

29 April 2016

Tunisia – Physical attack against LGBTQ rights defender Bouhdid Belhedi

On 27 April 2016, a group of three young men brutally assaulted LGBTQ rights defender **Bouhdid Belhedi** in his hometown of Hammamet, after the group recognized his affiliation to Shams LGBTQ rights association.

[Bouhdid Belhedi](#) is a defender of the LGBTQ community 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 queer (LGBTQ) rights. The association campaigns for the decriminalization of homosexuality in Tunisia and spreads values of tolerance and acceptance. After several attempts, [Shams](#) was granted official registration by Tunisia's Interior Ministry in May 2015, but was suspended for thirty days in January 2016 following an order from the Tunisian Court of First Instance. An appeal was later lodged by Shams, which allowed it to continue its activities.

Amidst escalating violence against LGBTQ rights defenders in Tunisia, defender Bouhdid Belhedi was physically assaulted in the street by three unknown men. On 27 April 2016, the defender visited his hometown of Hammamet, for a medical analysis and to receive care for a weak physical condition. Before his return to Tunis - the capital, the defender was approached by three men and was asked if he was a member of Shams association. Upon his affirmation, he was insulted, beaten in his stomach, threatened, and was unable to escape until some passers-by decided to intervene.

Following the incident, Bouhdid Belhedi was reluctant to file a complaint against his aggressors due to a previous complaint he made to the authorities which was entirely ignored, and also due to the homophobic smear campaign recently launched by the police against LGBT defenders in Tunisia including threats of imprisonment and torture.

The defender also avoided going to the hospital as he did not have a police report which is required for submission at the hospital in the case of treatment for an assault. 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 also by religious leaders.

Front Line Defenders expresses concern for the harassment of human rights defender Bouhdid Belhedi, which it believes to be solely related to his work in the defence of human rights, particularly LGBTQ rights in Tunisia.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Tunisia to:

1. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical integrity and security of Bouhdid Belhedi;
2. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the unjustified attack against Bouhdid Belhedi, 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 Tunisia are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.