



The power of speaking with one voice: advancing joint solutions to ensuring women's access to justice free from legal retaliation through co-operation among global and regional women's rights mechanisms

CONCEPT NOTE

CSW 70

A side-event to the seventieth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW70) organised by the Platform of Independent Expert Mechanisms on Discrimination and Violence against Women (EDVAW Platform) and UN Women

Date: 12 March 2026

Place: UN Women Headquarters, Daily News Building, New York

Duration: 1.15pm to 2.30pm (75 min) – Light lunch provided

Registration for in-person participation is required for access to the building. [Click here to register for participation.](#)

The event will be livestreamed on Zoom. [Click here for registration](#)

Context

The Platform of Independent Expert Mechanisms on Discrimination and Violence against Women (EDVAW Platform) gathers seven United Nations and regional independent expert mechanisms dedicated to addressing discrimination and violence against women and girls, promoting accountability, and advancing women's and girls' rights at the international and regional levels. While their mandates differ in scope, each have addressed issues around women's access to justice and the situation of women's rights defenders, providing insights into the realities of the many women and girls around the globe who are advocating for women's rights and protection from gender-based violence. What is emerging is a picture of both progress and setbacks, where women's rights defenders who help others understand their legal rights, navigate courts, access lawyers, challenge discriminatory laws or seek protection from gender-based violence see legal systems being misused against them.

This is a growing concern in many parts of the world. Legal systems are an important recognised pillar in every society and play a crucial role in upholding the protection of the innocent, at the international, regional and national levels. While protecting those who advocate for equality and justice, legal systems may also be misused as tools to silence, intimidate, or retaliate against women who challenge discrimination, violence, or unequal laws. Legal avenues may also be used against those who speak out and engage with international monitoring bodies. Formally designed to provide protection and accountability, when laws and legal procedures are used to discredit or exhaust those seeking protection, they risk becoming a vehicle for the continuation of violence. This undermines both human rights and the rule of law. Legal retaliation by those misusing the legal system has a chilling effect beyond the individuals targeted. When defenders are silenced, fewer women are able to seek justice or challenge abuse through legal channels.

By speaking to the situation across the globe, this side event seeks to highlight the findings made by the global and regional women's rights bodies and offer possible solutions, including

for States/national authorities. As their work shows, ensuring women’s access to justice and addressing legal retaliation requires action at multiple levels. Laws must be clear, fair, and applied without discrimination, and courts enabled to remain independent. Legal professionals, media, and educational institutions play a role in exposing abuses by those who strategically misuse judicial mechanisms and defending the principles of justice, but also in deconstructing gender stereotypes that may contribute to discourses and bias that prevent women’s effective access to justice and legitimise legal retaliation against them. International organisations and communities can offer solidarity, monitoring, and support to those at risk. As concerns about the state of human rights intensify worldwide, protecting women’s rights defenders from legal retaliation is essential for achieving equality and democracy. When women are free to speak, organise, and advocate without fear of punishment, societies are better equipped to address injustice and build a fairer future for everyone.

Words of welcome: **Words of welcome:** Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda, Deputy Executive Director for Normative Support, UN System Coordination and Programme Results, UN Women

Intervention via pre-recorded video : Reem Alsalem, UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls (SR VAWG)

Speakers:

- Janet R. Sallah Njie, Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (SRRWA)
- Miriam Roache, President of the Follow-up Mechanism to the Belém do Pará Convention (MESECVI)
- Maria-Andriani Kostopoulou, Chair of the EDVAW Platform and President of the Council of Europe Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO)
- Patsili Toledo Vasquez, Member of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Committee)
- Laura Nyirinkindi, Member of the UN Working Group on discrimination against women and girls (WGDAWG)

Moderator:

- Marja Ruotanen, General Director, Directorate General of Democracy and Human Dignity, Council of Europe

Format: Dialogue, questions and answers.

Expert mechanisms making up the EDVAW Platform:
African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa (SRRWA)
Follow-up Mechanism to the Belém do Pará Convention (MESECVI, by its acronym in Spanish)
Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO)
Inter-American Commission on Human Rights' Rapporteur on the Rights of Women (IA RWHR)
UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Committee)
UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls (SR VAWG)
UN Working Group on discrimination against women and girls (WGDAWG)