



Indonesian transgender rights defender Shinta Ratri wins international human rights prize

Human rights defender Shinta Ratri has been named the regional winner for Asia of the annual Front Line Defenders Award, in recognition of her courageous work to defend the rights of transgender people in Indonesia. Since 2008, Shinta has been running an Islamic school in Yogyakarta which offers transgender people the possibility to practice their faith and build community.

The award was presented during a ceremony in Dublin, Ireland, on 17th May, a date which marks the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia (IDAHOT). The other four regional winners are Badr Baabou (Tunisia), Rosanna Marzán (Dominican Republic), Veronika Lapina (Russia) and Nyasa Rainbow Alliance (Malawi). For the first time in the 14-year history of the Award, Front Line Defenders has presented the prize to five at-risk LGBTI+ human rights defenders, all facing severe threats for advancing the rights of their communities.

Shinta Ratri is a *waria* transgender woman. In 2008, she co-founded Pondok Pesantren Waria al-Fatah, an Islamic school aiming to serve older transgender women who had been cut off from family and prevented from practicing their faith in most Islamic centres in the country. In 2016, an Islamist political group attacked the school during a wave of violence against the LGBTI+ community. Shinta's work was featured in a [2017 Front Line Defenders report](#) about attacks on LGBTI+ defenders, which found that although Indonesian society was generally tolerant towards the *waria* community, in recent years hostility against them has surged and attacks - perpetrated by both political groups and the police - have increased. After closing for a short period, Shinta reopened the school and today continues to create a safe haven in Yogyakarta for transgender people – as well as other LGBTI+ people – offering them a space to build community, practice their faith and support one another.

This year, Front Line Defenders dedicated the 2019 Award to visibilizing LGBTI+ activism in honour of the 50th anniversary of the seminal Stonewall uprising – led by queer, transgender, and sex worker activists of colour – which helped spark the movement for LGBTI+ rights in the US and expressed solidarity with queer-identifying activists globally. Front Line Defenders Executive Director Andrew Anderson said today that the organisation recognises in particular the work of transgender human rights defenders like Shinta, “in light of the targeted violence and backlash they face.”

“Today we’re honouring the work of LGBTI+ defenders and the incredible communities of resistance they cultivate every day,” said Andrew Anderson at the Award ceremony. “The work of queer-identifying activists and collectives continues to shape and reshape how we understand personal, political and contested struggles for freedom. There is no human rights fight that has not been strengthened by the intersectional analyses brought to the front lines by queer defenders. We hope this award can be small acknowledgment of the immense, often incomprehensible bravery required to visibilize oneself as both an activist and LGBTI+ person in places that demean, deny and criminalize each of these identities.”

The other 2019 Laureates are:

Rosanna Marzán, *Diversidad Dominicana*, Dominican Republic

As Executive Director of [Diversidad Dominicana](#), Rosanna Marzán is leading a new wave of LGBTI+awareness in the Dominican Republic. While pursuing an education in law, Rosanna has proudly represented the LGBTI+ community of the D.R. in a long list of local and international policy meetings. Rosanna, who considers herself a “social educator,” works with fellow activists to raise awareness of the need for SOGIESC inclusion. She has acted as a spokesperson to the LGBTI Caravan of Pride in the D.R., attended assembly at the Organization of American States, and was among activists at the first LGBTI+ themed meeting of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. While pushing for the equal rights of all LGBTI+ people in the D.R., and working to visibilize the particular issues faced by lesbian women, Rosanna also works to support migrants, refugees and domestic abuse survivors. She faces intimidation, surveillance, harassment, defamation and targeted physical attacks in carrying out her public advocacy in the Dominican Republic.

Badr Baabou, *DAMJ*, Tunisia

Badr Baabou is co-founder and Chairman of DAMJ (meaning ‘inclusion’), an organisation working for equality and justice for the LGBTI community. He is also co-chair of M-Coalition, the first regional network on MSM and HIV-related rights in the MENA region, which advocates for improved access to HIV services in member countries. Badr previously worked for ATL, a national Tunisian organisation working to reduce rates and transmission of STIs and HIV among MSM communities. Badr also documents violations against the rights of religious and ethnic minorities in the country. He has been forced to seek temporary relocation as a result of threats and intimidation targeted against him, and often has to keep moving from place to place to maintain his safety.

Veronika Lapina, *Russian LGBT Network*, Russia

Veronika Lapina is an academic and activist with the Russian LGBT Network. After reports of a crackdown on the LGBTI+ community in Chechnya surfaced, Veronika joined the Network to help find safety and security for targeted members of the community. She risked her life and freedom traveling into Chechnya, at times alone, to bring individuals to safety in Russia. As a direct result of her work, more than 100 gay, lesbian and bisexual people have been evacuated from Chechnya in order to avoid the imminent danger they were facing there. She regularly receives threats in connection to her human rights work and her membership in the LGBTI+ community.

Nyasa Rainbow Alliance, Malawi

In December 2015, Eric Sambisa became the first person in Malawi to come out as gay on national television. The following year, he and other LGBTI+ community members established the Nyasa Rainbow Alliance in Blantyre, to provide support services and openly advocate for rights of the community. The organisation provides a safe space for the LGBTI+ community to discuss health concerns, receive medical support, practice their faith, network, peer educate and collaboratively develop research projects. In 2018, the organization attempted to officially register, only to have the regular bureaucratic procedure blocked by the Minister of Justice – a decision now being challenged in the country’s High Court on the basis that it is unconstitutional as it violates the provision of freedom of association. The organization has been forced to move offices after its previous office was broken into and information was stolen in an apparent targeted attack.

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Editor's note:

Front Line Defenders is the international foundation for the protection of human rights defenders, founded in Dublin in 2001 by Irish human rights activist Mary Lawlor. In addition to emergency grants, protection trainings, digital security support, campaigns, research, and advocacy, Front Line Defenders also hosts an [annual award](#) ceremony in Dublin, recognising international human rights defenders who protect the rights of their communities despite extreme personal risk.