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Sudan: Harassment against women human rights defenders Lana Awad and Aida Abdel Qader

Since 29 May 2020, women human rights defenders **Lana Awad** and **Aida Abdel Qader** have been subjected to several harassments following an article they published on 26 May in the South Darfur News, defending the health rights of citizens in Al-Fashir city. In the context of COVID-19, Al-Fashir city has reported an alarming number of deaths, according to research published by Al-Fashir University, the Sudanese Government and the UN.

[Lana Awad](#) and [Aida Abdel Qader](#) are women human rights defenders and journalists. Both women are members of the Darfur Journalists Association and their work focuses primarily on promoting women's rights and defending health rights in Sudan. Lana Awad had worked for the Ministry of Health and Social Development, but was dismissed as a result of the article she wrote with Aida Abdel Qader.

On 29 May 2020, Lana Awad and Aida Abdel Qader received several phone calls from unknown individuals, threatening that they would be arrested and tortured by the Military Intelligence Agency, in response to an article the two women published. The article details the high fatality rate in Al-Fashir city during COVID-19 and the shortage of personal protective equipment among health workers and residents in the city. On 31 May 2020, a military officer stopped the two women human rights defenders in the street and aggressively attempted to arrest them, but the women managed to get away. On 2 June, the Public Prosecutor opened an investigation against the two defenders in relation to the article. They are at risk of being charged with defamation and the spreading of false news. On 27 May, the Media News Agency of North Darfur falsely published an article under Lana Awad's name, which denied the information in the initial article written by the two WHRDs.

Both Lana Awad and Aida Abdel Qader have frequently been harassed in relation to their human rights work in the past. They are also facing increased risks due to the fact that they are working in a conflict zone.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned regarding the harassment of women human rights defenders Lana Awad and Aida Abdel Qader. It believes that they are being harassed as a result of their peaceful and legitimate human rights work and exercising their freedom of expression.

Front Line Defenders urges the Sudanese authorities to:

1. Drop the investigation into human rights defenders Lana Awad and Aida Abdel Qader, as it believes it is solely motivated by their work in defense of human rights;
2. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the attempted arrest of and threats against the two women human rights defenders with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Sudan are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.