Statement of the Platform of Independent Expert Mechanisms on Discrimination and Violence against Women (EDVAW Platform) on the occasion of International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women 2026

We, the members of the EDVAW Platform all together, call upon States, world leaders, and the global community, on this 25th of November - International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women 2026, to ensure that every woman and girl can report violence, seek protection and pursue justice without fear of retaliation. Access to justice is a fundamental human right and a central concern of international and regional human rights frameworks and must not expose victims and survivors to further harm, punishment or intimidation. Women's and girls' right to seek an effective remedy is fundamental—and justice systems must protect those who turn to them for help.

As the Platform of independent experts on the elimination of discrimination and violence against women and girls, we are deeply concerned by the misuse of legal systems and procedures to silence, punish, discredit, intimidate or economically exhaust women and girls who report violence or seek protection. Legal retaliation against women and girls who report violence is a global and cross-regional phenomenon that needs to be recognised. This legal retaliation can take many forms, both online and offline: counter-complaints and allegations of false reporting; defamation claims and repeated proceedings; the misuse of family, administrative, immigration or other legal processes; and pressure exerted through customary, religious or community mechanisms. It can also target the family members, professionals, organisations and human rights defenders who support survivors.

Legal retaliation can operate as a continuation or reinforcement of gender-based violence against women through institutional means. It can be used after a woman reports abuse, seeks a protection order, separates from an abusive partner or advocates for her rights. These tactics often draw on sexism and gender stereotypes, including expectations about how a "credible" or "ideal" victim should look, dress or behave, and assumptions that a woman who reports violence is exaggerating or manipulative. In family proceedings, for example, repeated litigation and attacks on a mother's credibility may be used to maintain pressure and control, including in disputes involving children. The impact is felt across many aspects of a woman's life, and it can deter other women and girls from reporting violence, while silencing supporters and weakening the organisations and services on which survivors rely. Women facing intersecting forms of discrimination may encounter heightened barriers to protection, legal assistance and redress.

Together, we call on States to prevent and address the misuse of legal systems and procedures against women and girls who report violence or seek protection, and to ensure effective access to protection, support and remedies. These efforts must also safeguard the individuals and organisations who support survivors. To this end, States and relevant actors should draw on the EDVAW Platform's Guidance *Note on the use of retaliatory legal actions*

against women and girls reporting violence – 2026 for recommendations on preventing and addressing legal retaliation.

The EDVAW Platform is joining the United Nations Secretary-General's UNiTE campaign on this International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women to "End Violence Against Women and Girls: Ensure Justice, Protect Survivors, End Impunity." We reaffirm that access to justice must be a pathway to safety and accountability. No woman or girl should face further violence, intimidation or other adverse consequences for seeking protection or asserting her rights. Ending legal retaliation is essential to ensuring justice, protecting survivors and ending impunity.

The EDVAW Platform brings together 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:

- 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), Chair
- 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, its causes and consequences (SR VAWG)
- UN Working Group on discrimination against women and girls (WGDAWG)