

22 January 2020

Tunisia: Trans woman human rights defender Frifta violently attacked by police

On 13 January 2020, woman human rights defender **Frifta** was violently attacked and subjected to electric shocks by three men including a police officer in Tunis. Since then, no action has been taken by the police to hold the perpetrators accountable.

[Frifta](#) is a transgender woman human rights defender and member of Damj (the Tunisian Association for Justice and Equality). In addition to defending the rights of the LGBT+ community in Tunisia, she advocates for the rights of sex workers, in particular with regards to their access to health care and privacy rights. Most of her work takes place in the field which makes her subject to ongoing harassment by the authorities.

On 11 January 2020, Frifta submitted a complaint against a police officer at a local police station in Tunis, concerning harassment of sex workers. The complaint was not transferred to the Public Prosecution, and Frifta's name was disclosed to the police officer in question. On 13 January at 3:30am, the police officer, accompanied by two unidentified men, attacked Frifta in front of a bar in Tunis, using electric shocks and tear gas. The attack caused her internal bleeding, bruises in her eyes, severe bleeding in her right eye, and several fractures, including in her skull.

The human rights defender was transferred to a public hospital in Tunis on the same night. Shortly after, the chief of the Bab El Bhar police section ordered to stop her treatment, as she did not have an authorisation from the police, required for the provision of free medical treatment of injuries caused by incidents such as physical attacks or domestic violence. Frifta's colleagues requested such an authorisation from a local police station, however, their request was ignored. Frifta was then transferred to another public hospital, but she was denied free medical aid again and her colleagues had to pay for her treatment. While in the hospital, Frifta was repeatedly subject to verbal and physical abuse, as well as medical negligence by the hospital staff.

On 15 January 2020, the human rights defender left the hospital. On the next day, while she was still suffering from severe psychological and physical injuries, she was summoned to a local police station in order to submit her testimony. Since then, no further action has been taken by the police.

Frifta has been frequently harassed by the authorities. She has spent a total of seven years in detention, in relation to her human rights work as well as because of the criminalisation of homosexuality in Tunisia.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned about the violent attack against woman human rights defender Frifta, which may have amounted to torture, as well as the denial of free medical treatment to her and the apparent lack of action by the police to hold the perpetrators accountable. It believes that these acts form part of a pattern of harassment directly linked to her work defending human rights.

Front Line Defenders urges the Tunisian authorities to:

1. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the attack against Frifta, which may have amounted to torture, as well as the denial of free medical treatment to her, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;

2. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of Frifta, and provide her with the necessary medical treatment;
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;
4. Systematically investigate reports of harassment by the police, including of sex workers, and adopt immediate measures to ensure the protection of the victims;
5. Abolish Article 230 of the Penal Code which criminalises homosexuality and cease all forms of harassment against the LGBTI community in Tunisia.

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