

[submitted via online survey]

**AWAVA's submission to the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights
Defenders Michel Forst**

The Situation of Women Human Rights Defenders

What recent trends or issues related to women human rights defenders should the Special Rapporteur focus on in his report? Please explain how they affect women human rights defenders, providing specific examples. Are there any country specific or regional trends or issues that the Special Rapporteur should refer to?

It has been well documented that women human rights defenders often become targets of sexual and gender-based violence. This violence is inflicted on them because often their work challenges traditional or conventional systems in the society and/or confronts male dominance and privilege. On the other hand, as Amnesty International states, "women human rights defenders face various forms of gender-based violence in addition to the attacks other human rights defenders might face, including sexual violence, and threats, harassment and defamation campaigns linked to their status as women" (Amnesty International (2017) Human Rights Defenders under threat: shrinking space for civil society).

Regardless of the fact that there are international and domestic protections in place, it is still important to work to eliminate violence against women human rights defenders. It is important to recognise the specific challenges this group of defenders face, in order to strengthen protection mechanisms and other responses to their specific concerns at both local and international levels.

Are there groups of women human rights defenders who face higher or specific risks that the Special Rapporteur should focus on in his report? Please describe their human rights work and the specific risks they face, adding country or regional specific information as appropriate.

Women who are representing diverse communities such as Indigenous communities, LGBTIQ communities or others experience double if not triple discrimination. They are often targeted because of their human rights work, gender and other identities such as connected to race, sexuality, ethnicity, disability etc.

Women working on the issues of sexual and reproductive rights, gender equality, family and domestic violence are also vulnerable to abuse and threats.

For women in regional and rural areas, the risks are increased due to the fact that they are normally known to both victim/survivors and perpetrators.

In 2018 AWAVA run a national survey with a range of stakeholders working in the area of reducing violence against women, sexual assault services, community legal centres, health services and others. Many responses mention a backlash against the evidence that violence against women is driven by gendered factors.

What are the main concerns and challenges that women human rights defenders face when carrying out human rights-related activities both in the private and public sphere, including through digital means?

Women human rights defenders are becoming targets of technology-facilitated abuse, trolling and cyberbullying online especially when they are working in areas of reducing violence against women, sexual and reproductive rights or broader women's rights.

Technology-facilitated abuse is strongly interlinked with dynamics of gender and sexuality. The normalisation of male violence and restrictive expectations about women and girls are some of the key drivers of violence and bullying generally.

Legislative response and opportunities to access justice differ throughout Australia and police and other relevant stakeholders require more training in this area.

Are there good practices (legal, administrative, policy, and others) that enable women human rights defenders to carry out their human rights work safely? How can protection measures and practices be made gender-sensitive and more effective? What other dimensions of difference (e.g. race, class, etc.) need to be considered in the design of protection practices, and how? If possible, please provide specific examples.

In Australia, the Safety Net Project is one of the signature projects of WESNET which looks at the intersection of technology and violence against women. Since 2011, Safety Net Australia has been training front-line agencies on the intersection of technology and violence against women issues; these trainings range from how abusive individuals misuse technology to how survivors can use their technology safely and privately. WESNET provides expert content for the two-hour "Empowering women to take control online," training, which is delivered to front-line agencies in partnership with the Commission. WESNET also provides technical expertise to practitioners, policy makers, and technologists on technology-facilitated abuse issues that impact women, including the misuse of images and video to harass, abuse, and harm.

More information about the Safety Net Project can be found at <https://wesnet.org.au/safetynet/>.

Recharge is a collaborative project between Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria (DVRCV), Women's Legal Service NSW and WESNET. As part of this project, DVRCV conducted

a national survey of technology-facilitated abuse drawing on the experience of family violence practitioners across Australia. For more information visit <http://www.wlsnsw.org.au/recharge/>

What recommendations should the Special Rapporteur include in his report? What opportunities for advocacy on women human rights defenders are presented by this report?

Violence against women human rights defenders should be addressed within broader efforts to reduce violence against women recognising different manifestations it can take, such as technology-facilitated abuse.

1. Broadening the definition of violence against women to include technology-facilitated abuse

In line with the CEDAW General Recommendation 35 on gender-based violence against women, updating general recommendation No. 19, in particular paragraph 20, we are calling for a broadening of the definition of violence against women to capture technology-facilitated abuse as one of the manifestations of gender-based violence.

2. Increased focus on the primary prevention programs

There is a need to increase the focus on primary prevention programs consisting of (but not limited to) educational programs about dominant constructions of gender, masculinity and violence against women, as well as promoting and mainstreaming gender equality on multiple levels including through policy.

3. Training for magistrates, lawyers and police on violence against women and technology

Police training is important in ensuring their ability to investigate and prosecute perpetrators, as well increasing public trust in obtaining justice in the instances of technology-facilitated abuse. It is equally important to train lawyers and appropriate magistrates on violence against women and technology-facilitated abuse.