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# Epstein files: 'No one is too wealthy or too powerful to be above the law'; rights experts demand accountability



IOM | Women make up the majority of victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation. (file)

By Vibhu Mishra



17 February 2026 | **Human Rights**

The large-scale disclosure of materials known as the "Epstein Files" has revealed "disturbing and credible evidence" of what independent human rights experts describe as a possible global

## **criminal enterprise involving systematic sexual abuse, trafficking and exploitation of women and girls.**

In a [statement](#) on Monday, the independent experts – who serve in their individual capacities under mandates from the UN [Human Rights Council](#) and are not UN staff – warned that the alleged acts documented in the files could amount to some of the gravest crimes under international law.

The reported conduct could amount to sexual slavery, reproductive violence, enforced disappearance, torture, inhuman and degrading treatment, and femicide, according to the experts.

“So grave is the scale, nature, systematic character, and transnational reach of these atrocities against women and girls, that a number of them may reasonably meet the legal threshold of crimes against humanity,” they said.

## **Crimes against humanity threshold**

Under international criminal law, crimes against humanity occur when acts such as rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, trafficking, persecution, torture or murder are committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against a civilian population, with knowledge of the attack.

The experts said the patterns reported in the files may meet this threshold and must be prosecuted in all competent national and international courts.

The disclosure process stems from the Epstein Files Transparency Act, signed into law on 19 November 2025. On 30 January 2026, following delays, the United States Department of Justice released a major tranche of material comprising more than three million pages, 2,000 videos and 180,000 images.

## **Background to the case**

Jeffrey Epstein, who died by suicide at age 66 in August 2019 in a New York jail cell,

moved in circles that included national and international politicians, celebrities and business figures. He faced criminal investigations in the United States over allegations that he operated a system to recruit and sexually exploit young girls – many of them minors and in vulnerable circumstances.

His associate, Ghislaine Maxwell, was convicted in 2021 of sex trafficking and other offenses, and sentenced in 2022 to 20 years in prison. However, questions persist regarding the potential involvement of additional individuals, financial structures and possible transnational dimensions of the alleged criminal enterprise.

UN experts concerned that flawed 'Epstein Files' disclosures undermine accountability for crimes against women & girls.

The files have shocked the conscience of humanity and raised terrifying implications of the level of impunity for such crimes. <https://t.co/7jxf9lm3oH>  
[pic.twitter.com/enKUC57Ftv](https://t.co/7jxf9lm3oH)

— UN Special Procedures (@UN\_SPExperts) [February 16, 2026](#)



## Independent, thorough and impartial investigation

The experts hailed the courage and resilience of victims in seeking accountability at significant personal cost, stressing that under international human rights law, States are obligated to prevent, investigate and punish violence against women and girls, including acts committed by private actors.

They added that “all the allegations contained in the ‘Epstein Files’ are egregious in nature and require independent, thorough, and impartial investigation, as well as inquiries to determine how such crimes could have taken place for so long.”

“These crimes were committed against a backdrop of supremacist beliefs, racism, corruption, extreme misogyny, and the commodification and dehumanisation of women and girls from different parts of the world,” they said.

## Tribute to survivors

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The experts also noted “grave errors” in the release process, including exposure of sensitive victim information, and highlighted the urgent need for victim-centered standard operating procedures for disclosure and redaction, so that no victim suffers further harm.

“The failure to safeguard their privacy puts them at risk of retaliation and stigma,” the experts warned.

## Hold perpetrators accountable

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They further underscored that “resignations of implicated individuals alone are not an adequate substitute for criminal accountability,” welcoming steps by some governments to probe current and former officials and private individuals named in the files. They called on other States to do the same.

“Any suggestion that it is time to move on from the ‘Epstein files’ is unacceptable. It represents a failure of responsibility towards victims,” they said.

“It is imperative that governments act decisively to hold perpetrators accountable,” the experts said. “No one is too wealthy or too powerful to be above the law.”

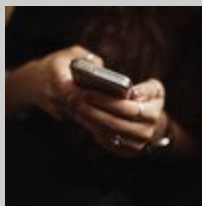
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## Epstein files: Nobody should evade justice, say UN rights experts

19 January 2024 | [Human Rights](#)

UN independent human rights experts on Friday emphasized no one is above the law, following the unsealing of nearly 1,000 pages of court records in the case of US financier Jeffrey Epstein, which shed light on the disturbing extent of his sexual abuse of teenage girls.

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