



TOOLBOX

FOR SUPPORT STAFF IN THE NETHERLANDS

Manual by Justice & Peace Netherlands

March 2024

SIDE BY SIDE
WITH
human
rights defenders



We are  Shelter City

A global movement of safe and inspiring spaces for human rights defenders at risk.

This toolbox is a publication of Justice & Peace Netherlands. Shelter City was founded in 2012 by Justice & Peace as a concrete and accessible way to support human rights defenders at risk.

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This document has been created by Fabianna Flores Sanchez and Joshca Großhanten. We hope you find it helpful & wish you a fruitful time with Shelter City!

Justice  Peace

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"I have gained new energy and am now better prepared. The Shelter City programme has shown me that it is better to be silent for a while, than to have to keep silent forever."

LOTTIE, INDIGENOUS RIGHTS DEFENDER &
FORMER SHELTER CITY UTRECHT GUEST



About the toolbox



Shelter City is a global movement that provides safe and inspiring spaces to human rights defenders at risk where they re-energize, receive tailormade support, and engage with local allies in order to reinforce their local actions for change.

The initiative was founded in 2012 by The Hague-based human rights organization Justice & Peace Netherlands. Today, the movement has grown to include 21 Shelter Cities and counting around the world, of which 13 are based in the Netherlands.

During their time in Shelter City, human rights defenders can rely on solidarity, develop their skills, knowledge and resilience together with the provision of resources, trainings and companionship.

In each local Shelter City, there is a team of dedicated people (including you!) and organizations that implement the initiative within their city. Each city offers a variety of

expertise, making the support we each provide unique and tailored to the needs of the human rights defenders.

This toolbox is meant for Shelter City support staff who work closely with human rights defenders in a Shelter City in the Netherlands. It contains guidance and tips meant to equip you to the task of providing daily support and accompaniment to human rights defenders at risk.

Each section is first shortly introduced, then followed by some practical tips (highlighted in boxes). These are meant to provide you with general guidance, rather than imposing on you a way of working. As you will quickly notice, you will learn a lot about how to deal with human rights defenders on the spot.

We thank you for your incredible work and dedication, and for standing side by side with human rights defenders.

Tool 1

Getting to know human rights defenders



As a support staff member to visiting human rights defenders in Shelter City, it is essential that you understand who they are, what their work involves, and what challenges they face. This information is intended to support you in being aware of the people you are supporting.

Who is a human rights defender?

To define the term human rights defender, we use the following definition provided by the European Union (EU) Guideline on human rights defenders, which describes human rights defenders as:

“...those individuals, groups and organs of society that promote and protect universally recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Human rights defenders seek the promotion and protection of civil and political rights as well as the promotion, protection and realization of economic, social and cultural rights.

Human rights defenders also promote and protect the rights of members of groups such as indigenous communities. The definition does not include those individuals or groups who commit or propagate violence.”

The notion of human rights defender is a broad one, encompassing people from all professions (though usually not state officials) who strive to achieve human rights and address human rights violations in a peaceful manner.

Human rights issues occur within a broad spectrum, varying from freedom of speech to women’s and LGBTIQ+ rights, indigenous rights, access to health care, etc. As a result, the work of human rights defenders can take many forms, such as collecting and spreading information, providing education on human rights, (international) advocacy and litigation to put pressure on perpetrators, assisting victims, promoting accountability and improvement of government policy.

Rather than who they are, human rights defenders are thus best described, as the United Nations (UN) does, through their work and methods of work. The central element is whether their activities are related to the achievement of human rights.

Security challenges of human rights work



State violence, poverty, impunity and political oppression very often characterize the contexts in which human rights defenders work. Human rights defenders worldwide face serious security challenges with global trends showing the deterioration of the working environment for many human rights defenders.

The threats they receive can be physical, psychological, economic or social. They can originate from different actors, such as state official, private businesses and interests, extremist groups, etc. The effective absence of rule of law and impunity are generally worsening factors.

The threats they receive can be physical, psychological, economic or social. They can originate from different actors, such as state official, private businesses and interests, extremist groups, etc. The effective absence of rule of law and impunity are generally worsening factors.

According to the 2021 Global Analysis of Front Line Defenders, 358 defenders in 35 countries were targeted and killed for their work in freedom of expression, human rights movements, women's rights and LGBTIQ+ work, the highest number ever on record. More than three-quarters of these, 59% of the total number of activists killed, were defenders of land, environmental or indigenous peoples' rights. Additionally many (human rights) lawyers, artists and journalists are targeted for their work.

Front Line Defenders reports that the murders of human rights defenders were not isolated events, but were preceded by judicial harassment, threats and physical attacks. At least 26% of those killed were indigenous persons, and 18% of killings targeted women (including trans women) human rights defenders. They face gendered and sexualized attacks from both state and non-state actors, as well as from within their own human rights movements. Such violations include removal from public or high-ranking positions in non-government organizations, trade unions, and political societies; smear campaigns questioning their commitment to their families; sexual assault and rape; militarized violence; and the harassment and targeting of their children.

In the vast majority of cases, human rights defenders did not receive the necessary protection and support from state authorities from the time they reported threats to the time they were murdered.





Box 1

International protection instruments for human rights defenders



Because the work they do is often dangerous, human rights defenders have received special attention from international institutions such as the UN or the EU, as well as some national governments

- The UN for instance mandated a Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, following-up on what is known as the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.
- The EU's General Council established Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders, which provide recommendations to member states, diplomatic missions and EU institutions on how to support human rights defenders worldwide. The European Commission are also involved in protecting and promoting the work of human rights defenders, and the European Parliament regularly adopts resolutions on specific cases.
- Besides the EU, regional organizations such as the OSCE, African Union, Inter-American Court on Human Rights and Council of Europe all have instruments or appointed officials focusing on human rights defenders.
- The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs established its own Action Plan on human rights defenders, and human rights defenders are a specific focus in its foreign human rights policy.

Although those instruments have the merit to highlight the difficult work of human rights defenders, their non-binding characters means their impact is mostly symbolic.

Temporary relocation initiatives such as Shelter City provide a concrete and accessible solution to supporting human rights defenders at risk, by providing them with the necessary time to temporarily leave a threatening situation, access support, and strengthen their capacities in order to continue their work more safely over the longer term.



Tool 2

Building up the programme



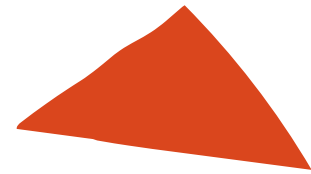
The overall objective of Shelter City is to sustain human rights defenders' work in the long-term.

Your role as support staff is essential in ensuring that human rights defenders' programme during their time in the Netherlands supports this objective. Below are tips and useful information to help you in building up the programme of your guest human rights defender.

It is important to mention that Shelter City support staff should not act or see themselves as "saviors" but simply as taking the role of supporting the human rights defenders during their stay. Human rights defenders have their own agency in their stay and decisions should not be patronized.



Key aspects of the programme



What can the programme include?

Human rights defenders coming under the Shelter City programme usually have several aims. In order to ensure the long-term impact of the programme and target activities, it is important to have a clear understanding of the needs and objectives of the guest human rights defenders.



1. Rest and respite

A safe space in which to re-energize, re-strategize, and focus on their wellbeing. This includes safe and comfortable accommodation, opportunities to enjoy nature, and simply having the time to rest. The programme also offers psychological support through a therapist, which many human rights defenders have found beneficial in the past. For this reason, providing psychological support upon request is essential.



2. Capacity-building

Defenders can increase their knowledge and skills in areas relevant to their work. This includes the security trainings they receive in The Hague, as well as language courses, human rights courses, or other capacity-building courses that your city arranges.



Key aspects of the



3. Networking

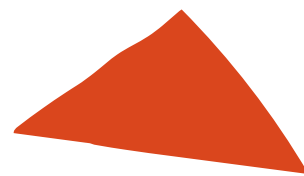
Networking can fulfil different objectives, such as increasing their international profile (and thus the likelihood that people will support them if something happens to them after they return), establish new partnerships with allies, obtain funding, exchange experience, and so on (see Tool 5).



4. Awareness-raising

Defenders can raise awareness about the human rights situation in their country. This can be done at schools, universities, during public events, or meetings with relevant allies. (see Tool 3).

Creating an agenda



Once you know the wishes and needs of your guest human rights defender, you can begin to build their programme and create an agenda for their three-month stay.

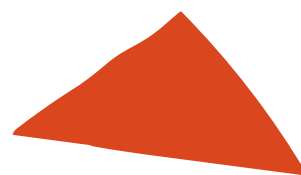
This will support the guests in getting as much as possible from their stay, and ensuring it is as fruitful as possible. This section is to guide you in this process.





Programme timeline

Phase 1



Before arrival

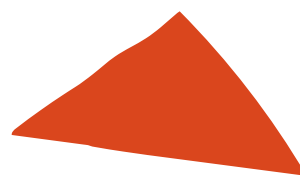
Once the human rights defender is selected by the Independent Selection Committee, Justice & Peace will share the profile with the partners in the city, and introduce them by e-mail.

- A first 'live' contact will be planned by Justice & Peace to define the human rights defender's goals more specifically.
- Some activities require beforehand planning (e.g. if psycho-social support is needed). Relevant courses, organizations, events and volunteers can already be identified and contacted.
- Some human rights defenders have high security risks when traveling and their participation in Shelter City should not be communicated externally (e.g. over social media) without consulting with Justice & Peace first.



Programme timeline

Phase 2



First days

As support staff you should arrange the pick-up of the guest at the airport. It is helpful to contact the human rights defender beforehand and communicate the pick-up logistics clearly.

- After arrival at the airport, the human rights defender is brought to their city.
- The Shelter City support staff at the host organization is often the first contact person, your role is thus particularly important at this stage.
- The first days will be dedicated to getting acquainted to life in the Netherlands (transport, shopping, etc.), as well as getting to know the partners and volunteers involved in the project. It is also when the activity plan will be further elaborated.
- It is important to repeat practical information (transport, shopping, use of bank card) several times.





Programme timeline

Phase 3



During the stay

Throughout the stay, the human rights defender will go to meetings, follow courses, continue their work and have the opportunity to relax and recover. Medical and psychological support can also be provided. You will play a role in supporting to organize these activities.



- Make sure you regularly assess with the human rights defender how the stay is going and if there are additional needs, or if the human rights defender thinks the agenda is too full. Be attentive to what they say, but also what they do not (dare to) say.
- Common activities with human rights defenders in other cities will also take place. Exchange with other human rights defenders and feeling part of an human rights defender community is crucial for many of them. A holistic security training and an advocacy training will be held in The Hague, usually three times during their three-month stay. You can also facilitate meet-ups - feel free to invite all human rights defenders for events in your city!

Programme timeline

Phase 4



Before return

Justice & Peace will prepare the return with the human rights defender based on their security plan. As first contact point, you will likely be the first to know if anything happens that could hinder the human rights defender's return.

- Make sure you relay any relevant information to Justice & Peace so that necessary measures can be taken in time.
- Returning to a tense situation is often difficult for human rights defenders. To prepare for that, there is a meeting on safe return that happens before the guests' departure, which support staff can be present in too.



"The best piece of the Shelter City programme is that it has a butterfly effect. By supporting one defender, you also support their communities."

FORMER SHELTER CITY GUEST





Elements to consider when making the human rights defenders' programme



1. The human rights defender's wellbeing:

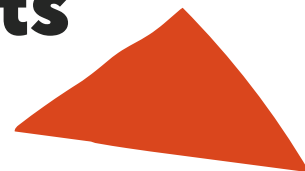
- Human rights defenders who come under the programme are often very tired due to a long time working without time off, and stress caused by threats and pressure related to their work. They can also be traumatized or start to process difficult events.
- Human rights defenders are likely to share with you their traumatic experiences, or during the trainings they will share it with one another, so you will also be present in those conversations. The best thing to do is listen non-judgementally. And if you need take some time for yourself for any reason let a member of staff know (see Section 7).
- Their programme in the Netherlands will fill up very quickly, and although they will often insist that they want to be busy and accept any proposition of activity, it is of high importance to regularly check with the human rights defender whether the schedule allows sufficient time to rest. Activities which can involve touching upon painful memories (telling their story in public for instance) should always be carefully considered, and prepared with the human rights defenders.
- Please note that people have different concepts of 'rest', for one person this means not doing anything, for the other it means being busy with activities in a different context.



"Shelter City reminded me that I am human before being a defender."

FORMER SHELTER CITY GUEST

Elements to consider when making the human rights defenders' programme



2. The human rights defender's security:

- To what extent is it desirable for the human rights defender to speak publicly? What can be the consequences if it is known in the home country that the human rights defender is staying abroad? Does the human rights defender want to use a pseudonym? Can photographs of the human rights defender be shared publicly?
- During the first few weeks of their stay, a security intake meeting will be held with Justice & Peace and the host organization to address these concerns. While the limits of visibility are established at the outset, regular assessments are conducted throughout the stay to ensure that the human rights defender's preferences and the context of their home country are taken into account.
- Justice & Peace will provide guidelines, but it is essential that assessments be made regularly to identify potential security risks and assist the human rights defender in making informed decisions. Sometimes, human rights defenders may not fully understand the security implications of publicity, and it is the role of support staff, partners, and Justice & Peace to inform and advise them accordingly.

3. The long-term benefits of the human rights defender's stay:

- Define how the rest, new knowledge, contacts and skills obtained in the three months can benefit the human rights defender's work and be of assistance to improve their security when the human rights defender returns.
- Keeping the objectives in mind can help to make choices between possible activities when the programme of the human rights defender becomes too busy.



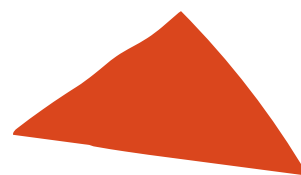
Useful information to take into account



- Many people and partners are involved in Shelter City, such as the host organization, other partner organizations such as universities and the municipality, Justice & Peace, and external support staff such as trainers, teachers, and practitioners. It is therefore important to communicate well about the human rights defender's agenda to avoid conflicting commitments, but also to avoid that the human rights defender is overwhelmed by the amount of activities.
- Some guests still work throughout their stay which can add stress and workload in the 3 months. You can discuss with your supervisor how you can ensure that the guest still gets sufficient time to rest.
- Health conditions such as disabilities or chronic health conditions should also be taken into account by adjusting to their individual needs such as providing access to a general practitioner. Furthermore, the different socio-cultural-economic context should be taken into account by providing support in navigating host society and its cultural norms.
- A number of human rights defenders indicated that they did not like that their agenda was being shared with the entire working group. They see certain appointments (such as with the psychologist) as private. As a solution, a 'private' agenda can be created using the platform Mattermost with all the details, specifically for the human rights defender, local coordinator and the support staff. Also a 'public' agenda can be created for the broader working group, in which certain sensitive appointments can be blocked without giving further details.



Example agenda of the three-month stay

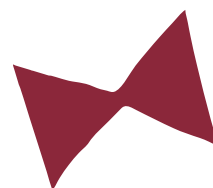


	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Week 1	Arrival		English lesson Intake at local host Welcome dinner		Psycho-social support		
Week 2							
Week 3	Networking event	Social event	English lesson		Psycho-social support		
Week 4	J&P capacity building Group dinner	J&P capacity building	J&P capacity building	J&P capacity building			
Week 5			English lesson		Psycho-social support	Social event	
Week 6			Networking event	Social event			
Week 7	J&P capacity building	J&P capacity building Group dinner	J&P capacity building	English lesson	Psycho-social support		
Week 8			English lesson			Social event	
Week 9	Networking event				Psycho-social support		
Week 10	J&P capacity building	J&P capacity building	J&P capacity building	J&P capacity building Group dinner			
Week 11	Travel to nearby country	Travel to nearby country	Travel to nearby country		Psycho-social support		
Week 12			Farewell dinner			Departure	



Tool 3

Communicating publicly about human rights defenders



When it comes to awareness raising, Shelter City aims to have a double impact.

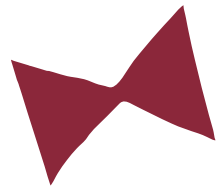
On the one hand, the human rights defender's presence in the city is a vehicle to raise awareness on human rights issues within the Dutch society. Through exchanges and debates with the human rights defender, human rights are made concrete and tangible to the general public.

On the other hand, encounters with the public are a way for the human rights defenders to gain visibility and support for their work. Knowing that their work is known, supported and recognized by a broad range of people and allies is a powerful motivation for human rights defenders to carry on in difficult circumstances.

Your role as support staff is to facilitate meaningful connections for both the guest human rights defender, and with those in your city or in the Netherlands.



Public outreach and human rights defenders



When reaching out to the public the following aspects need to be taken into account

It is important to highlight that while facilitating public outreach opportunities, there are cases where public exposure can be counterproductive.

After they return, human rights defenders can be suspected of having “collaborated with foreign governments” and accused of being “foreign agents”. In some countries, this can have serious consequences. In some extreme cases, what is posted online and what human rights defenders say and do in the Netherlands can provide material to harass human rights defenders in different ways (defamation, fabricated evidence, blackmail, etc.).

Therefore, the way we communicate about an human rights defender should always be

carefully considered, weighing the pros and cons of publicity. Between not even mentioning that a human rights defender is hosted in the city, to fully disclosing their name, organizations and where they work, there is a wide range of possibilities.

Justice & Peace will always provide advice depending on the human rights defender’s specific background and security assessment.

Note that while human rights defenders are the first ones responsible for their own security, they might not always be aware of the security consequences of gaining publicity. It is important that they are able to make informed choices.





Box 2

Basic public communication guidelines

Justice & Peace has established some basic rules and guidelines for publicly communicating about the human rights defenders. We kindly ask that all support staff adhere and implements the following:

- **Only first name** (or a nickname/pseudonym, unless discussed e.g. in the cases where including full name & thus more exposure fosters more safety and security)
- **No organization names** (unless agreed upon)
- **Absolutely NO arrival or departure dates**
- **Absolutely NO accommodation address**
- **Always ask for consent** of the human rights defenders before publishing anything, including photos.

These rules apply before, during and after the human rights defender's stay. They can be made more or less stringent depending on the cases and after face-to-face discussion with the human rights defender and in consultation with Justice & Peace.

There may indeed be cases where international publicity is an additional protection to the human rights defender.

Sometimes, some topics should not be mentioned but it is fine to talk about some non-controversial activities undertaken by the human rights defender (e.g. talking about rights enshrined in the constitution is fine, but criticising an authoritarian regime in public might bring the human rights defender into trouble).

In short, common sense and precaution should guide you in assessing whether or not publishing something about the human rights defender entails risks or not.

The golden rule is to always ask yourself if our actions here do not further endanger the human rights defender back home.

Tip:

When organizing public events, make sure to use a **guest list** and **ask people not to tweet or take photos if this is not appropriate for security reasons.**



Box 3

Shelter City communications



The global movement of Shelter City currently consists of 23 Shelter Cities worldwide, including 13 Dutch cities. To support and improve the consistency and visibility of the movement, we have created various platforms and tools that each Shelter City can use in their outreach activities.

Shelter City website

The website makes it possible to show local target audiences what is happening in Shelter City and how it contributes to supporting human rights defenders worldwide. It can also be useful to get the inhabitants of the Shelter Cities involved. Every Shelter City has an individual page about their city. This includes information about the city, partners involved, upcoming events and news from that city.

To edit or add content to the website, contact the Communications team at Justice & Peace.

Shelter City branding

Each Shelter City receives a branding toolkit, with city-specific logos, templates, and other brand assets that they can use in their communications.

For more information, read Shelter City library below.

Shelter City social media

You can find Shelter City on Instagram and Facebook. These channels are managed by the Shelter City Communications

team at Justice & Peace. Here, relevant information, events, and updates from Shelter City are shared.

Some cities have also started their own Shelter City social media pages. Your city can too!

To have your content shared on the Shelter City channels or for questions on how to start your city's own social media channels, contact the Communications team at Justice & Peace.

Shelter City library

All partners can access a Shelter City library. The purpose of this library is to create an online internal platform where Shelter City materials are actively shared, such as manuals and communication materials.

Shelter City partners can look at the available materials to get inspired and avoid duplication of efforts. For instance, if City X has created an intake questionnaire to prepare for the arrival of the human rights defender, it could be useful for other cities to be aware of this and see whether this could be used for their city too.

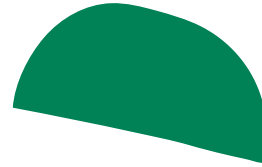
We hope to learn from each other's experience and encourage exchange.

To access the library, contact the Communications team at Justice & Peace.



Tool 4

Networking



Establishing a network of relevant organizations, civil servants, politicians, researchers, journalists, and other allies can assist the human rights defender in several ways.

Your role as Shelter City support staff is to help facilitate these meetings with allies relevant to your Shelter City guest. This section provides tips and guidance on how to do so.

For example, human rights defenders can provide first-hand information on the situation in their country, making sure that those issues remain at the agenda of politicians and donors.

In return, they can get support, advice and expertise, and exchange experiences from those they network with.

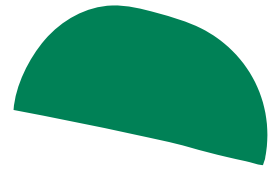
Having a broad professional network is also a way for human rights defenders to increase their international profile. It can add to their security, as a wider range of people could potentially take action should something happen to them after they return.

“Widening my networks is also one of the perks in of the Shelter City programme. Societal change requires societal action, and this entails having good connections with like-minded individuals and organizations with whom one can work together in making these changes.”

CZARINA, HUMAN RIGHTS LAWYER FROM THE PHILIPPINES & FORMER SHELTER CITY ROTTERDAM GUEST



Conducting effective meetings



Before the meeting

- Make sure the **human rights defender is fully informed** about who they will meet and what the organization/institution does.
- Offer the human rights defender, that someone from the support staff can accompany them at the meeting.
- Set out a few objectives for the meeting, in line with the objectives for the stay. Is it only about exchanging information? Can you foresee any concrete long-term outcome such as funding or collaboration? (Note that this is unlikely to come out after the first meeting, but establishing a personal contact is an important first step). Make sure the human rights defenders do not have unrealistic expectations about what they can get out of the meeting.
- Make sure the human rights defender has a clear and structured story to tell, but also that there is room for exchange. Preparation is all the more important if the human rights defender is not comfortable with English: the language barrier can affect the quality of the meeting.
- Be aware of the format of the meeting whether it is online or in-person and prepare accordingly.

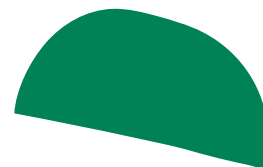
"As human rights defenders we accept the situation of danger. We feel that it is a consequence that we need to accept if we want to be part of the struggle. The Shelter City programme reminded me that I am human before being a defender."

FORMER SHELTER CITY GUEST





Conducting effective meetings



During the meeting

- Keep the objectives in mind and conduct the meeting in a **result-oriented** way.
- As support staff, you will know the story of the human rights defender. While they will do most of the talking, you can thus play an important role in **asking relevant questions** when you feel they have forgotten to mention something important, or are not clear.
- Ask the person whether they know **other relevant organizations or people to meet**.

After the meeting

- Shortly **debrief** with the human rights defenders. What could be improved for the next meeting. What are the next steps? How can the human rights defender capitalize on the meeting and use its outcomes in their work?
- Keep score of the main points discussed and if there are any **follow-up actions**.





Box 4

Relevant organizations for networking



As we host a considerable number of human rights defenders per year, we need to manage our contacts well and make sure they do not get flooded with requests. Always check beforehand whether the organization is relevant (thematically/ geographically) before requesting a meeting. Below is a non-exhaustive list of organizations. If you do not have the contact details of an organization, or an organization does not respond to your meeting request, please contact Justice & Peace.

Development/human rights

Amnesty International
Cordaid
Hivos
Mensen met een Missie
Netherlands Helsinki Committee
Human Rights Watch
Oxfam Novib
Protection International

Think tanks

The Hague Institute for Global Justice
College voor de Rechten van de Mens
Clingendael Institute

Shelter City Partners (selection)

ContourdeTwern
Vluchtelingen in de knel
Fundación Acceso
Peace Brigades International – Nederland
Stichting Humanitas
African Human Rights Network
Center for Participation and Development
Open Society Initiative for Eastern Africa
Protect Defenders
Urgent Foundation
Mondiaal Maastricht

Peacebuilding/conflict resolution

Global Partner for the Prevention of Armed Conflict
PAX for Peace
Impunity Watch
Humanity in Action
MasterPeace Global
ProDemos

Environmental rights

European Climate Foundation
Greenpeace International
LandAC The Netherlands
Both ENDS

Human rights in Africa

PROMENA Foundation
African Diaspora Policy Centre
European Network for Central Africa
Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies

Security

PROMENA Foundation
African Diaspora Policy Centre
Human Security Collective
AiiD



Box 4

Relevant organizations for networking

Legal/access to justice/ transitional justice

Lawyers for Lawyers
REDRESS
The Hague Institute for the
Internationalisation of Law
Avocats Sans Frontières
Global Human Rights Defence
EUROJUST

LGBTIQ+ rights

COC Netherlands
COC Haaglanden
ILGA Europe (Brussels)
TransAmsterdam
IHLIA Amsterdam LGBT Heritage

Journalists/Freedom of expression

Free Press Unlimited
Association of Journalists at the ICC
RNW-RNTC
Bellingcat
Lawyers for Lawyers
International Federation of Journalists
European Federation of Journalists
World Press Photo

Governmental organizations

Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Ministry of Justice & Security
Parliament (eerste en tweede kamer)
Municipalities

Women's rights

Wo=Men
Femmes for Freedom
Mama Cash
ATRIA
Women's Initiatives for Gender Justice

Penal Reform

Foro Penal
Penal Reform International
The World Organization Against Torture

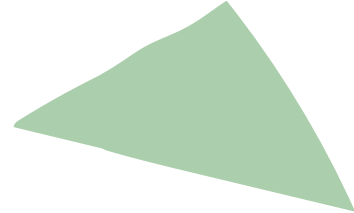
International Organizations

International Court of Justice
International Centre for Transitional Justice
International Criminal Court
Organization for the Prohibition
of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)
United Nations OCHA Centre



Tool 5

Human rights defenders and security



As support staff, you can support human rights defenders in thinking about their security and putting what they learnt in the trainings to action. Furthermore, you may also receive an online security training webinar by Justice & Peace. This will not only be beneficial for your security but will also prepare you for the security sessions with the human rights defenders.

The following section provides relevant resources that you can share with your Shelter City guest.

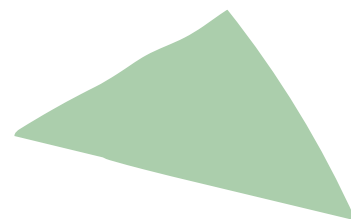
“As a human rights defender, you only think about the people you are doing it for. You do not think about yourself, your own safety.”

OLIVIER, HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER &
FORMER SHELTER CITY THE HAGUE GUEST





Aspects to consider concerning security



Justice & Peace adopts a holistic approach to the security of human rights defenders.

When working with human rights defenders on dissecting the threats and risks they face, we do not only look at the direct threats to their physical integrity or that of their properties (what is commonly referred to as **physical security**), such as the risk of having important documents stolen or being physically attacked. Other aspects of security are also tackled, such as **digital security** (in the digital world, threats represented by hacking, online harassment or mass surveillance are less concrete, and therefore often neglected) or **psychosocial security** (human rights defenders rarely pause to take care of themselves, which can lead to high levels of stress and sometimes burnout or depression).

All human rights defenders who come to the Netherlands will follow a security training with Justice & Peace, where we cover all those aspects and assist them in establishing a security plan. During this training, other aspects may also be covered such as **organizational security** (what measures are put in place in their organization?), **legal security** (is my organization legal under my country's law? Do I have legal experts to support me if I get arrested?), the **security of their family**, or **financial security** (a pre-requisite before helping others).

Holistic security is not about looking at the different aspects of security separately. It is about looking at their interaction, and getting a comprehensive picture of the human rights defender's situation, including the social,

political and economic context. For instance, if you are exhausted and stressed, you will be less likely to identify and adequately respond to threats. If you relocate to be physically safe, but cannot stand being away from your family, you might not be able to function properly. If you do not fully understand how technology can be used against you, you will not be able to fully grasp the potential implications on your security.

While it is not possible to end up with a fail-proof security plan that will keep the human rights defender away from any risk, we will provide them with tools to analyse their threats and develop measures to mitigate them, and prevent the worst from happening. The training is also a crucial place to exchange experiences with other human rights defenders.





Box 5

Resources on human rights defenders and security



Resources on Shelter City website

On the Shelter City website, you can find a page dedicated to providing useful resources and links for human rights defenders.

[Visit it here.](#)

Other resources

Tactical Tech's [Holistic Security Manual](#)

Protection International's [Manual for Human Rights Defenders](#)

Front Line Defenders' [Workbook on Security](#)

[Umbrella](#) - Security made easy: app giving digital and physical security tips for individuals at risk.





Box 6

Tools for safe online communication

Digital technologies make it easier for human rights defenders to document, research, verify, store, receive and publish information on human rights and human rights abuses. But this convenience comes at a cost.

More than ever before, human rights defenders are tracked by state and non-state actors who have at their disposal advanced online surveillance tools. While the use of technology for communications and advocacy is proving to be critical, the growing threats in the digital sphere are becoming more and more prominent.

The result, in many cases, is a significant curtailment of freedom of expression and the weakening of the right to privacy. A segment of the tech community has set itself the goal to resist massive data collection, mass surveillance and online censorship. This involves both a tactical (incl. risk assessment and behavioral change) and a technical approach (technical tools, software and hardware

designed with human rights in mind).

Below are a few tools we advise human rights defenders to use, but also advise you on using when communicating with your guest:

- [Signal](#): A secure alternative to WhatsApp
- [Jitsi Meet](#): A safe alternative to Skype
- [Tutanota and Protonmail](#): Alternative email services that offer encrypted emails. If two persons hold a Protonmail email account, their emails will automatically be end-to-end encrypted. The storage of the emails is also encrypted, which means even the company does not have access to the content. The same goes for Tutanota.
- **More resources are available at:**
Securityplanner.org
Totem-project.org
Ssd.eff.org





Tool 6

Psychosocial support



This section provides a deeper look into understanding and providing psychosocial support to visiting human rights defenders at risk.

Their stay in the Netherlands, where they have the space to reflect and take care of themselves, is a good moment to get support. Wellbeing is therefore an important focus of Shelter City, and you can help to facilitate this.

Human rights defenders work in environments often characterized by socio-political oppression, asymmetric distribution of power and wealth, high rates of poverty, and strong marginalization of vulnerable groups (including grassroots activists). Impunity is generally the norm.

Emotionally, human rights work is highly demanding, and the context in which they evolve has a high impact on their personal wellbeing. Human rights defenders are repeatedly exposed to high levels of violence and are often times targets of it, which may result in high levels of stress, exhaustion and sometimes trauma. Human rights defenders may find it difficult to talk about their mental health. Human rights defenders are highly committed individuals who often perceive personal sacrifices as inherent to their work.

A certain culture of martyrdom also prevails within the social circles of human rights defenders. It is important to emphasize that self-care is not self-indulgence, but imperative for themselves and their work. It is a matter of sustainability. In their home country, human rights defenders rarely have the time or opportunity to ask for professional support.

Their stay in the Netherlands, where they have the space to reflect and take care of themselves, is a good moment to get support. Wellbeing is therefore an important focus of Shelter City, and you can help to facilitate this.

Tip:

How can you best explain the importance of wellbeing? We often give the example of **being on an airplane**. In the case of an emergency on a plane, the flight attendant asks that you only help others with their oxygen mask **AFTER** you put on your own oxygen mask. In this example, **you can only help others once you've helped yourself**. This also applies to supporting others in your community, you first need to look after yourself.





Arranging psychological support



During the human rights defenders' stay, you will support in arranging psychosocial support.

Due to cultural sensitivities, but also expectations put on them, it might be particularly difficult for human rights defenders to ask for support. If preferred, psychological support can also be offered in their language, some therapists in the Netherlands also work in Spanish, French or Arabic.

The possibility to see a therapist should always been offered to human rights defenders – while making clear that Shelter City is not the place to start a fully-fledged therapy. In agreement with the therapist, it is possible in three months to work on stress-management and building resilience, or on reducing PTSD symptoms (e.g. through EMDR techniques).

If the human rights defender feels like the approach of psychosocial care is inappropriate, **always ensure they have a safe space for them to say so and be ready to stop and try something else.**

As a support staff you can help by finding out if there are any other activities that the human rights defender enjoys that can be an alternative to therapy such as, yoga, tai-chi, dance therapy, art therapy, etc. Throughout their stay in Shelter City, it is important to reassess the needs of the defender in terms of wellbeing.

Severe psychological conditions such as burnout or PTSD must be diagnosed and dealt with by professionals. **Your role as support staff is to be attentive to signs of distress**, and with the assistance of your supervisor and Justice & Peace, **direct the human rights defender to appropriate support.** See Box 7 for guidance.

If your city needs support in accessing suitable psychosocial support, please do not hesitate to contact the team at Justice & Peace.



"I found a Shelter City but better a 'Shelter Community'. What beautiful meetings with people and organisations (...) that make sense and inspire me (...) I can say without fear that I have a family, not in the DRC but in the world."

HONNEUR-DAVID, CONGOLESE JOURNALIST &
FORMER SHELTER CITY HAARLEM GUEST



Box 7

Recognizing stress and its symptoms



Stress is the body's natural reaction in response to a physical and/or emotional challenge. It can be positive, enabling the individual to react promptly and adequately to any given situation. However, if stress lasts too long, the body's resources will be exhausted and the person will develop harmful or negative forms of stress reactions.

Basic stress may be caused by various sources of tensions at the individual, emotional, family or social levels. It normally decreases when the source of tension disappears, or coping strategies have been developed.

Cumulative stress follows prolonged exposure to work and non-work stress factors and may develop into professional exhaustion known as "burnout".

The most common signs of cumulative stress include:

- **Physical symptoms:** Overtiredness, diarrhoea, constipation, headaches, abdominal and back pains, sleeping disorders, appetite changes.
- **Emotional signs:** Anxiety, frustration, guilt, mood swings, undue pessimism or optimism, irritability, crying spells, nightmares, apathy, depression.

- **Mental signs:** Forgetfulness, poor concentration, poor job performance, negative attitude, loss of creativity and motivation, boredom, negative self-talk, paranoid thoughts.

- **Relational signs:** Feeling isolated, resentful or intolerant of others, loneliness, marriage problems, nagging, social withdrawal, anti-social behaviour

- **Behavioural changes:** Increased alcohol, drug and/or tobacco use, change in eating habits or sexual behaviour, increase in risky behaviour, hyperactivity, avoidance of situations, cynical attitudes.

- **Collapse of belief systems:** Feeling of emptiness, doubt in religious beliefs, feeling unforgiven, looking for magical solutions, loss of purpose of life, needing to prove self-worth, cynicism about life, needing to prove self-worth, cynicism about life.



Box 8

Burnout and other symptoms of stress

A **burnout** is an exhaustion of normal stress coping mechanisms. Emotional exhaustion constitutes the main characteristic of a burnout. The symptoms of cumulative stress have intensified and become chronic.

Traumatic stress or critical incident stress is caused by situations outside the range of everyday experience, on which there is no control, where one's life or that of a loved one is perceived to be under immediate threat. After a traumatic event/critical incident, it is healthy and normal to react in one way or another. During the first hours, the following symptoms might appear:

- Shock, disbelief, feeling of being overwhelmed
- Strong or extreme emotional reaction or detachment
- Confusion, difficulty or disorientation in making decisions
- Physical reactions: nausea, dizziness, intense fatigue, sleeping difficulties, muscle tremors, etc.

Additional reactions during the first days and weeks:

- Persistent, intrusive recollections (flashbacks) of the incident, nightmares
- Tendency to avoid certain aspects of the incident (places, thoughts, emotions, activities)
- Hyper-alertness accompanied by a startle reflex, quick temper and sleeping disorders

In a certain number of cases, the above signs last for more than one to three months and traumatic stress may further develop into PTSD.

This is a pathological condition which will require referral to a mental health specialist. Additional symptoms include: persistent depression, irritability and mood swings, "numbness", feeling of guilt, feeling of helplessness, loss of faith and hope, loss of appetite, use of substances, etc.

Adapted from: Managing stress in the field International, Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 2009.

Wellbeing and support with traumatized people



Supporting traumatized people

There are also a few things you can do in interacting with traumatized human rights defenders. Since traumatic events are characterized as being beyond one's control, a crucial point is to never treat the human rights defender as if they are powerless or do not have agency. You can also assist them in identifying their strength and capacities (resources, network, etc.) and in changing their inner belief about what they are able to do.

- **Ensure** basic needs are met.
- **Communicate:** Uncertainty increases the level of stress for the human rights defender. Provide the human rights defender with accurate and full information.
- **Normalize** the emotional effects of traumatic events.
- **Ensure social support:** This is a core aspect for coping and resilience building
- **Empower:** Seek to engage human rights defenders in solving their own problems, the human rights defenders should participate in decision making
- **Avoid inadvertent re-traumatization:** For example, by asking intrusive questions or asking them to tell their story (in public, meeting) if they do not wish so

Incorporating wellbeing into the programme

The Shelter City programme provides important elements that contribute to the psychological rehabilitation and resilience-building of human rights defenders, such as living in a safe and welcoming environment and receiving international recognition for their work.

However, we should remain attentive that human rights defenders are not isolated during their stay, have listening ears to talk to, but also people to have fun with. At home, the human rights defender's community, family, and colleagues provide them with a support network which becomes far remote when they come to the Netherlands. Additionally, there might be some cultural differences which can be hard to deal with (e.g. coming from a collectivist society into an individualistic society).

Finding social contacts through various networks in the city (volunteers, local Amnesty International group, students, etc.) is a good way to facilitate the human rights defender to build a social network.

It is important to re-emphasize that support staff are not professionals in dealing with traumatized people. Box 8 and 9 offer useful and practical tips to follow (eg. active listening, supporting them during their meetings and planning activities with them whilst managing their expectations/setting boundaries).

Source: Maik Muller, Workshop on psycho-social support to HRDs to Justice & Peace staff, August 2016.

Tip:

Further guidance on how to navigate and support the wellbeing of human rights defenders in relocation programmes can be found in a publication Justice & Peace contributed to: [The Barcelona Guidelines on wellbeing and temporary international relocation of Human rights defenders at risk](#). We highly recommend all existing and new support staff members to familiarize themselves with this publication.



Box 9

Psycho-sensitive communication with human rights defenders

There exists broad cultural differences in how emotions are expressed. In many cultures, the expression of emotional suffering is more indirect (somatic rather than emotional), diffuse and non-verbal. While working with human rights defenders, it is important to consider that the meaning of words is influenced by cultural background. **Non-verbal communication** also plays a very important role.

Basic attitudes for constructive communication rely on:

- **Empathy:** Understand and show understanding
- **Respect:** Accept the person and their experience
- **Interest:** Show that the human rights defender and the incidents they have experienced are important to you

- **Precision:** Be clear in objectives and procedures

You can also make use of **active listening principles** in order to increase concentration and improve mutual understanding:

- **Give full attention to the speaker:** Eye contact, nodding, verbal and non-verbal messages that show interest
- **Listen beyond the words the person says:** Observe body language and tone of voice, listen with all senses
- **Paraphrase:** Regularly summarize and clarify what you understood, to confirm that you understood correctly and to show interest and appreciation

Source: Maïk Muller, Workshop on psycho-social support to human rights defenders to Justice & Peace staff, August 2016.



Tool 7

Taking care of yourself

Working as support staff, it is important to try and identify where your boundaries are and decide for yourself on how much you can take on. defenders.

Always remember that while you are the first contact for the human rights defender, you should never feel like you are solely responsible for them. Human rights defenders themselves should be in the lead to take initiatives, communicate, explore, and make friends.

Your supervisor, and ultimately Justice & Peace, are responsible for their security and their stay. Accompanying human rights defenders throughout their stay should always remain a pleasure! Do not hesitate to seek support in your team or with Justice & Peace, if you feel the need to talk about the challenges you face.



Box 10

A few self-care tips

- Be open and listen, but do take distance if necessary.
- Don't hesitate to say no if the human rights defender asks you something you don't feel up to do, or that goes beyond your role.
- Ask for help or advice (to Justice & Peace staff, your supervisor, a specialist, or support staff in other Shelter Cities) before feeling overwhelmed.
Be clear about when you are available: It might happen that you have activities after office hours with the human rights defender. But outside those set moments, extra hours should only be done in case of emergency.
- Share the 'burden': Ask colleagues or volunteers to take up some of the activities when they become too numerous.
- Manage expectations as to what you can and cannot do. Things you can do include listening to them, taking part in activities together, being empathetic, confirming the importance of their job, bringing a sense of humour into the conversation, making sure they take care of their health and have time to rest, etc. There are other things you cannot do, such as erase bad memories, solve all their problems, help their families or change the situation back home.



Checklist for Shelter City support staff

The toolbox for Shelter City support staff is designed to provide guidance and tips on working with human rights defenders staying in Shelter City.

- ☐ I understand various human rights issues and am aware of the challenges that human rights defenders face
- ☐ I know the individual elements of the Shelter City programme
- ☐ I am familiar with the timing of the human rights defender's stay
- ☐ I am well aware of the elements to be taken into account when creating a tailor-made programme for human rights defenders
- ☐ I embrace the basic rules of public communication in the context of human rights defenders' security
- ☐ I have a good understanding on how to conduct effective meetings as well as of the relevant organisations
- ☐ I can identify stress and its symptoms
- ☐ I have a basic understanding of how to deal with traumatized people
- ☐ I know how to use psycho-sensitive communication with human rights defenders
- ☐ I am aware of the fact that I am not a professional in any of these segments and am always able to reach out to my supervisors for guidance or help
- ☐ I understand the boundaries that I can set to differentiate between friend and support staff
- ☐ I know how to set boundaries to maintain a healthy relationship between support staff and human rights defenders
- ☐ I understand the importance of taking care of myself when working as a support staff and know how to do so

Do you have any questions? Please do not hesitate to contact us at info@sheltercity.org or speak directly with your team members for support.

We thank you for your incredible work and dedication, and for standing side by side with human rights defenders.