

Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences and the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions

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(Please use this reference in your reply)

13 January 2026

Excellency,

We have the honour to address you in our capacities as Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences and Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 59/20 and 53/4.

In this connection, we would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government information we have received concerning the killing of Ms. Iftihan Al-Mashhari, Director of the Cleaning and Improvement Fund in Taiz, reportedly following threats linked to her anti-corruption work, and the subsequent death of the main suspect during arrest, which may have affected efforts to establish the full truth and ensure accountability for violence against a woman in public office.

According to the information received:

Killing of Ms. Iftihan Al-Mashhari

On 18 September 2025, Ms. Iftihan Al-Mashhari, Director of the Cleaning and Improvement Fund in Taiz, appointed by the local government, was shot and killed, by unidentified assailants, in daylight at Al-Sinan roundabout while driving to work. She was known for anti-corruption efforts and institutional reforms within the Fund. Reportedly, her killing was the first targeting of a woman in an official leadership position in Taiz. No group has formally claimed responsibility for the killing.

In July 2023, Yemen's Ministry of Local Administration sent a 17-page report to Taiz Governor exposing massive financial and administrative corruption in the governorate's Cleaning and Improvement Fund. The audit found huge financial discrepancies, uncollected revenues, unauthorized spending, manipulation of accounts, checks issued without coverage, inflated expenses, and misuse of international aid. The report accused Fund leadership of violating financial laws, wasting public money, and protecting corrupt practices, and it called for urgent accountability measures, recovery of outstanding revenues, and legal action against those responsible.

Reportedly, Ms. Al-Mashhari was leading reforms and improvements in the delivery of public services and may have uncovered issues of corruption. She was responsible for managing more than 1000 staff.

Leaked audio recordings, attributed to Ms. Al-Mashhari and circulated after her death, allegedly indicate she had identified specific individuals as instigators of a plot to kill her.

Reactions to the killing

Several government representatives reportedly publicly condemned the killing, described it as a grave crime, and pledged that justice would be pursued through institutional and legal channels. A number of political parties reportedly denounced the assassination of Ms. Al-Mashhari, describing it as a heinous crime that threatens public service, women's leadership, and institutional integrity. Others reportedly condemned the killing and criticized the ongoing security failures, collusion, and negligence by military, security, and local authorities, which allegedly have allowed gangs to operate with impunity.

On 21 September 2025, workers at the Taiz Cleaning and Improvement Fund declared a full strike, demanding the arrest and swift trial of the perpetrators. "Rage and Justice" march took place to demand the arrest of Ms. Ifthian Al-Mashhari's killers, with the family vowing not to accept condolences until all perpetrators were caught. Other initiatives to commemorate Ms. Al-Mashhari and demand an impartial and prompt investigation were also held. In particular, civil society actors in Taiz launched the "Truth Unveiled" initiative, which denounces her killing as part of a wider system of corruption and violence that exploits state institutions and suppresses reform. The initiative claims to seek to uncover the full truth of the crime, pursue justice through an independent judicial process, and use the case as a catalyst for institutional reform that restores the rule of law and protects public resources.

Investigation and the death of the alleged main suspect

Security authorities reportedly launched a joint security campaign shortly after the killing. Several suspects were arrested, and the alleged main suspect, was killed during a security operation on 24 September 2025. Authorities stated that he was killed while resisting arrest, and images of his body circulated on social media.

The same day, a video clip attributed to the alleged main suspect surfaced, in which, right before his death, he provided details about the crime. Reportedly, in the video, he confessed that he carried out the murder at the urging of his cousin, identified by some sources as a brother of prominent Islah figure. Expressing sympathy with those who took the protests to the streets, he noted that he followed the events for several days after the crime and before his own death. He also claimed he initially intended only to shoot at Ms. Al-Mashhari's car in protest over unpaid wages, but his cousins convinced him that killing her outright would better serve their interests. Following the release of the video, he surrendered himself to Taiz police for investigation.

Also on 24 September 2025, the joint security campaign in Taiz announced the arrest of a military officer reportedly still held in military police custody. His detention coincided with investigations into the assassination of Ms. Al-Mashhari.

While we do not prejudge the accuracy of these allegations, we express grave concern at the killing of Ms. Ifthian Al-Mashhari and how her assassination appears to

be emblematic of a systemic pattern of intimidation and political violence against women in leadership positions. The fact that she was a woman holding a senior public office and the response to her assassination, including widespread protests demanding truth and justice for her and her family, underscore the urgent need to recognize violence against women in politics in Yemen as a central part to the investigation. We are concerned that attacks and threats directed at women in politics, public administration and anti-corruption efforts form part of a broader pattern of sex and gender-based violence aimed at deterring women from participating in public life, in violation of their human rights and international obligations of the State, including under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

In this regard, we wish to highlight the need for prompt, effective, independent and impartial investigations into all suspected unlawful killings, through which information is constantly shared with the family members in line with international standards, particularly the Principles on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions, adopted by Economic and Social Council resolution 1989/65, and the Revised United Nations Manual on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-Legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions (the Minnesota Protocol on the Investigation of a Potentially Unlawful Death (2016)).

A failure to conduct a proper investigation, including identifying and prosecuting potential perpetrators and, where appropriate, sanctioning those responsible, is regarded, in itself, as a violation of the right to life. In international law, the right to life entails not only a negative obligation to refrain from arbitrary deprivation of life but also a procedural obligation to ensure accountability where a potentially unlawful death occurs. In the case of women in politics, when their killings are based on the fact that they are women that are politically active and facilitated by discriminatory norms and attitudes, these obligations are also reflected, among others, in CEDAW and the CEDAW Committee's general recommendations No. 19, 35 and 40, as well as general recommendation No. 30 on women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations. We are particularly concerned that the continued threats, attacks and impunity against women in politics, serves to undermine the participation of women in society, and, as reflected in the report of the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women and Girls (A/73/301), have a chilling effect on those who would like to rise to the leadership position.

We are also aware of and would like to draw your attention to the statement of the UN Special Envoy for Yemen, Mr. Hans Grundberg, who described the assassination of Ms. Iftihan Al-Mashhari as “a major setback with negative ramifications on women in leadership roles, and women across the country,” noting that her killing, “carried out in daylight while on her way to work, is a stark reminder of the serious risks faced by women and by public sector officials who are fighting corruption.” He also stressed the need for a thorough and transparent investigation that would ensure that “all perpetrators of this crime are brought swiftly to justice.”¹

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.

¹ https://x.com/OSE_Yemen/status/1970807309912699265

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 current status of criminal investigations and judicial proceedings related to the killing of Ms. Iftihan Al-Mashhari. Please specifically indicate whether investigations extend beyond direct perpetrators to persons suspected of ordering, inciting, facilitating, or covering up the crime, including any individuals holding military, security, or political positions.
3. Please indicate whether Ms. Iftihan Al-Mashhari had reported the threats against her and/or her family before her killing, and what measures, if any, had been taken to provide her with adequate protection.
4. Please indicate what measures are in place to prevent reprisals or intimidation against family members of the victim, co-workers, witnesses, civil society actors, journalists, and others seeking accountability in connection with this case.
5. Please describe existing or planned mechanisms to protect women in leadership positions, public officials, and human rights defenders from threats, intimidation, and violence. Please indicate, in particular, what legal and institutional mechanisms exist to ensure that the women and girls, their families or representatives, can report the crimes committed against them without fear of stigma, retaliation, or discriminatory treatment by authorities.
6. Please indicate the measures taken to protect women in politics against threats, harassment and violence, as well as end the impunity for crimes committed against them

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 your Excellency's Government to take the necessary and appropriate steps to clarify the circumstances of the killing of Ms. Iftihan Al-Mashhari, to identify and punish all the perpetrators, and to provide information and communicate the findings of any investigation that may have been conducted on her death to her family.

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

Reem Alsalem

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

Morris Tidball-Binz

Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions

Annex

Reference to international human rights law

Right to life and personal security

The above-mentioned allegations appear to be in contravention of article 6(1) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), acceded to by Yemen on 9 February 1987, which provides for the right to life, security, and the right not to be arbitrarily deprived of life. The right to life, liberty, and security of person is also explicitly protected by article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which, at the present stage of development of international law, might be regarded as forming part of the body of international customary law.

In its general comment No. 36 on the right to life, the Human Rights Committee (The Committee on Civil and Political Rights) explained that in order to protect the right to life, state parties must “exercise due diligence to protect the lives of individuals against deprivations caused by persons or entities whose conduct is not attributable to the State.” Such obligation “extends to reasonably foreseeable threats and life-threatening situations that can result in loss of life.” (CCPR/C/GC/36, para. 7). In the same vein, in its general comment No. 31, the Committee noted that states parties have a positive obligation to ensure the protection of the rights contained in the Covenant against violations by private persons or entities, which includes the duty to take appropriate measures to prevent, investigate, prosecute and punish those responsible and repair the damage caused by private persons or entities (CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.13, paras. 8 and 18).

Regarding the right to personal security, in its general comment No. 35, the Human Rights Committee recalled that it obliges States parties to take appropriate measures to protect individuals from foreseeable threats to life or bodily integrity proceeding from any governmental or private actors. In particular, they must take both measures to prevent future injury and retrospective measures, such as enforcement of criminal laws, in response to past injury, responding appropriately to patterns of violence against categories of victims such as intimidation of human rights defenders and journalists, retaliation against witnesses, or violence against women (CCPR/C/GC/35, para. 9). Additionally, in the general comment No. 36 the Committee observed that the duty to protect the right to life requires States parties to take special measures of protection towards persons in vulnerable situations whose lives have been placed at particular risk because of specific threats or pre-existing patterns of violence, including officials fighting corruption and organized crime, prominent public figures and witnesses to crime (CCPR/C/GC/36, para. 23).

Right to an effective remedy and access to justice

The right to access to justice 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 UDHR safeguards the right of everyone to an “effective remedy by the competent national tribunals for acts violating the fundamental rights granted him by the constitution or by law.” 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).

Remedies required under article 2(3) of the ICCPR include reparations to individuals whose Covenant rights have been violated. In its general comment No. 31, the Human Rights Committee further specifies that reparation can involve restitution, rehabilitation and measures of satisfaction, such as public apologies, public memorials, guarantees of non-repetition and changes in relevant laws and practices, as well as bringing to justice the perpetrators of human rights violations (CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.13, para. 16).

We also wish to highlight, in relation to women, that Yemen ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) on 30 May 1984 and the CEDAW Committee affirmed that under general international law and specific human rights covenants, States may also be responsible for private acts if they fail to act with due diligence to prevent violations of rights or to investigate and punish acts of violence, and for providing compensation (**A/47/38, para. 9**).

Moreover, according to principle 2 of the United Nations Set of Principles for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights through Action to Combat Impunity, *“every people has the inalienable right to know the truth* about past events concerning the commission of heinous crimes and the circumstances and reasons that led to them.” Principle 4 affirms that victims and their families have the right to **full and effective access to information** concerning violations, including the identity of perpetrators and those responsible at all levels and principle 5 further specifies that “states must take appropriate action, including measures necessary to ensure the independent and effective operation of the judiciary, to give effect to the right to know” (E/CN.4/2005/102/Add.1).

The Principles on Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions (Prevention and Investigation Principles), in particular principle 9, require that relevant State institutions have the responsibility to undertake thorough, prompt and impartial investigations in all suspected cases of extra-legal, arbitrary and summary executions. Principle 11 additionally proposes that “in cases in which the established investigative procedures are inadequate because of lack of expertise or impartiality, because of the importance of the matter or because of the apparent existence of a pattern of abuse, and in cases where there are complaints from the family of the victim about these inadequacies or other substantial reasons, Governments shall pursue investigations through an independent commission of inquiry or similar procedure” (ECOSOC Res. 1989/65). In general comment No. 36, the Human Rights Committee noted that investigations and prosecutions of potentially unlawful deprivations of life should be undertaken in accordance with relevant international standards, including the Minnesota Protocol on the Investigation of Potentially Unlawful Death, and must be aimed at ensuring that those responsible are brought to justice, at promoting accountability and preventing impunity, at avoiding denial of justice and at drawing necessary lessons for revising practices and policies with a view to avoiding repeated violations. Investigations should

explore, inter alia, the legal responsibility of superior officials with regard to violations of the right to life committed by their subordinates (CCPR/C/GC/36, para. 27).

The Minnesota Protocol observes that investigators and investigative mechanisms must be, and must be seen to be, independent of undue influence and that investigative processes and outcomes must be transparent, including through openness to the scrutiny of the general public and of victims' families (paras. 28 and 32). Family members of victims of unlawful death have the right to equal and effective access to justice, to adequate, effective and prompt reparation, to recognition of their status before the law and to access to relevant information concerning the violations and relevant accountability mechanisms (para. 10).

Moreover, 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 article 12 requires States "to 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 his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration."

Freedom of expression

Freedom of expression is protected under article 19 of the ICCPR, which guarantees the right to hold opinions without interference and the right to freedom of expression, including the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers. Under article 2(1) of the ICCPR, states must protect individuals from foreseeable threats arising from their expression without any kind of discrimination. The right to freedom of expression is likewise affirmed in article 19 of the UDHR.

In its general comment No. 34, the Human Rights Committee emphasized that States parties have **positive obligations** to ensure the effective enjoyment of freedom of expression. In particular, they must protect individuals from acts by private persons or entities that would impair the exercise of this right, including threats, harassment, intimidation, or violence against, among others, persons who engage in the gathering and analysis of information on the human rights situation and who publish human rights-related reports, (CCPR/C/GC/34, para. 23). Important in this regard is also the Human Rights Council resolution 12/16 which calls upon States to ensure that victims of violations of the right to freedom of expression have an effective remedy, to investigate effectively threats and acts of violence and to bring to justice those responsible to combat impunity (A/HRC/RES/12/16, para. 5).

Right to equality and non-discrimination, including equality between men and women

The killing of a woman who holds a senior public office, especially in circumstances in which it is extremely rare for women to do so, in addition to being a direct form of violence against her, presumably also because of her status as a woman,

has an additional chilling effect on other women and, thereby, effectively violates their right to equality and non-discrimination.

In this context, we wish to recall that article 7(b) of CEDAW requires that states parties “take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country” and, in particular, “ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right to participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government.” Similarly, under article 5(a) of CEDAW, states must “modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women.” Such social and cultural patterns could include a stereotype based on which women holding public office would be less respectable than men in similar positions or perceived as an easier target.

Article 1 of the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women defines “violence against women” as any act of “gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life” A/RES/48/104). The CEDAW Committee’s general recommendation No. 19 (1992) goes even further by characterizing gender-based violence as a form of discrimination that “seriously inhibits women’s ability to enjoy rights and freedoms on a basis of equality with men” (A/47/38, para. 1). In general recommendation No. 35, the CEDAW Committee also notes that gender-based violence against women is one of the fundamental social, political and economic means by which the subordinate position of women with respect to men and their stereotyped roles are perpetuated (CEDAW/C/GC/35, para. 10).

Moreover, the General Assembly resolution 68/181, on the protection of women human rights defenders in articles 7, 9 and 10 call upon states to publicly acknowledge the important role played by women human rights defenders, take practical steps to prevent threats, harassment and violence against them and to combat impunity for such violations and abuses, and ensure that all legal provisions, administrative measures and polices are compatible with relevant provisions of international human rights law. Additionally relevant are the General Assembly resolutions 68/191 and 70/176 on taking action against gender-related killing of women and girls, which **urge States to exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate, prosecute, and punish such killings, and to address their root causes, including discrimination, harmful practices, and gender stereotypes.**

Further reaffirming these obligations, the Working Group on Discrimination against Women and Girls, in its report on participation in public life (A/HRC/23/50), stated that women human rights defenders are often the target of gender-specific violence, such as intimidation, attacks, and death threats, which are sometimes condoned or perpetrated by State actors.

The Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women and Girls, in her report A/73/301 on violence against women in politics, emphasized that women in leadership

positions continue to face violence and oppression, which is “often normalized and tolerated, especially in contexts where patriarchy is deeply embedded in society,” contrary to states’ domestic and international law obligations. The Special Rapporteur’s report A/HRC/20/16 underscored due diligence obligations of states to conduct “effective investigations of the crime and prosecute and sanction acts of violence perpetrated by State or private actors, especially when these acts demonstrate a pattern of systemic violence towards women.”

In the same vein, the CEDAW Committee, in its general recommendation No 40 (CEDAW/C/GC/40), emphasized how intimidation of women politicians and women in decision-making roles may push them out and constitute a chilling effect discouraging other women from reaching for such positions. The Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women and Girls confirmed the existence of such a chilling effect in her report on violence against women in politics (A/73/301), in which she also noted that in politics and elections, women may be more likely to conceal incidents of violence owing to the fear of appearing weak or unfit for the world of politics.

Moreover, under the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, states commit themselves to ensuring women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life (goal 5, target 5.5) In addition, goal 16 is aimed at ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels (target 16.7).

Finally, we wish to highlight that in the latest Universal Periodic Review (UPR) cycle when Yemen was under review, (January 2019 session), Yemen supported the recommendation to fulfil its obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (124.20), while also pledging to continue efforts to improve women’s participation in the political process and other domains (123.142) and consolidate the structure of the State institutions with a view to establishing the rule of law and comprehensive economic development and to combating corruption (123.11).