



**EMBARGOED UNTIL 12 PM, SRI LANKA, 13 OCTOBER 2020**

### **Front Line Defenders Award Presented to At-Risk Women Human Rights Defenders**

Four women human rights defenders and one indigenous community have won the 2020 Front Line Defenders Award for Human Rights Defenders at Risk. The organisation is honouring the defenders for their life-threatening work combatting gender-based violence, leading peacebuilding movements, defending the rights of minority groups and protecting indigenous land.

Governments around the world are using the pandemic to repress and attack human rights defenders. Authorities forces are using restrictions on movement, mobilisation and freedom of expression to target critical voices. HRDs from marginalized and stigmatized communities, already most at risk during COVID-19, are facing physical attacks, arrest, and criminal charges for helping their neighbours survive the pandemic. A Jury of Irish Parliamentarians convened to review Award nominations were hugely moved by the courage and determination of the five regional winners they selected:

<b>Africa:</b>	<a href="#">Mekfoula Mint Brahim</a> (Mauritania)
<b>Americas:</b>	<a href="#">Guardia Indígena de Cauca</a> (Colombia)
<b>Asia-Pacific:</b>	<a href="#">Juwairiya Mohideen</a> (Sri Lanka)
<b>Europe &amp; Central Asia:</b>	<a href="#">Lara Aharonian</a> (Armenia)
<b>Middle East &amp; North Africa:</b>	woman human rights defender (Iraq) <sup>1</sup>

Since 2005, Front Line Defenders has held its Award ceremony at Dublin's City Hall. This year, due COVID-19 restrictions, a virtual award ceremony will be held 9 December, International Human Rights Defenders Day. ***The Global Laureate and overall winner of the Award will be announced on 9 December.***

“The Covid pandemic has shown a light on corrupt, incompetent and repressive governments failing in their response to the crisis. These Award recipients are protecting some of the most marginalized communities in their countries. They continue to step forward as representatives of their communities at exactly the moment governments are doubling down on attacks against visible HRDs,” said Front Line Defenders Executive Director, Andrew Anderson. “The courage and integrity of the human rights defenders we honour today shines brightly as inspiration of how we can work together to achieve positive change.”

[Juwairiya Mohideen](#) is a Muslim woman human rights defender based in Puttalam in the North West of Sri Lanka. She and her family are part of the northern Muslim community that were forcibly displaced by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in October 1990. 30 years later, she continues to live in a refugee settlement in Puttalam. Juwairiya started her work with the Rural Development Foundation providing support for the IDP community Over a fifteen-year period, she identified a critical gap in dedicated support for women and girls within the local human

<sup>1</sup> Due to the security situation for this WHRD, Front Line Defenders, in consultation with the WHRD, will not name the winner for the Middle East and North Africa region at this time in order to ensure her protection.

rights/humanitarian aid sector. In 2010 she established the Muslim Women's Development Trust (MWDT), on which she serves as the Executive Director. MWDT provides daily practical support, comfort, advice and legal assistance to women and girls facing abuse, violence and discrimination. Juwairiya is at the front line of calls for reform in Muslim personal laws which deny Muslim women and girls the basic rights enjoyed by their non-Muslim sisters in Sri Lanka. Juwairiya has been undeterred by threats against her and her family, blatant misinformation and attacks on her character and being labelled as a traitor and shunned by parts of her close knit community.

"Juwairiya Mohideen works to advance women's rights against conservative religious forces, to improve the lives and wellbeing of marginalized groups and to seek justice and accountability for victims, and does so both under harassment and threat and always with a welcoming smile. From her own pain and trauma of displacement in her youth, she has built an incredible reputation as a determined champion of justice. She is a role model for all of Sri Lanka," remarked Mr. Anderson.

Front Line Defenders established its annual award in 2005. In 2018, the organisation began recognizing five winners from around the world, with one regional winner also named the Global Laureate.<sup>2</sup> The Jury for the 2020 Front Line Defenders Award was composed of Senator Ivana Bacik (Labour); Seán Crowe TD (Sinn Féin); Cormac Devlin TD (Fianna Fail); Gary Gannon TD (Social Democrats); and Jennifer Carroll MacNeill TD (Fine Gael).

Follow-up interviews with Juwairiya can be arranged.

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2 The five regions are: Africa, Americas, Asia-Pacific, Europe & Central Asia, Middle East & North Africa.