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Sudan – Fears over the safety of journalist Shamael Al-Noor following her writing against the ‘Islamic State’ and the application of Islamic law in Sudan

Human rights defender and journalist **Shamael Al-Noor** fears for her life, freedom and well-being after she was publicly criticised by Imam Muhammad Ali Al-Jazouli in his sermon on Friday 17 February 2017 at a mosque in Sudan. The Imam, who is known to be a supporter of the ‘Islamic State’ (IS), accused the human rights defender of heresy and blasphemy – a crime punishable by death in Sudan – after she wrote a column entitled “Obsession with Virtue” which was critical of IS and the application of Islamic law in Sudan.

[Shamael Al-Noor](#) is a journalist working with Al-Tayyar newspaper in Sudan. Al-Tayyar is an independent Sudanese daily newspaper that was founded in 2012. Shamael Al-Noor regularly writes for Al-Tayyar where she criticises extremism and promotes human rights. She has worked on the promotion of minority rights in Sudan and has exposed abuses committed by IS. Shamel Al-Noor [has written](#) about her experience living in a State ruled by Sharia and how the application of Islamic law has meant that more time is spent promoting Islamic virtue rather than giving due attention to basic rights and issues related to health, education and people’s living expenses. She recently published a column challenging the teachings of IS, which caused several Sudanese extremists, including government-backed journalists and religious figures, to publicly respond in a campaign of articles against her.

On 17 February 2017, Imam Muhammad Ali Al-Jazouli gave a sermon in which he promised that Shamael Al-Noor and Al-Tayyar will be served justice in the coming days. The video, which can be seen [here](#), was published on 18 February 2017 and identifies Shamael Al-Noor, in both the title and content, as an example of a frivolous journalist that is critical of Islamic teachings and must therefore be monitored and prosecuted. In another video published in 2014, that can be seen [here](#), Imam Muhammad Ali Al-Jazouli justified the killing of women and children in the fight against the USA and ‘crusaders’.

Shamael Al-Noor has also been attacked in a public campaign by a journalist and former member of the National Congress Party in Sudan, Al-Tayyeb Mustafa, who is a family member of President Omar Al-Bashir. Mustafa also called for the human rights defender to be prosecuted for heresy and blasphemy.

The 1991 Criminal Code allows for six-months imprisonment, flogging and/or a fine as punishment for blasphemy. In practice, a blasphemy conviction could constitute evidence of apostasy, which is punishable by death. There are mounting fears that Shamael Al-Noor might be attacked by supporters of IS in response to the public accusations stating that she is “insulting Islam and committing blasphemy. The human rights defender was informed that extremist religious groups have granted her until 25 February 2017 to repent and disavow her writings, otherwise ‘further action’ will be taken against her.

In the last year, several journalists were attacked across the Middle East and North Africa for expressing their criticism of IS and extremism in Islam. On 25 September 2016, Jordanian cartoonist Nahed Hattar was killed by what is presumed to be a member of IS as he was on his way to court in Amman, Jordan.

Front Line Defenders is extremely concerned that the life, freedom and well-being of Shamael Al-Noor may be at risk as a result of her legitimate work to promote human rights in Sudan.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in the Republic of the Sudan to:

1. Ensure that Shamael Al-Noor is protected and allowed to practice her freedom of speech without fear or interference;
2. Ensure that those acting to incite violence against human rights defenders are prosecuted;
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in the Republic of the Sudan are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.