



# CSW 70 RECOMMENDATIONS:

The role of lawyers and their  
protection as a path to access to  
justice for women and girls

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

The seventieth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW70) will consider the priority theme: Ensuring and strengthening access to justice for all women and girls, including by promoting inclusive and equitable legal systems, eliminating discriminatory laws, policies, and practices, and addressing structural barriers.

Access to justice is a fundamental human right and a prerequisite for the realization and protection of all other rights. However, **meaningful and effective access to justice cannot be achieved where lawyers are unable to perform their professional duties freely, independently, and without fear of reprisal.**

Women lawyers play a leading role in gender-transformative legal work worldwide, but this crucial work often carries serious personal and professional costs. Through our ongoing engagement with women lawyers across regions, we have documented the scope and urgency of the challenges they face —not just as legal professionals, but as women working in male-dominated systems. These risks are particularly acute for lawyers who apply gender-transformative, survivor-centred, or intersectional approaches, including those grounded in binding legal frameworks.

Against this backdrop, we believe it is essential that CSW70 explicitly address **the critical role** lawyers play in ensuring access to justice for women and girls, **the gender-specific risks and barriers** faced by women lawyers, and the **urgent need to protect and support them**. Without such protection, access to justice for women and girls remains incomplete and fragile.

This document provides:

- a factual background on the role of lawyers and the challenges faced by women lawyers (Section II);
- targeted recommendations for Member State delegations at CSW 70 (Section III); and
- an Annex outlining key United Nations standards and agreed language that support these recommendations (Section IV).

*The problem is when we handle cases concerning women's issues. There is a real possibility we will be personally — both verbally and physically — attacked.<sup>1</sup>*

*Nursyahbani Katjasungkana, lawyer from Indonesia*



## 2. BACKGROUND

Women lawyers are indispensable actors in advancing the priority theme of CSW70. Their work is critical to ensuring full, equal, and effective access to justice for all women and girls. In many countries, women lawyers are at the forefront of litigation and legal advocacy related to women's rights, gender-based violence, discrimination, and sexual- and reproductive rights. Yet, this work regularly carries heavy personal and professional consequences.

Globally, lawyers face intimidation, harassment, criminalization, and, in some cases, lethal attacks for carrying out their professional duties. Women lawyers face an additional layer of gender-specific risks. They are disproportionately targeted through sexist smear campaigns, stigmatization, online and offline harassment, threats, and gender-based violence. Such attacks frequently rely on entrenched gender stereotypes designed to undermine their credibility and legitimacy as legal professionals.

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In 2025, the report of the Working Group on Communications on the Status of Women, noted that the most frequently reported violations submitted to the Commission included death threats, torture, ill-treatment, harassment and abuse—including judicial harassment—arbitrary arrest and detention, and violence against women human rights defenders. The report further observed that such acts of intimidation often extended to their lawyers as a means of intimidation, as well as restrictions on their relevant advocacy and activities.<sup>2</sup>

In **Guatemala**, persistent gender-based discrimination has been documented against women lawyers and justice operators.<sup>3</sup> Women lawyers involved in anti-corruption efforts, transitional justice, or cases concerning serious human rights violations face a dual form of persecution: on the one hand, linked to their professional activities; on the other, rooted in gender-based stereotypes and discrimination within a deeply patriarchal justice system.<sup>4</sup> Criminalization strategies against women lawyers are often accompanied by gendered narratives aimed at delegitimizing their work and silencing their voices.

UN Special Procedures mandate holders have repeatedly highlighted the situation of women lawyers and judges in **Afghanistan**, where the Taliban have effectively excluded women from the legal system. More than 250 women judges were removed from their positions, and women lawyers have been unable to renew their professional licenses under Taliban-imposed requirements. Many face serious security threats, particularly those who previously worked on cases involving gender-based violence, terrorism, or human rights abuses. As a result, numerous women legal professionals have fled the country or gone into hiding, leading to the near-erasure of legal services for women in the country. As noted by UN experts: Not only are women lawyers in danger and their livelihoods upended, but the valuable services they provided—especially for other women—have been largely wiped out.<sup>5</sup>

The CEDAW Committee has also raised concerns regarding the situation of women lawyers in its concluding observations to several States. For example, in its Concluding Observations on **Burundi** (2016), the Committee expressed deep concern about restrictions imposed on women human rights defenders, “including women’s organizations and women lawyers” citing increased surveillance, intimidation, and fear of retaliation for advocating for women’s rights.<sup>6</sup>

More broadly, lawyers, judges, and prosecutors who apply gender-sensitive, survivor-centred, or intersectional approaches—even when firmly grounded in binding legal frameworks—are frequently exposed to reprisals, disciplinary proceedings, public attacks, or political pressure. Gender-responsive legal reasoning is often mischaracterized as bias or activism, undermining professional independence and creating a chilling effect that discourages the use of approaches essential to ensuring equality before the law and effective access to justice.

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The UN Working Group on Discrimination Against Women and Girls (WGDAGW) has also documented widespread discrimination within the legal sector. In its report following its visit to **Poland** (2019), the Working Group highlighted persistent gender stereotypes within justice systems, noting that women are often concentrated in junior judicial roles while remaining underrepresented in senior positions. It also documented an intimidating climate for women's rights advocates, including raids on women's rights organizations. The Working Group further observed that advocates for gender equality are increasingly portrayed as "anti-family," with their work labelled as "gender ideology" and subjected to attacks by conservative religious and political actors.<sup>7</sup>

In its report following its visit to **Maldives** (2023), the Working Group reported rising fundamentalism and shrinking civic space have exposed women human rights defenders to misogynistic online and offline harassment, with little accountability. It highlighted a shortage of women lawyers and significant barriers to women's access to justice due to legal, institutional, and sociocultural biases.<sup>8</sup>

These risks do not exist on their own; they are intensified by the structural inequalities embedded within the legal profession. The UN Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers (SRIJL) has stressed the negative impacts of gender stereotypes, the underrepresentation of women and the urgent need to integrate a gender perspective in all aspects of the justice system.<sup>9</sup>

Despite progress in gender representation within the legal profession in many countries over the past decades, women lawyers continue to face barriers to entry the profession, limited career progression, unequal treatment by courts and institutions, and discriminatory professional environments that affect both their work and their clients' access to justice. In many contexts, women's participation in the legal profession is perceived as a transgression of socially prescribed gender roles, further exposing them to retaliation and reprisals

In **Iran** women lawyers face gender-specific obstacles ranging from legal and social restrictions to institutional discrimination. Gender-based discrimination often restricts women's access to managerial positions in bar associations, while negative perceptions of their professional capabilities remain widespread, with women lawyers reporting intense gender discrimination and assaults on their dignity in courts. One example is the introduction of so-called Hijab and Chastity Law, which formally regulates the dress code of female binding conditions for access to courtrooms.<sup>10</sup>

While gender is the primary factor shaping the experiences of women lawyers, other intersecting identities—including race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, disability, and socio-economic background—can exacerbate the discrimination and risks they face. These challenges, combined with structural and gender-specific barriers within the legal profession, hinder women lawyers' ability to perform their professional duties and to serve as essential pillars of justice systems. Strengthening the protection, participation, and leadership of women in all their diversity is therefore crucial to ensuring accessible, equitable, and gender-responsive justice for all women and girls.

The report of the UN Secretary-General to the Seventieth Session of the Commission on the Status of Women further reflects and consolidates these concerns.<sup>11</sup> It highlights the persistent lack of gender-sensitive procedures among justice actors, the continued dominance of men in justice-sector decision-making, and a global shortage of lawyers with specialized training in gender-based violence. At the same time, the report reaffirms that legal aid is a core State obligation and a prerequisite for the substantive realization of women's rights. However, it notes that public funding for legal aid remains largely confined to criminal law, despite the predominantly civil nature of women's justice needs. In this context, the report calls on States to ensure accessible and effective legal-aid services for all women and girls, including the availability of specialized legal expertise and staffing in cases of violence against women, as well as legal aid for marginalized groups, including women in detention.

### 3. RECOMMENDATIONS

Our organizations call on Member States to negotiate and adopt an ambitious agreement that recognizes the indispensable role of lawyers in ensuring access to justice for women and girls, and that addresses the gender-specific risks faced by women legal professionals, which constitute a structural barrier to justice.

Effective access to justice for women and girls cannot be achieved without the independence, safety, and professional integrity of lawyers. Lawyers—particularly those working on women’s rights, gender-based violence, discrimination, and other gender-sensitive cases—play a critical role in bridging justice gaps. Yet, they face heightened risks of intimidation, harassment, reprisals, and gender-based violence, which undermine both their own rights and the rights of the women and girls they serve.

These recommendations draw on documented experiences of women lawyers, evidence collected by civil society organizations, findings of United Nations human rights mechanisms, and previously agreed United Nations language. For a detailed compilation of relevant agreed language, see the Annex.

#### 1. **Protection of lawyers, judges, and prosecutors**

- Protect the independence, safety, and professional integrity of lawyers, judges, and prosecutors by establishing safeguards against reprisals, disciplinary actions, political interference, stigmatization or attacks, and by ensuring that they can perform their duties free from intimidation, harassment, or hindrance or improper interference.
- Integrate a gender perspective into the creation of safe and enabling environments for the defense of human rights, to prevent discrimination, violations, and abuses, including threats, harassment, violence, and reprisals; and combat impunity by ensuring that violations or abuses against justice actors are promptly and impartially investigated, and that those responsible are held accountable.

Sources: Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 232 (o); CSW65, para. 24; CSW57, para. 34 A (z); CSW67, paras. 56 & 86 (mmm); CEDAW/C/GC/33, para. 15 (i); CEDAW/C/GC/40, para. 51(b); Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers, principles 16 and 17.

#### 2. **Equal access, permanence, and leadership of women in the legal profession**

- Adopt laws and other measures to ensure parity in decision-making positions at all levels of public administration, the judiciary, and other law-implementation mechanisms, including as magistrates, judges, prosecutors, public defenders, lawyers, administrators, mediators, and law enforcement officials. Guarantee equal access, retention, and advancement of women in all their diversity within the legal profession, including as judges, prosecutors, public defenders and lawyers, by addressing structural barriers, discrimination, gender-based risks, and hostile work environments. States should

Sources: Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, para. 232 (m); CEDAW/C/GC/33, para. 15 (f); CEDAW/C/GC/40, para. 49(a); Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers, principle 10.

## 3. RECOMMENDATIONS

### 3. Gender responsive training for judges and lawyers

- Ensure mandatory, continuous, and gender-responsive training for judges, lawyers, prosecutors, law enforcement officials, and other justice actors on women's human rights, gender equality, and international human rights law. Gender perspectives should be mainstreamed across all levels of justice systems in order to address stereotypes, bias, and discriminatory practices, and to create a safe, inclusive, and responsive environment for women and girls to access justice.

Sources: Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, para. 232 (i); CSW51, paras. 13 (h) & 14.13 (c); CSW62, para. 46(k); CEDAW/C/GC/33, paras. 15 (c), 29 (a), and 29 (f); Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers, principle 9.

### 4. Funding for legal aid

- Ensure accessible and effective legal-aid services for all women and girls, including the availability of specialized lawyers and staffing in the area of violence against women as well as legal aid provision for marginalized groups, such as women in detention;

Sources: E/CN.6/2026/3 – para. 51 (hh); Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, para. 232 (n); CSW57, 34 C (ddd).

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# CSW 70 RECOMMENDATIONS:

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**Annex:**  
**United Nations standards and agreed language**

# 1.CSW

The **Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action** (1995) affirms States' obligations to ensure women's equal participation in the justice system, to integrate gender-sensitive training across legal and judicial institutions, and to protect the rights of women working in the field of the promotion and protection of human rights.

Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 1995 - paras. 232 (i), 232 (m), 232 (n) and 232 (o).

(i) **Provide gender-sensitive human rights education and training** to public officials, including, inter alia, police and military personnel, corrections officers, health and medical personnel, and social workers, including people who deal with migration and refugee issues, and teachers at all levels of the educational system, and make available such education and training also to the judiciary and members of parliament in order to enable them to better exercise their public responsibilities

(m) **Ensure that women have the same right as men to be judges, advocates or other officers of the court**, as well as police officers and prison and detention officers, among other things.

(n) Strengthen existing or establish readily available and free or affordable alternative administrative mechanisms and legal aid programmes to assist disadvantaged women seeking redress for violations of their rights;

(o) **Ensure that all women and non-governmental organizations and their members in the field of protection and promotion of all human rights - civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights**, including the right to development - **enjoy fully all human rights** and freedoms in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and all other human rights instruments and the protection of national laws;

In its review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, presented at CSW69, the UN Secretary-General underscored the crucial role of legal assistance for women and girls and emphasized the need to expand initiatives that increase women's participation in the justice system<sup>1</sup>, while enhancing the awareness and guidance of professionals across the justice chain.<sup>2</sup>

Previous CSW Agreed Conclusions further highlight the importance of mainstreaming a gender perspective into justice systems at all levels, including through the sensitization and training of judges and lawyers on violence against women, gender equality, discrimination, and human rights. They emphasize that the promotion of women's full, equal, and meaningful participation and leadership in public life, including in the justice systems, is intrinsically linked to the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls. The Commission has expressed concern about violence targeting judges and members of local, grass-roots, and women's organizations, including in digital contexts, and has stressed that women's equal and safe participation is essential to strengthening public institutions and improving policy outcomes.

CSW51, Agreed conclusions on the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child, 2007— paras. 13(h) and 14.13 (c).

13. (h) Develop policies and programmes to **sensitize magistrates, judges, lawyers, prosecutors and persons who work with victims**, in order to ensure that judicial proceedings are adequate to the needs and the development of the girl child and that a **gender perspective** is applied to such proceedings;

14.13 (c) Invest in awareness campaigns, and provide **education and training, including specialized training on violence, gender issues, discrimination and human rights**, to parents and legal guardians, families, political, religious, traditional and community leaders, and all professions relevant to the protection and empowerment of girls, including educators, social workers, police officers, judges, lawyers, prosecutors and the media, to increase awareness and commitment to the promotion and protection of the rights of girls and appropriate responses to rights violations;

CSW57, Agreed Conclusions 2013: The elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls, 2013 - para. 34 C(ddd).

34. (ddd) Establish comprehensive, coordinated, inter-disciplinary, accessible and sustained multisectoral services, programmes and responses at all levels, and with the support of all available technologies, for all victims and survivors of all forms of violence against women and girls based on their needs, that are adequately resourced and include effective and coordinated action by, as appropriate, police and the justice sector, legal aid services (...)

CSW62, Agreed conclusions: Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls, 2018 - para. 46 (k).

46(k) Eliminate barriers and afford equal and effective access by all rural woman and girls to justice, legal remedies and legal support by, inter alia, providing adequate law enforcement and public safety infrastructure, accessible and affordable services, increasing the legal literacy of rural women and girls, such as awareness of and information about their legal rights, including on the existence of multiple legal systems, where they exist, providing legal assistance, **gender-responsive training** for police and security forces, prosecutors, **judges and lawyers** and other relevant authorities and officials in rural areas, as appropriate, putting in place mechanisms to ensure accountability and judicial remedies, and **mainstreaming a gender perspective into justice systems at all levels** to ensure the equal protection of the law for rural women and girls, taking into consideration, inter alia, the United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders (Bangkok Rules);

CSW65, Agreed Conclusions: Women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, 2021 - para. 24.

24. **The Commission emphasizes that the promotion of full and equal participation and leadership of women in public life and the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls are interconnected.** It expresses concern that violence against women politicians, voters, candidates, election administrators, **judges and members of local, grass-roots and women's organizations** in public life is common. It recognizes that all forms of violence and discrimination, including in digital contexts, prevent women from exercising their equal right to participate in all spheres of public life, and emphasizes that their participation is essential to improving the work of public institutions and strengthening policy outcomes.



**CSW67, Agreed Conclusions: Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, 2023 - paras. 56.**

56. The Commission expresses concern that women participating in public life, including politicians, voters, candidates, election administrators, **judges**, journalists, women in sport and members of women's organizations, **face higher levels of violence, including in digital contexts**, and especially on social media, which prevents them from exercising their equal right to participate in all spheres of public life, and notes with concern that there is a **lack of preventive measures and remedies**, which underlines the need for action by Member States in partnership with other stakeholders.

Across multiple sessions, the CSW has consistently emphasized the essential role of women human rights defenders<sup>3</sup> in advancing gender equality and the realization of women's rights, while recognizing that they face **heightened and gender-specific risks of violence, harassment, reprisals, and intimidation**. CSW agreed conclusions underscore States' obligations to protect and support women human rights defenders, to ensure safe and enabling environments for their work, and to address impunity for attacks and reprisals against them.

**CSW57, Agreed Conclusions 2013: The elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls, 2013 - para. 34 A (z).**

*(z) Support and protect those who are committed to eliminating violence against women, including women human rights defenders in this regard, who face particular risks of violence.*

**CSW66, Agreed Conclusions: Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes, 2022 - para. 35.**

35. **The Commission welcomes the major contributions** of civil society organizations, especially women's, young women's, girls', youth-led, grass-roots and community-based organizations, rural, indigenous and feminist groups, **women human rights defenders**, women journalists and media professionals and trade unions in **promoting and protecting the human rights of all women and girls**, placing their interests, needs and visions on local, national, regional and international agendas and in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of measures to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, including in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes. It expresses concern that such civil society organizations face many challenges and barriers to full, equal and meaningful participation and leadership, including diminishing funding, as well as violence, harassment, reprisals directed at, and threats to the physical security of, their members.

**CSW67, Agreed Conclusions: Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, 2023 - para 86 (mmm)**

*(mmm) Support the important role of civil society actors in promoting and protecting the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all women; take steps to protect such actors, including women human rights defenders; **integrate a gender perspective into the creation of a safe and enabling environment for the defence of human rights and to prevent discrimination, violations and abuses against them**, such as threats, harassment, violence and reprisals; and **combat impunity** by taking steps to ensure that violations or abuses are promptly and impartially investigated and that those responsible are held accountable;*

## 2. REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS SECRETARY-GENERAL TO THE CSW70

The report of the UN Secretary-General to the Seventieth Session of the Commission on the Status of Women highlights the lack of child-centred and gender-sensitive procedures among justice actors, as well as the continued dominance of men in justice system decision-making. At the same time, the report affirms that legal aid is a core state obligation essential to the substantive realization of rights. However, public funding for legal aid is often confined to criminal law, despite the predominantly civil nature of justice needs, and there remains a global shortage of lawyers with specialized training in gender-based violence.

**United Nations Secretary-General, Report to the Commission on the Status of Women, Seventieth session, 15 January 2026, E/CN.6/2026/3 - paras. 22, 25, 44, 45 and 51 (hh)**

22. *Girls face distinct and often overlooked obstacles in accessing justice services. Impediments include the absence of **child-centred and gender-sensitive** procedures among justice actors.*

25. **The justice sector also remains largely male-dominated at decision-making levels.** The absence of female justice actors reflects structural gender imbalances and, as evidence from some contexts shows, can discourage women from engaging with justice systems and affect legal outcomes. (...) Attending to who holds decision-making power within courts -- and across the justice system more broadly -- is important to understanding how law is interpreted, applied, and enforced in practice.

44. Around the world, **legal aid has been shown to improve legal outcomes.** Grounded in international law and frameworks as well as regional agreements, **legal aid for women and girls goes to the substantive realization of rights.** In addition to its inherent value, legal aid also has a strong business case: research shows the absence of legal aid can lead to a "false economy", with the costs of unresolved problems shifting to other areas of government spending such as health care, housing, child protection, and incarceration.

45. **An obligation of the state, government funding for legal aid is often a challenge**, sometimes limited to only criminal matters while legal needs are commonly civil, and includes shortages of lawyers with specialized training in responding to gender-based violence.

51 (hh). **Ensure accessible and effective legal-aid services for all women and girls, including the availability of specialized lawyers and staffing in the area of violence against women as well as legal aid provision for marginalized groups, such as women in detention;**

### 3. UN TREATY BODIES AND SPECIAL PROCEDURES

The CEDAW Committee's General Recommendation No. 33 on women's access to justice identifies multiple structural and systemic barriers that impede women's effective access to justice. Among these, the Committee highlights the stigmatization and gender bias that often influence investigations and trials, as well as the targeting of women who seek to assert their rights. General Recommendation No. 33 further affirms States' obligations to ensure women's equal participation at all levels of the justice system, including as judges, prosecutors, public defenders, and lawyers. It calls on States to remove barriers to women's entry into and advancement within the legal profession, to protect women human rights defenders from harassment, threats, retaliation, and violence, and to strengthen access to justice through gender-sensitive legal aid.

**CEDAW Committee, General recommendation No. 33 on women's access to justice, 3 August 2015, CEDAW/C/GC/33 - paras 15 (c), 15 (f), 15 (i), 29 (a), and 29 (f).**

*15(c) Ensure that justice system professionals handle cases in a gender-sensitive manner;*

*15(f) Confront and **remove barriers to women's participation as professionals within all bodies and levels of judicial and quasi-judicial systems** and providers of justice-related services, and take steps, including temporary special measures, to **ensure that women are equally represented in the judiciary and other law implementation mechanisms as magistrates, judges, prosecutors, public defenders, lawyers, administrators, mediators, law enforcement officials, judicial and penal officials and expert practitioners, as well as in other professional capacities;***

*15(i) **Ensure that women human rights defenders are able to gain access to justice and receive protection from harassment, threats, retaliation and violence.***

*29 (a) Take measures, **including awareness-raising and capacity-building programmes for all justice system personnel and law students,** to eliminate gender stereotyping and incorporate a gender perspective into all aspects of the justice system;*

*29 (f) **Provide capacity-building programmes for judges, prosecutors, lawyers and law enforcement officials on the application of international legal instruments relating to human rights,** including the Convention and the jurisprudence of the Committee, and on the application of legislation prohibiting discrimination against women.*

The CEDAW Committee's General Recommendation No. 40 (2024) on the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems establishes parity—defined as 50/50 representation—as the benchmark for women's presence and substantive influence across all decision-making systems. It emphasizes the need to integrate gender analysis and the elimination of gender stereotypes into appointment processes, training, and examinations. The Recommendation further urges States to systematically incorporate women's human rights and gender-responsive legal interpretation into initial and ongoing training for all justice and law-enforcement actors, in order to address gender bias and ensure gender-responsive decision-making. In addition, it stresses States' obligations to protect the personal safety of women representatives of civil society organizations and women human rights defenders, including by providing legal guarantees and protection against gender-based violence, intimidation, and reprisals, and by ensuring their effective access to justice.

**CEDAW Committee, General recommendation No. 40 on the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems, 2024 - paras. 49(a), 49(c), and 51(b).**

*49. (a) Adopt laws and other measures to **ensure parity in decision-making positions** at all levels in public administration and the **judiciary**, including local, customary and informal justice systems, and include the capacity to **eliminate gender stereotypes and conduct gender analysis and integration in training and exams for such appointments;***

*(c) Systematically integrate women's human rights, gender equality and the capacity to interpret the law from a gender perspective in initial training and recurrent capacity-building for **judges, prosecutors, law professors and students,** police and other law enforcement, and civil servants, in order to address gender bias and stereotyping and ensure gender-responsiveness in judicial and administrative decision-making*

*51(b) Ensure the **personal safety of women representatives of civil society organizations and women human rights defenders,** provide guarantees and legal protection to ensure that they can conduct their work free from gender-based violence against women, intimidation and reprisals, and ensure their access to justice;*

### 4. UN BASIC PRINCIPLES ON THE ROLE OF LAWYERS

The UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers affirm States' obligations to ensure that lawyers receive appropriate education and training, including on human rights, fundamental freedoms, and professional ethics, and that entry into and continued practice within the legal profession are free from discrimination. They further require States to guarantee that lawyers are able to carry out their professional functions independently and without intimidation, harassment, hindrance, or improper interference. The Principles also underscore that lawyers must not be subjected to prosecution, sanctions, or reprisals for actions taken in accordance with their professional duties and ethics, and that authorities must provide effective protection where lawyers' security is threatened as a result of their work.

**UN, Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers, Eighth United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders, Havana, 1990 - Principles 9, 10, 16 and 17.**

*9. Governments, professional associations of lawyers and educational institutions shall ensure that lawyers have **appropriate education and training** and be made aware of the ideals and ethical duties of the lawyer and of **human rights and fundamental freedoms** recognized by national and international law.*

*10. Governments, professional associations of lawyers and educational institutions shall ensure that there is **no discrimination against a person with respect to entry into or continued practice** within the legal profession on the grounds of race, colour, sex, ethnic origin, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, economic or other status, except that a requirement, that a lawyer must be a national of the country concerned, shall not be considered discriminatory.*

16. Governments shall ensure that lawyers (a) are able to perform all of their professional functions **without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference**; (b) are able to travel and to consult with their clients freely both within their own country and abroad; and (c) shall not suffer, or be threatened with, prosecution or administrative, economic or other sanctions for any action taken in accordance with recognized professional duties, standards and ethics.

17. Where the security of lawyers is threatened as a result of discharging their functions, they shall be adequately safeguarded by the authorities.

## 5. UN SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON THE INDEPENDENCE OF JUDGES AND LAWYERS (SRIJL)

the UN Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers (SRIJL) has consistently underlined the **negative impact of gender stereotypes** on the independence and functioning of justice systems and stressed the necessity of integrating a **strong gender perspective** across all aspects of the administration of justice. The Special Rapporteur has highlighted the persistent **underrepresentation of women** in the judiciary and legal professions—particularly in senior and decision-making positions—and has identified institutional, cultural, and structural barriers to women's advancement. These include entrenched gender stereotypes, glass-ceiling effects, patriarchal norms, work-family imbalance, and gender-based harassment.

SRIJL, Interim report of the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, 2011, /66/289 - paras. 23, 24 and 34.

23. **Women are still largely underrepresented in judicial office and in the legal profession throughout the world**, in particular in the highest-level positions; this undoubtedly reflects institutionalized gender discrimination within the justice system.

24. Women appointed to office also have to face bias and discrimination from their colleagues and society at large on the basis of assumptions about their gender. Their behaviour is scrutinized and harshly criticized, their qualifications are more frequently questioned than those of their male colleagues, and their objectivity is more likely to be challenged. Women are often restricted or pushed to working on "low-profile" cases, in areas of the law that are traditionally associated with women, like family law, or confined to working in the lower courts.

34. Overcoming the male-female imbalance in the judicial branch is only one aspect of its sensitization to gender equality and women's rights. **Providing for gender-awareness training of judges, prosecutors, public defenders and lawyers of both sexes is equally important.**

SRIJL, Participation of women in the administration of justice, 2021, A/HRC/76/142 - paras. 90, 91, 97, 98, 99 and 100.

90. The gender approach in the judicial sphere implies much more than promoting equality policies aimed at achieving equal conditions in access to and performance in the workplace. Measures are required to ensure equal access to the higher courts so that equal career progression is achieved. Above all, it is **necessary to guarantee a work-life balance that makes the acceptance of greater professional responsibilities compatible with family responsibilities**, a deficiency that often constitutes the structural causal factor in the lower presence of women in the higher courts of justice.

91. **The limited presence of women in high courts and senior prosecutorial positions is a widespread pattern globally.** Even in countries where there is equal representation of the sexes in the different courts, the percentage of women judges decreases significantly as one moves up the ladder of power. This circumstance is more evident when political bodies are in charge of making appointments.

97. At times and in some places, **sexual harassment and extortion persist in courts** and prosecutors' offices, both against the women who are part of these institutions and against those who are related to them, including lawyers, defenders, victims and others. Among the serious consequences of these practices are women's lack of confidence in the justice system and the early termination of their judicial careers.

98. Design and implement a **quota system** that is not merely symbolic in order to ensure equality in access to positions in the administration of justice and to achieve greater equality from a geographical or regional perspective.

99. Use the Sustainable Development Goals to ensure that, by 2030, **50 per cent of public positions, both in the judiciary and in prosecution services, are held by women.**

## REFERENCES

1. UN Secretary-General, Review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, 27 December 2024, E/CN.6/2025/3, para 207.
2. Ibid., para. 176.
3. The Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers has stated that: "when acting on behalf of their clients in defending their human rights and fundamental freedoms, lawyers should also be regarded as human rights defenders". See: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, 22 August 2016, A/71/348, par. 35.