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## PRESS RELEASE

Geneva, Tuesday 10 October 2017

### **2017 Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders goes to Mohamed Zaree**

Mohamed Zaree was selected by a jury of 10 global human rights organizations (*See list below*). The Award is given to Human Rights Defenders who have shown deep commitment to human rights and face great personal risk. The aim of the award is to provide protection through international recognition. Strongly supported by the City of Geneva, the Award will be presented by the United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights on Oct. 10<sup>th</sup> at the University of Geneva.

#### **Mohamed Zaree (Egypt)**

Mohamed Zaree is a devoted human rights activist and legal scholar whose work focuses on human rights advocacy around freedom of expression and association. He is also known for his role as the Egypt Country Director of the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS), which works throughout the Arabic speaking world. He assumed this role after government pressure on CIHRS prompted them to relocate their headquarters to Tunis in 2014.

The Egyptian government has been escalating its pressure on the human rights movement. Human rights NGOs and defenders are confronted with a growing wave of threats, harassment, and intimidation, legal and otherwise. Despite this, Zaree is leading CIHRS' research, human rights education, and national advocacy initiatives in Egypt and is shaping the media debate on human rights issues. During this critical period for civil society, he is also leading the Forum of Independent Egyptian Human Rights NGOs, a network aiming to unify human rights groups in advocacy. Zaree's initiatives have helped NGOs to develop common approaches to human rights issues in Egypt.

Within the context of the renewed crackdown on Egyptian human rights organizations, he has become a leading figure in Egypt's human rights movement.

Zaree is currently facing investigation under the "Foreign Funding Case" and is at high risk of prosecution and life imprisonment. The "Foreign Funding Case" highly restricts NGO activities. Despite this, Zaree continues to engage the authorities in dialogue wherever possible, arguing that respect for human rights will increase stability in Egypt.

Zaree has been under a travel ban since May 2016. He remains present and active in Egypt and represents CIHRS inside the country.

Martin Ennals Foundation Chair Dick Oosting stated: "*Severe restriction of civil society's space to express itself is what led Mohamed Zaree to advocate for human rights and fight for the freedom of association. He is still paying the price for his courageous acts, and we urge his government to lift the travel ban.*"

The two other finalists received Martin Ennals Prizes

### **Karla Avelar (El Salvador)**

Karla Avelar, a transgender woman in El Salvador, founded the country's first organization of transgender women - COMCAVIS TRANS. She grew up on the streets, suffering discrimination, violence, sexual exploitation, rape, and attempted murder. She works to change national legislation and the authorities' practices, by publicizing violations suffered by LGBTI people. Her advocacy helped prompt the authorities to segregate LGBTI prisoners for their own safety, and provide HIV treatment.

### **FreeThe5KH (Cambodia)**

FreeThe5KH are five Human Rights Defenders who were recently released after 427 days of pre-trial detention. They are awaiting trial and are banned from travel. There were widespread international calls for their unconditional release, and a stop to judicial harassment of human rights defenders in Cambodia. This comes in the context of an increasingly severe crackdown on civil society and the political opposition in Cambodia.

**The main award of the human rights movement.** The Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders (MEA) is a unique collaboration among ten of the world's leading human rights organizations to give **protection** to human rights defenders worldwide. The **Jury** is composed of the following NGOs:

- Amnesty International
- FIDH
- Human Rights First
- HURIDOCS
- International Service for Human Rights
- EWDE Germany
- Front Line Defenders
- Human Rights Watch
- International Commission of Jurists
- World Organisation against Torture

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