

“All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law.”
Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article 7

Securing rights and justice without fear of retaliation #ForAllWomenAndGirls

Statement of The Platform of Independent Expert Mechanisms on Discrimination and Violence against Women (EDVAW Platform) on the occasion of International Women’s Day 2026: Rights. Justice. Action. For ALL Women and Girls

In speaking with one voice, we members of the EDVAW Platform call upon States, world leaders, and the global community, on this 8th of March - International Women’s Day 2026, to secure the rights of all women and girls to access justice safely and without fear of retaliation, in line with CSW 70’s priority theme. Access to justice must never expose women and girls to punishment, intimidation, or further harm.

As the Platform of independent experts on the elimination of discrimination and violence against women and girls, we note with concern the increasing number of cases worldwide of women facing intimidation, gender bias, or prohibitive financial costs when seeking to enforce their rights in a court of law. Many others encounter legal strategies deployed to silence their voices. Such retaliation through legal means hampers women’s effective access to justice and is becoming a reality in many settings.

We refer to this pattern as legal retaliation: the misuse of legal systems, procedures, or claims to silence, punish, intimidate, or economically exhaust women who seek justice. In the context of gender-based violence, this may take the form of defamation lawsuits or the strategic use or abuse of legal rules, procedures, and institutions to punish, discredit, economically exhaust, or reassert control over women who report violence, as well as those who support them.

It may also take the form of judicial minimization, misclassification of acts of gender-based violence as lesser offences, or the imposition of manifestly inadequate sanctions that fail to reflect the gravity of the harm. Such practices not only harm women and women’s rights defenders but also undermine human rights, erode the rule of law itself and weaken democratic institutions.

Across jurisdictions, women who seek justice for gender-based violence are too often assessed against the stereotype of the “ideal victim” - expected to be passive, compliant, and emotionally consistent. Those who do not conform to these narrow expectations risk disbelief, blame, or diminished protection. Judicial reasoning that relies on gender stereotypes, myths about sexual violence, or assumptions about women’s credibility creates structural barriers to justice and perpetuates discrimination within the very institutions tasked with protecting rights.

Under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), indicator 5.1.1 assesses *whether legal frameworks are in place to promote, enforce, and monitor equality and*

non-discrimination on the basis of sex. Despite the progress made by Member States in their international obligations and commitments, women and girls continue to struggle for equal and fair justice within the legal system, a consequence of persistent power imbalances in our societies. Formal equality in legislation does not automatically translate into substantive equality in practice. Where courts fail to apply a gender-sensitive interpretation, to recognize structural vulnerability, or to address the intersection of discrimination, justice remains illusory.

The pushback to women's rights is taking on various forms, and it is spilling into the courts, creating an increasingly unfriendly and unfavourable environment for women in the very place women put their hopes in. International human rights mechanisms were created to fulfil the same role, to protect the most vulnerable and ensure the enforcement of their rights. Realising this vision requires urgent action to close the implementation gap between international commitments and the daily realities of women and girls who see these mechanisms weakened, ignored or selectively applied.

Protecting national legal systems and international human rights mechanisms from the backlash they are experiencing is essential for achieving equality, prosperity and democracy. The weakening of human rights mechanisms has a direct impact on the lives of all of us, but women and children always feel it first and most acutely. The hope and trust in the justice and human rights mechanisms must be preserved. It is only when women are free to speak, organise, and advocate for their rights without fear of punishment that societies are better equipped to address injustice and build a fairer future for everyone. Women's access to justice is a fundamental human right and a central concern of international and regional human rights frameworks. Legal systems are a fundamental pillar of every society and play a crucial role in safeguarding those who advocate for equality and justice.

Together, we call attention to the growing misuse of legal systems as instruments to silence, intimidate, or punish women who challenge discrimination, violence, or unequal laws against themselves or their communities. We urge States to address judicial bias, eliminate gender stereotyping in courtrooms, ensure accurate legal qualification of gender-based violence, impose sanctions that reflect the seriousness of such offences, and guarantee victim-centred, trauma-informed procedures that prevent secondary victimization. Justice without fear is not a privilege — it is a fundamental right of every woman and girl, all the time, everywhere. We stand united in advocating for legal systems, judicial proceedings and human rights mechanisms that protect women's rights and uphold justice at national, regional, and international levels.

The EDVAW Platform is joining UN Women in this International Women's Day to demand "Rights. Justice. Action. For ALL women and girls." It 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.

- 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 (WGDAG)