



EMBARGOED UNTIL 10AM, BOGOTÁ, 8 OCTOBER 2020

Front Line Defenders Award for the Americas Region Presented to Guardia Indígena de Cauca

The **Guardia Indígena de Cauca (Indigenous Guard of Cauca)** has been named as the **2020 Americas Regional Winner of the Front Line Defenders Award for Human Rights Defenders at Risk**. The organisation is honouring the defenders for their protection of indigenous communities and their rights, their territories and the environment, as well as the Guardia's model of nonviolent collective protection.

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:

Africa:	Mekfoula Mint Brahim (Mauritania)
Americas:	Guardia Indígena de Cauca (Colombia)
Asia-Pacific:	Juwairiya Mohideen (Sri Lanka)
Europe & Central Asia:	Lara Aharonian (Armenia)
Middle East & North Africa:	woman human rights defender (Iraq) ¹

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 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.”

The Indigenous Guard of Cauca - Kiwe Thegnas (Defenders of Life and Territory), member of the organization Asociación de Cabildos Indígenas del Norte del Cauca (ACIN), CRIC branch, is a community life and ancestral resistance composed of women, men, boys and girls who defend their territories in a peaceful, unarmed way. It was created in the violent region of Cauca in southwestern Colombia, and in 2001 began operating as an organised collective. The majority of the indigenous guards belong to the Nasa indigenous group, which is the largest and most

¹ 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.

organised, and they have trained other communities throughout Colombia over the years to defend their own territories. Their communities have been subjected to multiple forms of violence resulting from the presence of armed actors, the drug trafficking economy and multinational exploitation. Among its many activities, the Guard carries out collective protection actions with its communities, gives talks on awareness raising and peace, tours their territories, gives humanitarian protection for child victims of armed actions, rescues injured people in the context of warfare under the framework of humanitarian action, carries out training on anti-personnel mines (ERM), and organises relief actions for communities that have been massively displaced from their lands. Because of its role, the Indigenous Guard has been subjected to multiple attacks from different actors who seek to break the peaceful resistance of the communities they represent.

About the Colombian human rights defenders, Mr. Anderson noted, “The Guardia represent a unique model of collective protection in one of the world’s most dangerous places to be a human rights defender. Throughout yeas of the armed conflict, the Guardia offered an unarmed, peaceful defence of their community, traditions, culture, way of live and Mother Nature. Despite the peace agreement, HRDs, including the Guardia, continue to face lethal attacks and extreme risk. This award acknowledges this uncommon courage for the entire Guardia collective.”

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.² 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).

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