recent report on the killing of human rights defenders (A/HRC/46/35), the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders emphasized that women human rights defenders are often attacked with gendered threats, some of which have a highly defamatory nature, often involving women's personal lives (paragraphs 65-66). The Special Rapporteur stressed that States could and should intervene to prevent killings by responding more effectively to threats against human rights defenders; such interventions include taking action to stop vilification and threats aimed at defenders, which make them more vulnerable to attacks (paragraph 103). The States should protect and enhance existing human rights defender protection mechanisms, and ensure that they are gender-sensitive, 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, and support existing efforts to increase accountability for killings and other attacks on defenders (paragraph 104).

The United Nations Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, in its article 13, paragraphs 3 and 5, establishes that steps shall be taken to ensure that "all involved in the investigation, including the complainant, counsel, witnesses and those conducting the investigation, are protected against ill-treatment, intimidation or reprisal" and that "any ill-treatment, intimidation or reprisal or any other form of interference on the occasion of the lodging of a complaint or during the investigation is appropriately punished". In this regard, the Working Group recalls that according to principle 14 for the search for disappeared persons of the Committee on Enforced Disappearances, during the search process, the competent authorities should ensure the protection of the victims at all times, regardless of the level of involvement that they choose to have in the search.

The Working Group's General Comment on the right to truth (A/HRC/16/48) states that the right of the relatives to know the truth of the fate and whereabouts of the disappeared persons is an absolute right, not subject to any limitation or derogation. No legitimate aim, or exceptional circumstances, may be invoked by the State to restrict this right. The inalienable right to know the truth about past events concerning the perpetration heinous crimes and about the circumstances and reasons that led, through massive or systematic violations, to the perpetration of those crimes, is also established in the updated Set of Principles for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights through Action to Combat Impunity of February 2005 (principle 2). We would like to recall that the full and effective exercise of the right to truth provides a vital safeguard against the recurrence of violations (principle 5).

The Working Group has noted that many women human rights defenders and activists are often victims of violence and enforced disappearance. In its General Comment on women affected by enforced disappearances¹, the Working Group reminds that women suffer particular types of harm based on their gender, including

¹ [A/HRC/WGEID/98/2](#)

instances of sexual violence, and forced impregnation, and the resulting psychological damage and social stigma, as well as the disruption of family structures. (...) in addition, women from minority groups and women affected by poverty and social inequalities are particularly vulnerable and exposed to enforced disappearances.

In its study on enforced or involuntary disappearances and economic, social and cultural rights² the Working Group has highlighted the chilling effect of the disappearance of journalists and human rights defenders and called States to “ensur[e] the existence of and respect for cultural diversity and the existence of space where multiple opinions, positions and interpretations of history can find their expression in the public sphere diminishes the level of vulnerability of those questioning in one way or another mainstream ideas and positions, and so prevents against targeting of human rights defenders”.

In its study on new technologies and enforced disappearances³, the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances analyses how new technologies are being used against relatives of disappeared persons, their representatives, human rights defenders and civil society organizations and how attacks on social media against relatives of disappeared persons have often been characterised by gender stereotyping and discrimination, and digitally-enabled tools (including troll farms, botnets and fake accounts) to conduct targeted defamation or disinformation campaigns, to stigmatise the disappeared persons or their families, and to enable online harassment, including sexual harassment, and hate speech.

We recall article 4 (b) of the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, which stipulates that States should pursue by all appropriate means and without delay a policy of eliminating violence against women and, to this end, should refrain from engaging in violence against women. Furthermore, we would like to remind your Excellency’s Government that in its general recommendation No. 35 (2017) on gender-based violence against women, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women has clarified that, under the Convention and general international law, a State party is responsible for acts or omissions of its organs and agents that constitute gender-based violence against women, which include the acts or omissions of officials in its executive, legislative and judicial branches. States parties are responsible for preventing such acts or omissions by their own organs and agents, including through training and the adoption, implementation and monitoring of legal provisions, administrative regulations and codes of conduct, and for investigating, prosecuting and applying appropriate legal or disciplinary sanctions, as well as providing reparation, in all cases of gender-based violence against women, including those constituting international crimes, and in cases of failure, negligence or omission on the part of public authorities.

This general recommendation also recalls State obligation of due diligence under article 2 (e) of the Convention, which includes the obligation to take all appropriate measures to prevent, as well as to investigate, prosecute, punish and provide reparations for, acts or omissions by non-State actors that result in gender-based violence against women and girls [general recommendation no 35, paragraph 24(2)]. In

² [A/HRC/30/38/Add.5](#)

³ [A/HRC/54/22/Add.5](#)

this recommendation, the Committee sets out specific punitive, rehabilitative, preventive and protective measures States should introduce to fulfil this obligation.

We would like to recall that the Committee on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, in its general recommendation 35 on gender-based violence, states that under general international law, as well as under international treaties, a private actor's acts or omissions may engage the international responsibility of the State. It also recalls that article 2 (e) of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women explicitly provides that States parties are required to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women by any person, organization or enterprise. This obligation, frequently referred to as an obligation of due diligence, underpins the Convention as a whole and accordingly States Parties will be responsible if they fail to take all appropriate measures to prevent as well as to investigate, prosecute, punish and provide reparation for acts or omissions by non-State actors which result in gender-based violence against women.

We would further like to refer to the report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, on online violence (A/HRC/38/47), in which she recommends that States, in accordance with the principle of due diligence, address new forms of online violence against women and girls as human rights violations that are interrelated with the broader framework of discrimination against women and girls, and that internet intermediaries uphold women's human rights standards.