



## **Mandate of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences**

### **Statement by Reem Alsalem, Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls\***

on

#### **AWID 's open letter of 18 May 2023 "There Is No Place for Anti-Trans Agendas in the UN"**

On 18<sup>th</sup> of May 2023, the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) published a statement on its website entitled "[There is no place for anti-trans agendas in the UN](#)", which as of today, was signed by 844 organizations and individuals. I was informed by the two executive directors of AWID, Inna Michaeli and Faye Macheke Co-Executive Directors a week later (the 24<sup>th</sup> of May 2023) that the letter had been published. A day later, I acknowledged receipt and informed AWID that I would be responding to the letter at an appropriate time and space. I am choosing to do so today.

In the letter, AWID and its co-signatories stated that I had "weaponized "protection of women's rights" to advocate for positions that misrepresent and regress from international norms and standards.

I will not dwell on these false and dangerous allegations, as I have done so elsewhere in great detail, including in response to a similar letter from Sexual Rights Initiative (SRI), which can be found [here](#). The letter by AWID did however contain one novelty, which I found very concerning, namely its allegation that I reportedly continue to "perpetuate narratives upholding outdated and non-scientific understandings of binary biological sex." There is nothing outdated or unscientific about the binary nature of sex, and I would encourage signatories of this letter to seek out biologists for a conversation around this issue.

The content and symbolism of this letter evoked strong reactions from amongst different feminist and women organizers, who recognized the gravity of its aim which was to castigate me as a rapporteur and present me as someone who was anti-trans; who damaged the integrity of her mandate and who reportedly acted in violation of established human rights protections and principles. In doing so, the letter also has the intention of punishing and silencing me, a fate that many women, girls, and their allies across the world continue to experience when they speak on the issues of sex, gender, and gender identity.

Hence, and 21<sup>st</sup> of June 2023, a day before my interactive dialogue at the Human Rights Council, 781 organizations and more than 2,600 individuals from over 60 countries signed a letter entitled "[Let the UN Special Rapporteur on VAWG Deliver her Mandate](#)". In it, they

stated that they were appalled by the continuing attacks (of which the AWID letter was the latest) against me for doing what the human rights council has tasked me to do.

Since these letters from SRI and AWID have been published, the attacks against me have only intensified. Non-governmental organizations, academic centers, international and regional organizations, experts, and governments have been pressured not to engage with me, and not to invite me to speak or visit. Many of these work in the field of human rights and are usually staunch defenders of free speech. Those that have extended invitations to me to speak have come under intense pressure to disinvite me. Some individuals belonging to some organizations have been questioned as to why they follow me on social media and why they have “liked” one of my products.

Three signatures of the AWID letter have recently expressed an interest to have a conversation with me and some other organizations and individuals that are opposed to their views. I welcome this development. It is however telling that none of them feel they can be seen to have such a conversation publicly.

What is also gravely concerning to me is that some organizations are trying to undermine the long-standing and continued record of support that I have had for the right of all women and girls to be free from violence, as expressed also in my most recent report and statements since my engagement on Scotland’s self-ID bill. In doing so, they have also tried to deprive women and girls that are victims of violence of the voice and support of the mandate, as it carries out vital work in so many different thematic areas that are relevant to the mandate in order to advance the protection and response agenda.

Actions such as these constitute a conscious attempt to undermine my work as an independent mandate holder, and to undermine my credibility and reputation. These, in my view, constitute undue interference in my work as a rapporteur.

I was and continue to be gravely concerned at the way in which organizations that claim to be human rights centered and feminist, and from which a number are accredited with the human rights council, still continue to position themselves as the custodians of the feminist movement, villainizing those who do not agree with their views, and attempt to ban discussions on issues that many women and girls, in all their diversity, as well as their societies clearly care about.

The positions I have adopted mirror those taken by thousands of human rights defenders, experts, academics, educators, politicians as well as de-transitioners in many countries across the globe. It is positive that many of these positions are being aired more widely and publicly, and that opportunities have been created and seized to discuss these issues that are important to the whole of society, [as I have also advocated for](#).

Some political parties and politicians have revised previously held positions in very substantial ways. Other countries including their politicians, experts and academics are moving ahead with reviewing draft policies or legislation or insisting on seeing the evidence of what previous policies have produced. At the same time, I am aware that in other countries, some governments are charging ahead with amendments to their free speech laws that would stifle

healthy discussions on sex, gender, and gender identity (amongst others), as well as adopt self-ID laws without considering recent evidence, including that produced by authority in the medical field. Attacks, reprisals and punishment against women, girls and their allies also continue to be unabated in many corners and appear to have intensified. These attacks must be taken seriously and must be stopped. Societies must uphold and protect the foundations that make them pluralistic, tolerant, and respectful of freedom of belief and speech.

6 September 2023

*\* The Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, as a Special Procedures mandate of the Human Rights Council, serves in her individual capacity independent from any government or organization*