

30 August 2016

Tunisia: Homophobic physical attack on LGBTI rights defender Bouhdid Belhedi

On 29 August 2016, an unknown man physically assaulted LGBTI rights defender Mr. **Bouhdid Belhedi** in central Tunis, after the man recognised his affiliation to Shams LGBTI rights association.

[Bouhdid Belhedi](#) is a LGBTI defender working on the defence of sexual minorities in Tunisia and against homophobia. He is a member of the Executive Bureau of [Shams](#), a non governmental organisation which works for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex rights. The association campaigns for the decriminalization of homosexuality in Tunisia and encourages values of tolerance and acceptance of the LGBTI community.

On 29 August 2016 at approximately 10:00 a.m., an unknown man stopped the human rights defender near the Majestic hotel in central Tunis, telling him that he recognised his face and beating him by punching him in the head, ribs, stomach and kicking his body while on the ground. The attacker repeated homophobic phrases and insults while beating the human rights defender. According to Belhedi, a police officer who was located nearby did not interfere to protect him or arrest the attacker. The assault resulted in several bruises on the human rights defender's neck.

This is not the first the Bouhdid Belhedi has been subjected to assault and threats. On [27 April 2016](#), a group of three men brutally assaulted Bouhdid Belhedi in his hometown of Hammamet. In June 2015 following an interview given to the television channel Nessma TV about Shams, he received death threats and was subjected to defamatory remarks on social media and by religious leaders. Bouhdid Belhedi has been reluctant to file a complaint against his aggressors due to a previous complaint he made to the authorities which was ignored, and also due to the homophobic smear campaign recently launched by the police against LGBTI defenders in Tunisia including threats of imprisonment and torture. As [homosexuality is a crime](#) in Tunisia, victims are treated as criminals and subjected to violent physical examinations to prove their "guilt."

In a separate incident, in April 2016, an Islamic preacher in the city of Sfax openly called for the execution of homosexuals in Tunisia during the Friday praying sermon. On 2 June 2016, Shams filed a complaint against this preacher to the Tunisian Public Prosecutor, but so far no investigation has been initiated.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned about the incidents of physical violence and incitement to violence against the LGBTI community in Tunisia and LGBTI defenders and strongly urges the Tunisian authorities to investigate these incidents and effectively assist victims of homophobic violence to seek justice and remedy.

Front Line Defenders calls upon the Tunisian authorities to:

1. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical integrity and security of Bouhdid Belhedi;
2. Conduct a thorough and impartial investigation into incidents of physical violence and

incitement to violence against LGBTI defenders, including Bouhdid Belhedi, and ensure the physical and psychological integrity of members of LGBTI community who report homophobic assaults;

3. Abolish Article 230 of the Penal Code which criminalises homosexuality.

Front Line Defenders respectfully reminds you that the United Nations Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted by consensus by the UN General Assembly on 9 December 1998, recognises the legitimacy of the activities of human rights defenders, their right to freedom of association and to carry out their activities without fear of reprisals. We would particularly draw your attention to Article 6 (b): *“Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others: (b) As provided for in human rights and other applicable international instruments, freely to publish, impart or disseminate to others views, information and knowledge on all human rights and fundamental freedoms,”* and to Article 12 (2): *“The State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually and in association with others, against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration.”*

Please inform us of any actions that may be taken with regard to the above case.

Yours sincerely,



Mary Lawlor

Executive Director