Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers and the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders

Ref.: AL AGO 3/2025
(Please use this reference in your reply)

26 November 2025

Excellency,

We have the honour to address you in our capacities as Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers and Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 53/12 and 52/4.

In this connection, we would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government information we have received concerning ongoing harassment, threats, and attacks against Mr. Zola Ferreira Bambi, a human rights lawyer in Angola, which appear to directly interfere with his independent exercise of the legal profession and his legitimate work as a human rights defender. These alleged incidents—including physical assaults, threats against his family, vandalism of his property, judicial harassment, and the recent discovery of a bullet lodged in his vehicle—suggest an alarming pattern of intimidation that may reflect an increasingly hostile environment for lawyers and human rights defenders in the country.

Zola Ferreira Bambi is a human rights lawyer who has long worked to defend the rights of human rights activists and vulnerable communities in Angola. Since the early 2000s, he has documented and challenged the persecution and legal harassment of human rights defenders. He has represented activists and journalists in high-profile cases concerning freedom of expression and access to justice. Over the past decade, he has also documented and denounced numerous cases of corruption, impunity, abuse of power, forced displacement and police violence。

We have addressed the situation of lawyers and the legal profession in Angola in the past, including in our previous communication about the alleged house arrest and arbitrary detention of the subject of this communication, Mr. Zola Ferreira Bambi (AL AGO 1/2024). We thank you for your reply of 12 June 2024; however, our concerns persist.

According to the information received:

On 26 August 2025, at approximately 7.30 a.m., Mr. Ferreira Bambi allegedly discovered a firearm projectile lodged in the upper part of his car's windshield as he was preparing to leave his home. The exact timing of the incident is uncertain, but it may have occurred while he was returning from a conference the previous evening.

Mr. Ferreira Bambi allegedly immediately reported the incident to the Serviço de Investigação Criminal (SIC), where forensic technicians confirmed it was a real bullet. The projectile was collected and sent for ballistic analysis.

On 27 August Mr. Ferreira Bambi allegedly submitted an official crime report to the Office of the Attorney General (Procuradoria-Geral da República—PGR), requesting an investigation. He included records of previous threats and attacks, noting that his work as a human-rights lawyer has placed him at risk. These include vandalism to his vehicle, death threats against himself and his family, and direct physical assaults. In January 2024, he was reportedly subjected to house arrest by the police and forcibly taken to a police station to prevent him from representing in court an activist detained under unlawful circumstances.

To date, no preliminary results from the ballistic investigation have been made public, nor have the circumstances of the incident been clarified. Mr. Ferreira Bambi reports that he has received no updates by the PGR, nor was he assigned a case number.

Without wishing to prejudge the accuracy of the aforementioned allegations, we express serious concern regarding the alleged harassment against Mr. Ferreira Bambi, which appear to have directly interfered with his work as a human rights defender and lawyer. We are further concerned that the reported incidents appear to form part of an increasing pattern of systematic intimidation aimed at impeding his legitimate professional work. If confirmed, the events described above would amount to a serious breach of several international and regional standards on the free and independent exercise of the legal profession.

We wish to recall that according to international standards, States must guarantee that those who practice law can do so free from intimidation, obstacles, harassment, or interference. The free exercise of the legal profession contributes to ensuring access to justice, oversight of state power, protection of due process and judicial guarantees.

Furthermore, in accordance with the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers, governments have the duty to ensure that legal professionals are able to perform all of their functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference, including threats of prosecution or administrative, economic or other sanctions for any action taken in accordance with their recognized professional duties, standards and ethics (principles 16 and 17).

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 measures adopted to ensure Mr. Ferreira Bambi's physical and psychological integrity after his harassment.

3. Please provide information on the steps taken by the relevant authorities to investigate the allegation of harassment of Mr. Ferreira Bambi and his family. In case no investigations have been undertaken, please provide information on the reasons thereof.

4. Please describe what measures have been implemented to ensure that Mr. Ferreira Bambi can effectively continue his work as a human rights defender and lawyer in Angola.

5. Please indicate what measures have been taken to ensure that human rights defenders, including human rights lawyers, in Angola can operate in an enabling environment and can carry out their legitimate activities without fear of harassment, violence or criminalization of any kind.

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 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.

Margaret Satterthwaite
Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers

Mary Lawlor
Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders

Annex

Reference to international human rights law

In connection with above alleged facts and concerns, we would like to draw the attention of your Excellency's Government to the following international human rights standards. We draw particular attention to article 9 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), acceded to by Angola on 10 January 1992, which guarantees the right of all persons to liberty and security of person.

We underline that States obligation on States Parties to ensure the protection of the rights contained in the Covenant against violations by its agents and to take all necessary measures intended to prevent arbitrary deprivations of life by their law enforcement officials. We note that the duty to investigate arises in circumstances in which a serious risk of deprivation of life was caused by the use of potentially lethal force, even if the risk did not materialise and that a failure to investigate and bring perpetrators of such violations to justice could in and of itself give rise to a separate breach of the ICCPR (CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.13 and CCPR/C/GC/36).

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, 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 also like to draw particular attention to the following provisions of the Declaration:

- article 9, paragraph (3) part c), which holds that everyone has the rights, individually and in association with others, to offer and provide professionally qualified legal assistance or other relevant advice and assistance in defending human rights and fundamental freedoms;

- article 9, paragraph 5, which holds that States shall conduct a prompt and impartial investigation or ensure that an inquiry takes place whenever there is reasonable ground to believe that a violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms has occurred in any territory under its jurisdiction;

  article 11, holding that everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to the lawful exercise of his or her occupation or profession; 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.

As it relates to lawyers, I refer your Excellency's Government to the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers, adopted by the Eighth United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders, held in Havana (Cuba) from 27 August to 7 September 1990. With respect to the guarantees for the functioning of lawyers, the Principles require that Governments take all appropriate measures to ensure that lawyers are able to perform all of their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference, and to prevent that lawyers be threatened with prosecution or administrative, economic or other sanctions for any action taken in accordance with recognized professional duties, standards and ethics (principle 16); that where the security of lawyers is threatened as a result of discharging their functions, they shall be adequately safeguarded by the authorities (principle 17); that lawyers shall not be identified with their clients or their clients' causes as a result of discharging their functions (principle 18); and that lawyers shall enjoy civil and penal immunity for relevant statements made in good faith in written or oral pleadings or in their professional appearances before a court, tribunal or other legal or administrative authority (principle 20).