



Ministry of Foreign Affairs



# Speak Truth to Power

## Report



Expert Meeting, 9th, 10th and 11th of December 2013  
International Seminar, 21st and 22nd of January 2014

The Hague, The Netherlands

# Report Speak Truth to Power

The Expertmeeting and the International Seminar were sponsored by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and organized by Justice and Peace Netherlands and Human Security Collective

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# Introduction

Human rights Defenders (HRDs) play an essential role in defending fundamental freedoms all over the world. They are a major driving force behind democratization. The courage these people display deserves both moral and practical support. Far from being recognized for what they are – vital protagonists for change, the guarantors of a free society – HRDs are, on the contrary, subjected daily to repression by regimes that are all the harsher for having understood the force and the legitimacy of their claims.

The right to defend human rights exists and is protected internationally by treaties and conventions as well as several regional mechanisms for protection, such as the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders. The EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders were adopted in 2004 and reviewed in 2008. These Guidelines assist EU missions in their approach to HRDs. EU missions have been tasked to develop local strategies, in close cooperation with HRDs, which define the EU's line of action.

These treaties and conventions provide a strong framework through which the protection of HRDs can be ensured. Their implementation needs attention, as in practice, HRDs often faces many challenges, while carrying out their work.

On January 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> 2014, the international seminar “Speak Truth to Power” took place in The Hague. It was co-hosted and organized by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs and two Dutch NGOs: Justice and Peace Netherlands and Human Security Collective. The seminar brought together human rights defenders from all over the world, European External Action Service staff, EU Commission and EU member states colleagues working on Human Rights Defenders and NGO's. The seminar was preceded by a meeting of experts that prepared the agenda and introductory papers.

Main topics on the agenda were the Netherlands Shelter City Initiative, the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders and digital security. Furthermore the participants discussed some of the changing circumstances and the restrictions faced by NGOs: the shrinking political space and operational space, the problems regarding receiving foreign funding and the negative effects of counter terrorism regulations.

This report highlights how the expert meeting in 2013 and the international seminar in 2014 paid attention to these topics.



# 1. Objectives

The International seminar “Speak Truth to Power” was organized with HRDs and focused on their challenges so they can make their voices heard more effectively in international forums and in their own countries. What expertise and skills are needed to further strengthen vulnerable local Human Rights Defenders, living and operating outside the country capitals and in remote areas? Which tools and modules are there and what tools should be developed?

This international seminar was based on a preparatory expert meeting that was held from the 9<sup>th</sup> till the 11<sup>th</sup> of December 2013. The objectives of this expert meeting, as well as the objectives for the international seminar, were the same and were formulated as follows:

- To identify and further develop mechanisms to provide an enabling environment at international, regional and local level for the protection and empowerment of HRDs.
- To identify expertise and skills needed to further strengthen vulnerable local HRDs, living and operating outside the country capitals and in remote areas, and further develop relevant tools and modules.

## 2. Themes

### 2.1. Protection Mechanisms

Since the first United Nations Declaration for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders was adopted in 1998, several mechanisms for protection have been developed within the existing regional organizations<sup>1</sup>. As the latest addition to the protection mechanisms, the UN has adopted a groundbreaking resolution on the issue of reprisals with the aim to end the disconcerting pattern of harassment, attack and reprisals against HRDs. The resolution explicitly calls upon the Secretary-General to appoint an official to coordinate the international response on the issue of reprisals, to strengthen protections for HRDs and to intervene in cases of alleged attacks. Furthermore, the resolution calls on States to pass and enact laws to protect HRDs.

However, one can raise questions about the way in which the UN and regional protection mechanisms are operationalized and are practically implemented. Do they offer adequate protection to HRDs? Should a regional mechanism for the protection of HRDs be developed and implemented? What are the consequences of a lack of a regional protection mechanism for HRDs? On a more practical level, what can non-governmental organizations (NGOs) do to assist HRDs at risk? Providing regional shelter in case of imminent threats, raise individual cases at the international level and provide training and network opportunities to HRDs?

In addition to the UN protection mechanisms, there are the EU guidelines; can EU missions strengthen this existing mechanism and the EU focal points on HRD's? Does the Dutch protection model for temporary shelter "The Hague Shelter City" offer sufficient protection for HRD's and could this model be used by other EU countries? How can EU member states instruct their embassies abroad on these guidelines? Could the EU guidelines be contextualized with regard to local initiatives (e.g. the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project)?

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<sup>1</sup> The African Commission Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders in Africa, the Functional Unit on Human Rights Defenders of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, the Office of the Commissioner on Human Rights of the Council of Europe, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the European Union Guidelines for the protection of human rights defenders. Since 2000, there is also the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders.

Implementation of these EU guidelines is important as they raise awareness, generate the resources and capabilities required to engage with these local mechanisms and help to reach out to HRDs outside of the capital cities.

Coalition building on national, regional and international level is important for HRDs and NGOs. These coalitions allow for an exchange of solutions to problems that HRDs and NGOs face all over the world. However, these coalitions might be problematic in a repressive environment. What are the possibilities for informal networks and how could these be supported by the EU?

## 2.2. Legislative and Financial Measures that Reduce the Civil and Political Freedoms of Human Rights Defenders and Civil Society Organizations

Over the past decade surveillance of the financial system and demands for an increased regulation and financial transparency of NGOs have become part and parcel of the suite of counter-terrorism measures with the stated aim of reducing their vulnerability to abuse by terrorist organizations. As a result, human rights grant-making and grant-receiving seem to have been restricted in many parts of the world.

These financial and legal restrictions -on the national and international level- are felt by HRDs and NGOs in varying degrees. An understanding of the systemic causes of these restrictions could help, as it opens up the possibility for smart advocacy on the rights to freedom of speech, assembly, association, and internet.

This parallel session will provide an opportunity to discuss with EU officials the challenges HRDs face and the various initiatives that are undertaken to address these.

## 2.3. Digital Awareness: the Bright and Dark Side of Digital Tools and Technologies

The internet is a vital tool for the work of Human Rights Defenders (HRD's). Digital tools and technologies are making it easier for HRD's to research, verify, store, share and publish information. Citizen journalism is rapidly growing and social media are being used to inform the public about human rights, their violations and the activities of HRDs who have to address these problems. As such, the internet can be a tool that connects HRDS with the world and provides them with indirect security.

At the same time, digital tools and technologies can be used by governments and corporations to monitor civilians and censor and manipulate digital information. Governments also enact legislation that seriously restricts fundamental rights online, like blasphemy and anti-terrorism laws. The online rights of civilians sometimes is further restricted by social media, that lay down rules on their websites and platforms and often facilitate governments by e.g. blocking information or providing surveillance tools.



## Speak Truth to Power

This reality puts citizens, but especially HRDs, in a difficult and potentially dangerous situation. The internet they use to broadcast their message is the same internet that governments can have access to if they want to monitor and persecute them. It is for this reason that digital security must be an essential part of their work. Many HRDs see themselves as 'digital migrants' and see digital security as an extra burden on their work; something that will keep them from doing what they do best: defending human rights. Awareness is needed, but it is hard to pinpoint. The technology and tools are overwhelming and it is difficult to decide what is best. It is clear that a different approach is needed in each situation.

In this parallel session both approaches will be discussed, as both public recognition and the storing and sharing of sensitive information can be useful for HRDs in their work. Another key point will be how we can raise awareness on these topics, in the global North as well as the South.

## 3. Expert Meeting

### 3.1. Introduction

The preparatory Expert Meeting “Speak Truth to Power” was held from the 9<sup>th</sup> till the 11<sup>th</sup> of December, 2013, in The Hague. The papers below are a summary of the outcomes and recommendations of the meeting, and focus on three specific themes:

1. Protection Mechanisms,
2. Legal and Financial Frameworks and Measures
3. Digital Awareness.

The recommendations emerged from discussions during the expert meeting between HRDs from various parts of the world and experts in the field of human rights. Both groups of people participated in the expert meeting. They discussed on the three themes in break out and plenary sessions.

The papers below served two goals. Firstly, as guidance for further discussions in the international seminar in January. And secondly, as future white papers/policy documents to further advance EU HRD policy.

The content of the papers gives a concise and powerful analysis of the many challenges HRDs currently face and the conditions and mechanisms that are required to enable them in their work. The authors of the papers also included a number of recommendations that might improve enabling governance and the legal and financial conditions in which HRDs operate, as well as mechanisms that could be implemented for protection when such conditions fall short. The subjects of the papers represent the current landscape, with all its obstacles and promising horizons, in which HRDs carry out their courageous work.

### 3.2. Protection Mechanisms

#### Shrinking Space for HRDs

The space in which HRDs work is consistently challenged by a variety of state and non-state actors. This prevents HRDs from doing their work and often also has repercussion on their families. The threats HRDs receive stem from them challenging traditional and economic power structures.

Several trends can be identified that prove a particular challenge to HRDs.

- State sponsored defamation campaigns are often used by states to portray HRDs as foreign agents who undermine national security.

- Legislation is introduced in several countries that undermines the operating space for HRDs. Counter/Terrorism legislation is used to stem freedom of speech and assembly and is used to criminalize the activities of HRDs. HRDs face increased control and undue restrictions on funding, and in particular foreign funding. This has led to reduced operations of many HRDs as they rely in large on foreign funds.
- Increased surveillance and censorship online undermines the freedom of expression of HRDs to operate freely as governments have expanded their online surveillance.

## Role of the EU

EU Delegation and EU Member state Embassies have an essential role to play where it comes to the implementation and operationalization of the Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders.

To increase the understanding of the guidelines it is essential that they are translated in the local languages. This will make the guidelines more effective as it will also reach beyond the urban centers. This should be accompanied with an overview of the actions that the EU can undertake to improve the protection of HRDs and a Local Implementation Strategy developed at national level.

Furthermore Member states should develop a rights based approach to their work, to strengthen the role of HRDs. This should include the development of indicators as a way to assess the implementation of the local Human Rights Country strategies.

Due to a reduced number and high turnover of staff, there is a lack of understanding of the EU guidelines and the international framework for the protection of HRDs. The lack of allocation of resources goes hand in hand with the increased suppression of HRDs

When the EU does take action, there is an urgent need for feedback to HRDs on actions taken by the EU and possible state responses. For example, the UN Working Group on Enforced Disappearances internationally, but also human rights dialogues and effectiveness of demarches and other forms of quiet diplomacy to protect HRDs. These measures can also provide to be a risk in some cases.

Finally there is a need to simplify protection of HRDs when under serious threat. There is often reluctance and delays in issuing visas to HRDs in serious risk or provide emergency funding.

## Trade and HRDs

Trade can be used as a tool for the protection of HRDs. The development of national actions plans by EU members' states on the implementation of the UN Principles on Business and Human Rights should be a tool to provide protection for those HRDs that work economic and social rights. Furthermore it provides

an opportunity to call on those European countries to investigate their supply chain, if violations to HRDs occur by their subcontractors.

Secondly the recent enactment of GSP+<sup>2</sup> provides the EU with a strong tool to put pressure on governments to uphold human rights standards that resulting from the ratification of core international conventions on human and labor rights, environmental protection and good governance as well as from the effective implementation thereof. Noncompliance with the core international conventions on human and labor rights, allows the EU to withdraw the trade preferences.

Lastly it is important that the EU pushes for an inclusion of human rights standards where it comes to export of *dual-use* items to suppressive regimes. Western technology is often used to undermine freedom of expression online and monitor individual HRDs,

### Digital Security

Digital security proves to be an important part of the protection of HRD. Digital security is more of a means to an end rather than an end in itself. This means that every HRD should take those measures necessary to protect themselves without becoming a barrier to their work. The EU Delegation and the Member states have an important role to play in making secure communication channels available to HRDs and using tools to secure their own email exchanges with HRDs. Furthermore they can provide secure internet access to HRDs in countries where this is restricted, and secondly make a physical message board available to facilitate interaction between HRDs in a crisis situation.

### National Human Rights Institutions (NHRI) and Regional Mechanisms

Several regional mechanisms for protection of HRDs exist within regional organizations: the African Commission Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights Defenders in Africa, the Functional Unit on Human Rights Defenders of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, the Office for the Commissioner on Human Rights of the Council of Europe, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and European Union Guidelines for the protection of Human Rights Defenders that has a global focus and can offer both political and practical support to HRDs. Therefore there is a need for the EU to operate as an interlocutor between HRDs and NHRI and state authorities, and provide technical assistance to strengthen these local mechanisms for protection.

Although the existing regional mechanisms are fundamental for a more coordinated approach to the protection of HRDs their impact on a national level is not always profound. Therefore a stronger

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<sup>2</sup> The EU's "Generalized Scheme of Preferences" (GSP) allows developing country exporters to pay lower duties on their exports to the EU.

engagement with NHRIs is needed. NHRIs provide an essential link between the international and regional systems and its norms and standards and the reality of implementation, follow up and monitoring at the domestic level. This is especially viable in the Asian context where a regional body for the protection of HRDs has not materialized, although positive steps have been made with the creation of the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights.

To deal with this plethora of challenges, it is important for HRDs and CSOs to build coalitions on national, regional and international level. These coalitions allow for an exchange of solutions to problems that HRDs and CSOs face all over the world. However, these coalitions might be problematic in a repressive environment. Furthermore these coalitions should also comprise a broader range of actors, including business leaders and bank. What are the possibilities for informal networks and how can these be supported by the EU?

### 3.3. Legal and Financial Frameworks and Measures that Affect the Political Space of Civil Society and Human Rights Defenders

The participants to the preparatory expert meeting, held in The Hague in December 2013, concluded that the problems that hinder the work of civil society and Human Rights Defenders are systemic and require a systemic solution. The challenges are multi-faceted and multi-layered but have in common a clear point of departure: Human Rights Defenders need operational and political space to act. This space which is supported by the International Community is undermined by legislative financial rules and regulations encouraged by that same International Community. There is an urgent need for collective advocacy of the Human Rights (HR) community, whereby complementary actions with other affected civil society actors from the humanitarian, development, and peace building communities are required.

Stringent global counter terrorism rules and regulations implemented since 9/11 have forced civil society and Human Rights Defenders to maneuver in a shrinking international and domestic space. These laws and regulations impact the ability of Non-profit Organizations (NPOs) to operate and raise funds and are used by many governments as a pretext to clamp down on groups and actors that are critical of societal issues and government policies or assert the fundamental rights of individuals and minority groups. These international measures reinforce existing domestic measures that undermine the respect for human rights.

One of the protagonists of the global trend toward regulating NPOs is the Financial Action Task Force (FATF). FATF sets international Anti-Money Laundering, Countering the Financing of Terrorism and Anti proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction standards globally (AML/CFT standards). This inter-governmental task force was established 1989 to combat money laundering worldwide and the members develop standards intended to prevent illegal money streams on a global scale.

The US Treasury Department is one of the most powerful drivers behind standards development and implementation, and after the 2001 terrorist attacks on the US, the FATF structure and mechanism were focused on preventing terrorism financing. Presently, 40 AML/CFT and anti-proliferation standards are accepted by 180 countries. Every 5 to 6 years these countries are peer-evaluated on a rotating basis to ensure that they are compliant with FATF's recommendations. The findings of these evaluations are binding. Countries that are "partially" or "not compliant" have to improve compliance within 1 to 2 years to prevent blacklisting by the core FATF members, comprised of the most powerful countries in the world. Blacklisting can seriously impact the countries financial standing internationally.

One standard in particular, Recommendation 8, has the stated aim to reduce the vulnerability of NPOs to abuse by terrorist organizations [www.fatf-gafi.org/recommendations](http://www.fatf-gafi.org/recommendations). There is little evidence to legitimize a special focus on NPOs in relation to preventing terrorist financing. Yet, a number of countries have used the standard as a rationale for the development of repressive NPO laws or have referred to it as an international obligation they have to meet. The consequences of the implementation of the standard are felt by humanitarian agencies, Human Rights Defenders and peace builders that operate in areas where violent extremists are active. These are also used where governments have, in addition to stringent NPO laws, enacted special counterterrorism and emergency laws that give security forces authority to scrutinize and disrupt NPO activity. Human Rights Defenders and journalists in particular are refused access to these areas and when they are able to work do so at risk of their lives. The FATF AML/CFT regime is implemented in tandem with other regulations that have a global reach, such as UN Security Council Resolution 1373 and 1276, and are executed through UN bodies like the Counter Terrorism Executive Directorate and the Al Qaeda/Taliban Sanctions Committee. These require countries to implement the resolutions and increase their counter terrorism capabilities. The EU participates in all these international arrangements. In addition, global, regional and domestic terrorist or blacklists have been compiled by governments—and private companies such as World Check—in an effort prevent terrorist financing. These lists often have little oversight and are frequently outdated, rely on biased open-source information or include names added for political reasons.

The requirement for grant-makers, donors and financial service institutions—such as banks—to screen partners, recipients and clients against these lists has led to risk-aversion. The sanctions for non-compliance are steep and can result in the withdrawal of permission to operate and significant financial sanctions. All stakeholders involved in grant-making and grant-receiving are affected and have no choice but to comply with due diligence procedures that become more rigid and affect the entire cash transfer chain.

International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) that have sizeable cash-intensive operations in conflict zones and other high risk areas and banks are clients of these enterprises. A number of banks have

taken a decision to end their services to civil society clients and individuals that require cross-border cash transfers to conflict zones and high risk areas. A growing group of private human rights funders experienced difficulty getting their funds to partners as some countries have put limitations on foreign funding, under the guise of anti-nationalism or anti-terrorism arguments. Human rights organizations and Human Rights Defenders are singled out as anti-nationalist and enemies of the state, and as allies of western values that are alien to the nation's identity.

In the development of a post 2015 global aid agenda the demand for increased accountability of stakeholders in relation to the achievement of development goals <http://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/about/mdg.shtml> gives policy makers and governments another mechanism for civil society oversight which can be linked to the global security agenda. Like the unintended consequences of the FATF Recommendation 8 on civil society's operational and political space, an unintended consequence of this agenda could be that support to the most relevant actors and organizations is complicated by Official Development Assistance good governance standards. The often small-scale and innovative initiatives of local civil society and local Human Rights Defenders in particular become financially, legally and politically too complicated for donors to support and are therefore easily ignored or overlooked in favor of mainstream large (I)NGOs or commercial development firms.

There are a number of windows of opportunity to improve an enabling environment for Human Rights Defenders and their supporters that the group will present at the International Seminar of January 21 and 22, 2014. Others in the HR community can benefit from: the engagement with the FATF by an international FATF NPO group on a number of guidance documents in relation to the implementation of Recommendation 8, and the Humanitarian Assistance Facilitation Act in the USA which will allow humanitarian agencies and peace builders' access to certain conflict zones. [www.charityandsecurity.org/solutions/Humanitarian Assistance Faciliation Act](http://www.charityandsecurity.org/solutions/Humanitarian_Assistance_Facilitation_Act)

The upcoming revision of the EU HRD guidelines in 2014 provides another opportunity to address the issues outlined in the paper:

- Revise the guidelines to ensure that EU Heads of Missions include access to sources of funding in their reporting on the situation of HRDS (Recommendations 8 and 9)
- Press the FATF and UN CTED/CTITF (counter terrorism executive directorate and counter terrorism implementation task force) to ensure that rules designed to prevent the financing of terrorism do not adversely affect HRDs (in accordance with Recommendation 11)
- Incorporate the recommendations of the Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association on Civil Society's Right to Funding and Resources (A/HRC/23/39) into the EU HRD guidelines.

### 3.4. Improving Digital Security for NGO's and HRD's: an Integrated Approach

When asked, most HRDs will tell that they use the internet very often. Digital tools and technologies make it easier for them to research, verify, store, share and publish information in a very efficient manner. However, most HRDs are usually unaware of the perils of the digital age. Largely, the human rights movement is not invested in their digital security at all. While it is critically important to use technology for communications and advocacy, the growing threats of the digital sphere are becoming more and more dreadful. The movements of HRDs are targeted by repressive regimes all over the world by using different surveillance tools and by blocking their access to content.

In an effort to control the digital sphere, many governments have introduced several predatory legislative and technical regimes to block citizens' access to content. In this regard, at one level HRDs are targeted using surveillance tools; at another level Internet firewalls have been introduced to curb freedom of expression.

In many countries the internet is regulated by anti-terrorism laws and/or anti blasphemy laws. There is also a lot of (moral) policing online. This is not only done by governments; as the internet transforms itself from a free web space to a corporate web space, we see that corporations, like Facebook, Google and twitter, enact local laws on their websites and platforms. The question is how the mainstream human rights movement can be safeguarded from the growing threats posed by the digital world.

We believe that this issue is now getting a lot of attention and several international and local organizations try to combat these threats for HRDs and NGOs. NGOs like Frontline Defenders, Tactical Technology Collective, APC, EFF and Bytes for All have done a lot to create programs and tools that is both open source and free to use for online security. Such software can range from email clients to internet browsers, encryption software for email or data, and ways to securely store passwords. Next to this software, guides are developed to teach HRDs with little or no computer knowledge on how to use such programs.

But even with all this software and all these guides, something simple as secure emailing is for the most HRDs like using a tool from the future. The digital strategies for a secure electronic work environment aren't implemented. When asked, HRDs give many reasons why they do not -yet- work with these tools. They can roughly be divided in three different groups: HRDs that lack general knowledge on digital security, HRDs that lack the technical knowledge and HRDs who don't want to be distracted from their work on Human Rights and thus don't have the time to focus on digital security.



The first group, HRDs that lack general knowledge on digital security, are HRDs who don't know what the risks are or who don't know what they can do against digital insecurity. For them, a guidebook or training can make them aware of the risks that are out there and direct them at websites, tricks and tools that can help them improve digital security.

The second group is by far the largest group of HRDs. They know that there are digital threats, but they are unaware how to secure themselves from these threats. Although a lot of online guides can be found on the web and there are tons of free and open source software applications to improve internet security, these still require a bit of technical knowledge to install or to get acquainted with it. Then there is the point that there is a large variety of software. If you want to secure your email, there are multiple programs that will encrypt your email in different ways; how do you know, as a HRD, what to choose? These questions can be hard to answer, but trainings and the website from technical tech can help HRDs in these choices.

Thirdly and lastly, there are HRDs who don't want to be diverted from their normal Human Rights work, and who feel that working on digital security is exactly what their opposition wants. According to some of them, working on digital security is the same as working against NGO laws. It is work that is created for the NGOs to keep them from doing what they do best: Defending Human Rights. We believe that all these three groups have a reasonable standpoint. And although these different groups have different problems with the implementation of digital security, we think that they can be helped by one similar way: digital security for NGOs must be made more accessible and easy to use. By doing so it will be broader implemented, and will take less time to do so.

The question is, how can we make digital security for HRDs and NGOs more accessible? The question to this answer is, we believe, relatively simple. Learn and use only those tools that you need. For this four things are needed in both the North and the South: awareness, a checklist, training and support. We know that for example awareness raising and training is already offered, but we feel that a conclusive and integrated approach will make it easier for NGOs and HRDs to learn, install and use these programs.

The first step in this, is creating more awareness with the HRDs and NGOs. It is important that everyone knows how digital tools can be used to manipulate and monitor someone's computer. However, these trainings are mostly given in the South, but not in the North. These organizations, which are in contact with many HRDs in the South, are often the weakest link.

Secondly, once this awareness is raised one should be able to determine what a NGO should and can do to improve their digital security. For some NGOs this would mean full encryption on all the server locations, encrypted emailing and secure emailing, while for other NGOs we would only advise a simple way of secure emailing. The ideal would be that NGOs can determine, by advice or through a check-list,

what their threats are, how much time, money and knowledge they want to spend and what their technical capabilities are. Based on that information, a digital security plan can be made.

Thirdly, the NGOs and HRDs have to be trained to work with the software. This is probably the easiest part. Many NGOs already offer training to other NGOs and HRDs and a lot of good guides, handbooks and tools are developed for practicing.

Fourth and lastly, support must be organized. This can either be a helpdesk which you can contact over Skype or telephone, or some whiz kids that you contact through email, but good support is needed for the NGOs and HRDs who face (digital) problems when the trainer has left. This can be done from one NGO, either in the South or North, or multiple NGOs cooperating, but it is important that people who followed the guidebooks and training, but don't have much technical knowledge, are able to get good advice and support just as one should get support for a professional software manufacturer.

Such an integrated approach doesn't have to cost much, especially since we use the internet. But we believe that such a total approach, on top of all the work that has been done like designing the software, building the trainings and writing the guidebooks, will make digital security easy and accessible, also for the digital migrants.

## 4. International Seminar

### 4.1. Official Welcome Speech

The official welcome speech of the International Seminar was held by the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Frans Timmermans:

*Ladies and gentlemen,*

*The Quakers are credited with coining and popularizing the creed 'speak truth to power'. To them, it was closely related to the protection of human dignity and the cause of nonviolent struggle. The phrase echoed the methods of Mahatma Gandhi and foreshadowed those of Martin Luther King.*

*The act of speaking truth to power is a cornerstone of all human rights activity. In this short, punchy phrase, truth and power are diametrically opposed. We picture the image of David facing Goliath or some modern representation of it: a lone individual against an all-powerful Moloch.*

*The implicit message of speaking truth to power is, of course, that truth can hurt power more than any kind of physical weapon could. Truth here refers not only to demonstrable facts (as opposed to propaganda), but also to the truths that reside in our consciences. It goes beyond the simple fact that a zebra is a different animal than a giraffe, and embraces a set of fundamental, ethical principles. Historically, this kind of truth-speaking is closely related to freedom, human dignity and human rights. Truth in this sense is synonymous with a human rights worldview; with the moral imperative that human beings have certain inalienable rights – the right to a fair trial, the right to voice their opinions and to hold their own religious beliefs. The right to life, physical integrity and liberty. The right not to be imprisoned without due process.*



*The development of moral sentiments is what drives societies forward. Human beings, as a reflective species, are not slaves to their passions. We are also able to reflect on our behavior. We make*

*judgments about the world around us and about the society we live in, and we try to live in accordance with its ethical demands, both as individuals as well as collectively.*

*From their earliest conception, human rights have been part of this process. Many of the values now firmly enshrined as human rights were once ideas so novel that they were viewed with contempt, anger or mistrust, and were viciously repressed. Sadly, in too many parts of the world, this is still the case.*

*To speak truth to power is to speak up and challenge the status quo. To speak up for the universal value of human dignity. Challenging existing practices and presenting alternative visions of the future are what keeps societies moving forward. Of course, there is always one primary victim of this kind of progress: the powerful and the privileged.*

*So it is no surprise that tyrants throughout history have always resisted the free flow of ideas and feared criticism of their conduct. Stalin feared journalists and writers, and he viciously repressed those who dared to speak the truth.*

*Yet he also tried to make use of them. Writers and artists had to propagate official Soviet doctrines or perish in Siberia or worse. Through the craft of writers, Stalin sought to mould 'new' Soviet men. He once described writers as 'the engineers of human souls'.*

*Stalin's ominous phrase is a testimony to the power of ideas. And although ideas ultimately find their true expression in practice, change would not be possible without the promotion of ideas, without criticizing the status quo, without free and open communication between citizens. Speaking truth to power and speaking truth about power are an integral part of human rights. Wherever open and public scrutiny of the government is repressed, human rights are almost always in a dire state too.*

*We all know that in many parts of the world Human Rights Defenders are publicly defamed, falsely accused, arbitrarily detained and wrongly convicted. They are threatened, beaten, tortured and executed. And it doesn't stop there: Human Rights Defenders often see their families harassed and their offices raided. They become outcasts and lose their jobs. They are branded as traitors when in fact they are standing up for their fellow citizens. Human Rights Defenders are not anti-this or anti-that; they are pro-people and pro-rights.*

*So it is all the more important to protect those of you here today and the many other Human Rights Defenders out there. You are 'agents of change'. It is only when pressure is applied by Human Rights Defenders from inside society that we see real change. The Netherlands supports you as key drivers of change.*

## Speak Truth to Power

*In many parts of the world, Human Rights Defenders are oppressed and their activities restricted. It is especially worrisome that, around the world, the narrow scope for protest that does exist seems to be shrinking further.*

- *Legislation regulating NGOs' fundraising activities is increasingly restrictive. Some countries maliciously presume that funding from countries like the Netherlands could turn NGOs into foreign agents or traitors. They compel NGOs to register, and their access to funds from abroad is restricted. This curbs their right to freedom of association and their efforts to protect human rights.*
- *In some countries, we see systematic intimidation of Human Rights Defenders. We see campaigns that stigmatize and ridicule them and their organizations. Campaigns that present them as irrelevant to society, or even a threat to it. Laws are created to silence them, and these have a stifling effect on their freedom of speech and their ability to continue their activities.*



### Dutch Efforts

*The Netherlands is trying to address these challenges by supporting Human Rights Defenders in various ways:*

1. *By drawing attention to the position of Human Rights Defenders together with our European Union-colleagues in our contacts with other countries;*
2. *By providing training to Human Rights Defenders;*
3. *And by offering shelter for those who need temporary respite from the dangerous conditions they face every day.*

## Shelter City

*This month has seen the expansion of the successful Shelter City program. The Hague was the first Shelter City, but with the addition of Middelburg, we hope to be able to host up to ten Human Rights Defenders annually over the course of the next three years. The municipalities of The Hague and Middelburg have already agreed to provide homes for Human Rights Defenders and we expect other interested municipalities to follow soon.*

*I would like to thank Justice and Peace, who co-organized this seminar with us and successfully set up the Shelter City program. Thank you also to the Human Security Collective, the other co-organizer of this seminar. They emphasize the importance of an enabling legal and financial environment, and the need to both understand the systemic drivers that impede this environment and find solutions to overcome them.*

*The concept of a 'shelter city' is one rooted in Dutch history. In the eighteenth century, many Enlightenment thinkers sought refuge in the Netherlands. Voltaire's books, for example, were printed in Amsterdam.*

*Of course, when Human Rights Defenders have to seek shelter the most favorable and durable option is to support them in their own country or region, so they can continue to act as drivers of change. But when this is not possible, the Dutch Shelter City program provides a temporary solution.*

*The initiative's first year has been remarkable. Sheltering those under pressure in their own countries is a gratifying task, but it has also turned out to be an opportunity for people in the Netherlands to listen to and learn from four extraordinary people.*

- *Two of the four participants are here with us today: Asha from Sudan and Irène from the Democratic Republic of Congo.*
- *One of the other Human Rights Defenders, who received shelter and could not be here today, is Magamed Abubakarov, a criminal defense lawyer (or advocate) from Chechnya. He is widely known for his brave work on some of the most sensitive cases in the North Caucasus, many of which involved strong allegations of abduction, torture and fabrication of criminal charges by law enforcement officials. He won the 2013 Lawyers for Lawyers award in recognition of his immense courage.*



### *Drawing Attention*

*As you know, the Shelter City program is not the only thing the Dutch government does to protect Human Rights Defenders. The Netherlands also draws attention to the position of Human Rights Defenders in our bilateral contacts, in the Human Rights Council and in our political dialogues within various multilateral and regional fora.*

*Our government also calls attention to the position of civil society organizations, for instance through the Community of Democracies. There is also our annual award, the Human Rights Tulip, which was awarded this year to Aahung, a Pakistani organization promoting and protecting sexual and reproductive health and rights.*

*In addition, the Netherlands supports capacity-building for Human Rights Defenders and their organizations through our network of embassies. As part of International Human Rights Day, on the 10th of December each year, Dutch embassies around the world work together to highlight the important role of Human Rights Defenders. Our embassy in Tallinn, for example, organized a successful 'Diplohack', an event in which diplomats teamed up with activists, hackers and programmers to develop practical technical solutions to overcome obstacles to internet freedom.*

### *Provide Training*

*Part of our capacity-building work involves training Human Rights Defenders. Over the next three years, the Netherlands will be funding eight major human rights projects. Two of them will focus specifically on Human Rights Defenders:*

- The Netherlands Helsinki Committee (NHC) will provide practical, moral and legal support to individuals under threat or pressure in places like Russia, Azerbaijan, Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan.*
- The group Small Media will support Human Rights Defenders in Egypt, Syria and Iran by providing online training and technical support, as well as doing research to further improve the support that's available.*

### *Internet Freedom and Security*

*As the internet and mobile communications have become part of our everyday lives, their role in the act of speaking truth to power has become central. Yet internet freedom is often denied: around the globe, Human Rights Defenders, journalists and ordinary citizens are routinely arrested because of their activities online.*

*In recent years there has been a crackdown on internet freedom in repressive and transitional environments. During crises and protests, communication lines are cut and critical means of*

*expression are met with censorship, harassment and risk of arrest. In this fast-changing political and technological environment there is an urgent need to protect internet freedom and to give rapid, timely and flexible support to the internet's critical users. Internet freedom is a primary focus of Dutch foreign policy and we support various initiatives to further this goal. Two examples:*

- We've established the Digital Defenders Partnership, which provides a rapid response to threats to internet freedom. Through financial support and training, this partnership aims to increase and better coordinate emergency support for the internet's critical users.*
- And I've already mentioned Small Media, which provides training, technical support and secure hosting to bloggers and civic activists in Iran.*

## Conclusion

*Again, we can see a historical analogy. The invention of the Gutenberg printing press in 1450 is often cited as a driving force behind the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century. Much in the same way, historians have argued that the democratic revolutions of the nineteenth century were due to the emergence of newspapers, and the growth of a public sphere. It's hardly overstating things to argue that the internet is generating similar worldwide momentum.*

*Communication – spreading ideas and speaking truth – is often at the forefront of monumental historical change.*

*The reason I keep referring to history is that we are now living through a transformative period: a paradigm-shift. A year and a half ago, the Chinese artist Ai Weiwei argued in The Guardian that China could never have invented the iPhone. To him, the reason is simple: a culture that is rife with oppression, hierarchy and censorship could never muster the spontaneity and creative energy to even imagine a device that would allow you to communicate and express yourself like a smartphone does.*

*Wherever you go in the world, if there is a connection on the internet, it enables action. Smartphones, or just simple phones that allow people to SMS, help greatly to spread news, or pictures. It's nothing short of a revolution. It changes the way the international community operates and the way we all live.*

*Your work inspires us all. Your work tells us what we need to do in the field of human rights. Your work also helps us to look critically at ourselves and revalue the things we believe in. This conference strengthens our knowledge about human rights,*

***"We are your partner, and you can call upon us when you need us. We support you. We are your friend. And we will try to do everything to make sure that human rights defenders worldwide, for all of us, can make this world a better place."***

**Minister Timmermans**



*Human Rights Defenders and what we can do to help them. I also hope that all who are here today feel at ease in The Netherlands, and feel welcome in The Netherlands. We are your partner, and you can call upon us when you need us. We support you. We are your friend. And we will try to do everything to make sure that Human Rights Defenders worldwide, for all of us, can make this world a better place.*

## 4.2. Introduction on Purpose and Set Up of the Seminar

Speech by Victor Scheffers, director of Justice and Peace Netherlands, and by Lia van Broekhoven, director Human Security Collective, on the purpose and set up of the seminar.

*Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, dear friends,*

*It gives us great pleasure to welcome you all to The Hague and to this International Seminar on Human Rights Defenders. We are delighted that you have come here today from so many different corners of the globe: from Mexico, Myanmar, Pakistan, Nepal, China, India, Sudan, Israel, Uganda, Kenya, DR Congo, Egypt, Liberia, Ukraine, the United States, from European Union member states and from The Netherlands. Thank you all for being here.*

*Welcome to The Hague, the legal capital of the world, the international city of peace and justice, or maybe I can use the old name for this occasion: the international center of justice and peace! The Hague is also the seat of the Dutch government, with the Houses of Parliament and the Ministerial buildings. Of course: when we talk about the legal capital of the world, what first comes to mind are the international courts, tribunals and the major intergovernmental organizations. But many research centers of international law, justice, peace and security, and national and international NGO's like Justice and Peace and Human Security Collective are also based in The Hague.*

*Both Lia and I would like to give a short presentation of our organizations, and then explain the background and the objectives of this International Seminar.*

### Introduction

*(Victor Scheffers: Justice and Peace)*

*My organization Justice and Peace Netherlands is part of an international network, set up by the Catholic Church from 1967 onwards, with partners in 160 countries. For more than forty five years Justice and Peace Netherlands has been actively promoting respect for human rights all over the world. We have evolved from a human rights organization which focused on specific human*



*rights issues, to an organization with a mission to improve access to justice for poor and marginalized groups whose rights are persistently violated.*

*During this journey we have met many civil society organizations and Human Rights Defenders. We became partners in programs to combat sexual violence against women and girls, to defend the rights of minorities, to promote dialogue and good governance, to fight impunity, to promote human rights and social justice in our own country and in other countries. In our collaborative relationships in the Netherlands and worldwide, the focus has come to lie on the effective defense of interests by and on behalf of victims of*



*situations of injustice. Here, the contribution of partners in the South is essential. They have knowledge of local circumstances and they are closer to the people directly concerned. Together with our local partners, Justice and Peace ensures that their commitment to human rights, peace, justice and reconciliation is made visible in social and political debates, in the Netherlands and on international level.*

*Human Rights Defenders are central to our programs and activities. They are people who want to change the world and dare to take a stand in defense of other people's rights, sometimes in very difficult conditions. Human Rights Defenders are the voice and the conscience of a society. In every society there are people courageous enough to raise their voices, inform their fellow citizens and call their governments to account, despite the dangers this can entail. They are people who are brave enough to stand up for their rights and the rights of others, at great personal risk. A human rights defender can never be sure of a happy ending.*

*Despite all international declarations, guidelines and special procedures, the situation of Human Rights Defenders worldwide is deteriorating. "Speaking truth to power" is often perceived as threatening by and for those who are in power, even in our own continent Europe. Far from being recognized for what they are – vital protagonists for change, the guarantors of a free society – Human Rights Defenders are, on the contrary, subjected daily to repression by regimes that are all the harsher for having understood the force and the legitimacy of their claims. The central question for us today is: how can we strengthen their work and the mechanisms needed for their protection?*

*In December 2010 Justice and Peace Netherlands has invited Human Rights Defenders from all over the world to discuss this question and to identify priorities for their work.*

*During that international workshop participants identified their concerns in the field of capacity-building, networking, role of international community and protection.*

*With the input from the workshop Justice and Peace Netherlands developed its strategy to protect Human Rights Defenders.*

*In our program the first focus is on capacity building, in particular on regional, national and international human rights mechanisms; on advocacy skills and how to develop a lobby strategy; and on digital and physical security.*

*Second focus is linking grass root level with international level, for example, through exchange programs and international workshops and seminars such as this one, and through facilitating lobby trips to The Netherlands (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), EU in Brussels and the Offices of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders in Geneva.*

*Third focus is our Shelter City Initiative in our home town The Hague. Shelter City provides a temporary safe living and working environment for a human rights defender. We see the temporary relocation of a human rights defender to The Hague as a measure of protection only to be used in extreme circumstances. This Shelter City Initiative is an essential link in the chain of protection for Human Rights Defenders. After the successful completion of the pilot in The Hague, the project is currently being expanded: a number of cities are invited to set up similar shelter city programs. The first presentation this morning will be on that topic.*

*(Lia van Broekhoven: Human Security Collective)*

*Good morning everyone, very pleased to be here with you. My colleagues and I are grateful for the effort you made to come to the international seminar. Let me also thank the Justice and Peace team for their good suggestion to organize this event together and in partnership with the MoFa – we are pleased to become part of a process which you started 3 years ago. Your work and that of friends and colleagues who stand for human rights world-wide is vital to open societies where the freedoms of speech, assembly and association of citizens and their organizations are respected by all. In this time and age this is all the more critical as these freedoms are being increasingly eroded domestically and internationally.*

*The question raised by Victor about the need to strengthen the work of Human Rights Defenders and mechanisms for their, your protection and for expanding their, your operational and political space is*

*certainly a crucial one. Collective strategies and activities to protect and expand civil society space are very much needed now that the push back on human rights and their defenders and others that are critical about those in power or the current status quo is coming from various sides and take on appearances we may not yet be sufficiently aware of.*

*To name but a few formidable ones: international financial rules and regulations, corporate and national security interests, an overriding security paradigm that influences every aspect of our lives. We also experience a growing sense of belonging to a familiar community in times of economic and financial uncertainty, and further economic globalization. While globalization leads to opportunities in terms of mobilization of labor, exchange of knowledge, coalitions of citizens on cross border initiatives, it also gives rise to discriminatory and racist undercurrents that are present in any society, including those in Europe.*

*Together with my colleagues Fulco van Deventer and Jeanne Abdulla, I founded Human Security Collective in January 2013. Our work is a continuation of what we used to do in a special*



*program at the Dutch INGO, Cordaid; a number of you are familiar with. As an international hub we convene and facilitate meetings for Human Rights Defenders and other courageous civil society actors such as young activists and women leaders, on the one hand, and on the other hand, national and international security actors, both policy makers and those that are working on an operational level such as police and military.*

*The topical issues of these meetings relate especially to the impact of countering terrorism or violent extremism policies, rules and regulations on the space for civil society actors, and Human Rights Defenders in particular. Participants discuss alternative and complementary initiatives to often repressive and hard security activities. The meetings are part of longer term advocacy processes and "on the ground projects".*

*In a number of civil society coalitions we are actively pursuing a reform of policies, rules and regulations that hinder your work as Human Rights Defenders, and that of others in civil society. When we started in 2007 we were entering un-chartered territory. Presently, there is a growing group of persons coming from these different worlds that appreciate each other's point of view, and genuinely want to learn from each other's practices, both the good ones and the failures. This group informs policy at the UN counter terrorism entities, the Financial Action Task Force, the OSCE/Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe, the EU and a number of national governments world-wide.*

## *Explanation of the Goal of the Seminar*

*(Victor Scheffers)*

*Last year, Justice and Peace and Human Security Collective took the initiative to organize in December 2013 an international workshop with Human Rights Defenders on various aspects of protection. Worldwide, Human Rights Defenders working at grass root level are our most important partners who deserve support especially in difficult circumstances. Therefore, they are central to our programs.*

*For the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs Human Rights Defenders are one of his priorities. The Netherlands supports Human Rights Defenders as key driving forces behind change and progress in their countries. The Netherlands supports Human Rights Defenders in various ways: by drawing attention to their position in its contacts with other countries, by providing them with training and by offering shelter to those in need of temporary refuge from the dangerous circumstances they find themselves in every day: Shelter City, for example, here in The Hague.*

*In his human rights policy note – Justice and respect for all – (2013), the Minister had announced that a high-level international meeting would be organized with and about Human Rights Defenders, so that they can make their voices heard more effectively in international forums and in their own countries.*

*It was decided to combine both initiatives. The workshop in December became a meeting of experts to prepare the agenda of the International Seminar in January. The title of this joint project of Justice and Peace, Human Security Collective and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs is: "Speak truth to Power". It is a fairly unique combination of two NGOs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs taking joint responsibility for organizing an international seminar. At the beginning of this meeting, I want to thank the Ministry for its commitment and its cooperation.*

*So this International Seminar is organized with the input of Human Rights Defenders and focuses on their challenges: how can they make their voices heard more effectively in international forums and in their own countries.*

### *The Objectives of 'Speak Truth to Power' are:*

- To identify and further develop mechanisms to provide a safe environment at international, regional and local level for the protection and empowerment of Human Rights Defenders.*
- To identify expertise and skills needed to further strengthen vulnerable local Human Rights Defenders, living and operating outside the country capitals and in remote areas, and further develop relevant tools and modules.*

*(Lia van Broekhoven)*

*We have identified a number of topics for the seminar that relate to the objectives just stated by Victor. On the first day we will discuss in break-out sessions and in plenary:*

**Protection mechanisms:** *do the current international and regional mechanisms, such as the EU guidelines on HRDs, suffice to protect Human Rights Defenders when their work is consistently challenged by a variety of state and non-state actors. What could and should we do as civil society, as HRDs collectively and in collaboration with governments and the EU to ensure that these mechanisms are being operationalized and implemented?*

**Legislative and financial measures** *that reduce the civil and political freedoms of Human Rights Defenders and civil society writ large: in the past decade surveillance of the financial system and demands for increased regulation and financial transparency of civil society to prevent terrorism has resulted in a chilling effect on human rights grant-making and grant-receiving in many parts of the world. Recently, a growing number of countries have adopted NGO laws that restrict the freedoms to assembly and association of civil society organizations. What can Human Rights Defenders*



*do in their own context, regionally or globally to mitigate the negative effects of these measures? What type of coalition is useful to collaborate with, what type of advocacy is required? Can the EU be helpful in addressing these issues?*

**Digital Awareness:** *the bright and dark side of digital tools and technologies: can and do digital technologies protect Human Rights Defenders or are currently available technologies too risky to use in this time of seemingly endless data trawling, storing and analysis with the aim to prevent security risks and threats? What can intergovernmental organizations like the EU and member states for digital security that serves HRDs?*

*The preparatory expert meeting in December in which a number of you participated generated three introductory papers on these topical issues that are found in your information pack. These papers are an important resource for the discussions today and tomorrow.*



## Speak Truth to Power

*The second day will start with meetings for HRDs and EU delegates separately in which both groups can further elaborate on the outcome of the first day. Both groups will then reconvene and exchange ideas and recommendations on how HRDs can make their voices heard more effectively in international forums and in their own countries. Here an explicit link will be made with the objectives of the seminar which were just formulated by Victor.*

*The morning session will be closed with the film Theo van Boven – Inspiration behind the confrontation and a Q and A. Theo van Boven was the predecessor of what is now the position of High Commissioner for Human Rights and Special Rapporteur on Torture. He is an eminent HR professor.*

*After lunch we will go into a public event and will have a number of panel discussions on Shelter City, EU guidelines and Digital Security, in which the audience will have ample time to interact with the panelists.*

## Conclusion

*(Lia van Broekhoven)*

*Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends,*

*You have been invited to The Hague to talk about a more effective approach to the protection of Human Rights Defenders. There is a rich variety of expertise assembled here in this meeting room. Some of you have an academic background. Others have a more grass roots based experience and represent local NGOs. There are representatives of national organizations and NGOs, of the European Union and members of the Human Rights Working Group (COHOM) in Europe. I am certain this seminar will benefit from the diversity of experience you bring to the table. I hope we will be able to find productive ways forward. Thank you again for joining us in this important process. I wish all of us a very successful seminar.*

*(Victor Scheffers)*

*And now I would like to introduce the chair of our plenary debates for the next two days: Jan van der Kolk. Jan is a good friend of Justice and Peace and of Human Security Collective. He chaired our expert meeting in December, and became fully involved in this project. Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends, thank you for your attention. Jan: now it's your turn.*



### 4.3. Shelter City The Hague

Presentation of the evaluation of the pilot project by Yvonne Donders, Professor International Human Rights and Cultural Diversity and Executive Director of the Amsterdam Center for International Law at the Faculty of Law of the University of Amsterdam. Professor Donders is also the chair of the Advisory Commission Shelter City.



# Shelter City

## Defend Human Rights Defenders

Prof. Dr. Yvonne Donders, University of Amsterdam  
Chair Advisory Commission Shelter City

Justice and Peace





## **Shelter City 2012 - 2013**

- ✓ History of Shelter City – Pilot in The Hague
- ✓ Goals of Shelter City
- ✓ Procedure for Identification and Selection of Candidates
- ✓ Four Human Rights Defenders in The Hague
- ✓ Evaluation of the Project

## **Shelter City 2014 and beyond**

- ✓ Expansion of Numbers and Cities

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## **Shelter City 2012-2013**



### **International Framework**

- UN – GA Resolution on Human Rights Defenders (1999)
- EU – Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders (2004)  
*“...providing measures for swift assistance and protection to human rights defenders in danger in third countries, such as, where appropriate, issuing emergency visas and facilitating temporary shelter in the EU Member States”*
- EU – EP Resolution on EU Policies in Favour of Human Rights Defenders (2010) + Manual on Shelter City

### **National Initiative**

- Municipality The Hague (D’66 and Groen Links) - 2010
- Justitia et Pax – Conference Human Rights Defenders

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## Shelter City 2012-2013



### The Hague: City of Peace and Justice



Shelter City is a programme that supports Human Rights Defenders who are threatened and under great pressure in their own country. They will find safe shelter for a period of three months in The Hague, to rest, to follow courses and to extend their network in The Hague and Brussels. After three months they will return to their home country to continue their valuable work with renewed energy, knowledge and a broader network.

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## Shelter City 2012-2013



### Goals of Shelter City

1. Provide shelter and protection to HRDs
2. Build capacity of HRDs
3. Strengthen image of NL as human rights "champion"
4. Strengthen image of The Hague as City of Peace and Justice
5. Strengthen involvement and raise awareness of citizens of The Hague about human rights

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## Shelter City 2012-2013



### Criteria for selection of candidates

- ☑ Serious threat and/or heavy pressure in home country
- ☑ Willing and able to return to home country
- ☑ Possible activities and network in NL
- ☑ Visibility of the HRD not at the expense of safety of the person or family

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## Shelter City 2012-2013



### Procedure for selection of candidates

1. Identification via Justitia et Pax, partner organisations, embassies, UN, EU
2. Selection by independent advisory commission
  - Members: Yvonne Donders (Professor International Human Rights University of Amsterdam), rep. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, rep. HIVOS
  - Observers: rep. Municipality The Hague, rep. Justitia et Pax
3. Appointment by Director Justitia et Pax

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## Shelter City 2012-2013



### Evaluation

#### ☺ Achievements

- Real shelter provided
- Relevant activities, including public presentations
- Network building
- Publicity
- Twinning with EP or TK members

#### ❖ Lessons learned

- ✓ English or French as preferred language
- ✓ Medical and psychological support
- ✓ Timing of visits

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## Shelter City 2014 - 2017



### **Dutch Shelter City Programme** supported by the **Ministry of Foreign Affairs**



Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the  
Netherlands

#### Expansion:

- 10 Human Rights Defenders per year
- More Shelter Cities: The Hague, Middelburg, other

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## 4.4. Outcomes Parallel Sessions

### 4.4.1. Protection Mechanisms

#### *EU Recommendations*

- Role of local missions is essential. Some activists are not aware of provisions possible for their work. Call on missions to ensure improved understanding of the guidelines, for example, translation into local languages; outreach to community based activists (lack of knowledge of their own rights as HRDs)
- List to address particular context of that country, to be widely publicized so that HRDs are aware of available support
- Encourage Rights Based Approach (RBA) in all bilateral discussions, with specific indicators
- High turnover in embassies; seek for continuity of action
- Resource allocation for implementation of practical action under the EU guidelines
- Limitations, in the political context, on how much feedback on actions can be taken. HRDs need to know the commitments made by governments regarding their case. If it can be made public this is better
- Practical support for HRDs at risk (visa, delays) and how this can be simplified? Physical approach to embassies, many levels of security, meetings at offices can create extra risks.

#### *Obligations to HRDs*

- Outreach to missions; updates and requests for practical responses

#### *Governments*

- Should be aware of HR issues in their countries

#### *Trade and HRDs*

- Can be used as a tool, for example, resource extraction. Make sure that companies come with a RBA
- EU Action Plans for example on Business and Human Rights (BHR)
- Corruption



### *Digital Security*

- Reported increases in surveillance
- Egypt for example regarding publication
- Extensive training is more needed
- EU delegations and MS have an important role to play. Make sure that they have secure channels of communications and provide access to means of communications

### *Regional Mechanisms*

- Strengthen these mechanisms
- African Commission on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR) - communications are largely ignored by Member States, barely any response by countries

### *NHRIs*

- Need to strengthen the effect that they have at national level

### *Networks*

- EU can play a role in creating space for HRDs to meet on a regular basis

### *Takeaways of the Session by the Participants*

- Information-sharing: trends; mechanisms available (improvements/changes); how are stakeholders looking to support HRDs; how can HRDs engage more in their own protection
- Attitudes of individual diplomats and how to optimize the personal behavior of diplomats - we have guidelines and guidance notes - message on the importance of training and other types of materials to just documents - diplomats talking to each other.
- Long-term strategy by EU and other governments and entities sympathetic to HR to promote an enabling environment for HR defense. Not just re-funding HR work in terms of standalone projects and also more long-term support. Not just to NHRI but also to real civil society, similar to OSI core funding for 20 odd years. Why not do it in other regions of the world? If EU can't find other ways to channel funding.
- Not just about money, but also valuing the work of HRDs for example through awards
- How to find broader support in society, element in the longer-term strategy to enable the defense of HR
- Importance of national level initiatives and EU advocacy and support for specific laws and policies for protection of HRDs (to implement UN Declaration)

- EU advocacy for legal accountability for attacks on HRDs; important preventive measure
- Know and use mechanisms more
- Arbitrary and selective use of bad laws; development of survival strategy. Confederation of Sudanese Civil Society Organizations includes almost all independent CSOs in Sudan. Just finished strategy and beginning to implement. Will go and inform colleagues of mechanisms; call for closer coordination with people around this table
- Start supporting safe return
- A lot of guidance out there - what to do with it and how to implement it. UK action plan on BHR just published - looking at implementation of the plan to see how to link in HR from the start, not separated from industry
- Creation of more safe spaces such exchanges
- Trade agreements to be properly monitored to ensure stronger protection of HRDs
- HRDs and diplomats working for the same goals - support each other by sharing information
- Secure spaces - embassies and residences should be used as safe spaces for meetings. For example, HIV testing day in Senegal in residence provided a space LGBT to meet and talk
- Up to MS, not just European External Action Service (EEAS), to get information to the missions to raise awareness on how to implement, but concrete steps/toolkit. Not just react but also actively engage.
- Also reaching remote areas
- Focus on people not on paper. Guidelines are only as good as the people working with them. Big mainstreaming task as other units need to learn about complex issues. Regional HR meetings, bringing together embassy staff and HRDs and staff from Ministry, to discuss challenges in the countries - rise in activities following the meeting. HR officers then get more support.
- Ask EU to engage itself for the establishment of effective and participatory regional HR mechanics
- EU should invest in building skills of HRDs. EU SR on Sudan (now defunct???) engages HRDs and government in same meeting. Set of arguments for HRDs to use
- Need to reach out to marginalized HRDs - geographically and working on sensitive issues (for example economic interests) - sometimes they are stigmatized and outsiders - shouldn't need to be accepted in own communities. For example: LGBT, Dalit's.
- Improve feedback to HRDs - should debrief on interventions and expected response
- How to go beyond personal commitment to mainstream it into other sectors. How to avoid preaching to the chapel to those not used to talking regarding HR.
- EIDHR offering "flexible" help - national diplomats should be more informed.
- Diplomats should be encouraged to reach out



## Speak Truth to Power

- Info sharing; safe return; personal links with HRDs - mutually beneficial relationship given staffing constraints.
- Protection of HRDs must also concern the national governments and multinational corporations should also be more involved in the protection of international HR - one of the sources of insecurity of HRDs, who see them as a source of insecurity
- Strengthening at ground level and also strengthening vertically the links between roots and the decision makers. Work of embassies doesn't trickle down. What is the relationship between information gathered at the local level and the center - people vetted before it's taken seriously.
- Internal guidelines being reviewed - how to better train diplomats. More consistent application of the EUG.
- How to integrate HR in economic policy
- Support the strengthening of the networking between local and national mechanisms
- Using UPR - EUG to include recommendations to SUR to include information on situation of HRDs
- Law - UN Declaration to become Convention; also national law
- EU HR FP meeting annually in BXL

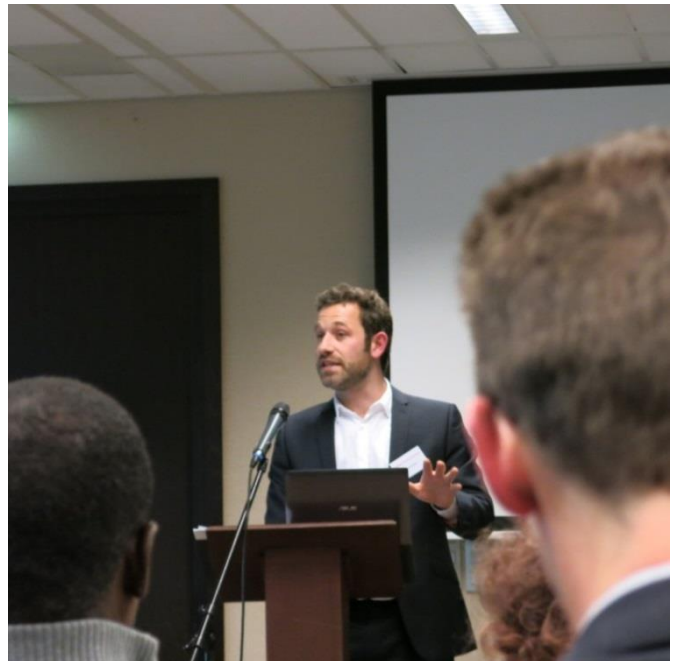
### 4.4.2. Legal and Financial Frameworks and Measures

#### *Scene Setting*

Access to international and regional human rights funding crucial for HRDs because it is usually unavailable in countries where it is most needed

Challenge for international funders working with HRDs because of increasingly restrictive climate – space shrinking politically, socially, legally and financially but also increasingly onerous due diligence requirements.

Good governance requires states to enact a range of Counter Terrorism Measures (CTMs) but while often necessary and important they also risk equipping repressive states with the tools to crackdown on CSOs.



International community supports HRDs but this also leaves them open to labelling by government and others as traitors / enemies of development etc.

This narrative combines with exceptional national security and CTMs to place HRDs in a particularly vulnerable position.

### *Needs & Expectations from an Event Like This*

Learn more about situation on the ground and think through how complex frameworks for CT and security can be reformed, and how these relate to the EU guidelines on HRDs

Why is it easier to register a business than a CSO in many parts of the world?

Are there are other ways to demonstrate transparency / good governance on part of NPO sector?

Need to consider the nexus between local, national & regional regulatory frameworks

Practically impossible to work on human rights for terrorist suspects (for example Palestinians who have been tortured) when funders and international rules and regulations demand that projects shun any contact or potential material support with terrorist organizations

### *Challenges on the Ground*

1. INDIA – FCRA – being used to arbitrarily block access to foreign funding for organizations working on human rights issues
2. ISRAEL – measures implemented in the name of addressing specific issues to deal with Palestinian political violence increasingly used against Palestinian human rights and peace movement across I-P
3. SUDAN – national security law used for arrest, detention, denial of access to lawyer etc. – full immunity; counter-terrorism act used against demonstrators & protestors; civil society law allows government to vet CSO proposals for funding
4. PAKISTAN – legal measures affecting CSOs plus outright military/security institutional repression; stricter surveillance and clampdown on CSOs than terrorist org's; blasphemy law used extensively against HRDs;
5. UKRAINE – what's happening there this week demonstrates how repressive laws affecting CSOs and freedom of expression can be a source of violent conflict – urgent call for wide-ranging EU sanctions

### *European Commission EEAS*

Role of European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights – world's biggest single program dealing with HRDs – approximately 160 million over last 7 years – important for us in this room to understand how it works

- Increased flexibility of funding mechanisms
- Doesn't require consent of national governments
- Able to work confidentially
- Use of encryption/security systems to deal with silent partners
- Able to finance non-registered NGOs & natural persons

New revised program 2014-2020 allows

- Greater flexibility to give directly to HRDs
- Possibility of re-granting
- Direct projects in countries where calls for proposals aren't possible
- Emergency fund for HRDs at risk

### *Recommendations*

- Establishment of national systems for HRDs where possible
- Capacity-building for national human rights commissions
- Support for development of soft law – the work of the new Special Rapporteur on freedom of association and assembly – need for a new general comment on freedom of association at the HRC. Soft law is of course frequently ignored but it is all we have at the moment
- Support other multilateral mechanisms for protecting civil society – community of democracies + lifeline program
- Prioritizing HRDs in development policy – linked to that is a need for donors to leverage their aid and trade to support
- Need for EU countries to lead by example by getting rid of their own repressive laws
- Long term support rather than short term fixes
- Emphasis on fundamental important on human rights in national security and counter-terrorism
- Need to stop rewarding countries that adopt repressive laws in the name of counter-terrorism and good governance and start rewarding laws that create an enabling environment for civil society

### 4.4.3. Digital Awareness

#### Challenges

- Increasing government controls
- Internet is governed by blasphemy laws or anti-terrorists laws. Policy Laundering
- moral policing (making religious and sexual minorities extremely vulnerable) Many activists post their campaign online
- Government private sector nexus, (government makes certain agreements with corporations...they would block if government sends in written request to them)
- Internet rights are human rights
- Predatory laws are meant to protect national security, but they are blocking human rights and rights to access as well.
- Technology facilitating more surveillance.
- Hate speech and Incitement.



#### Concerns

- Weak capacity at HRDs (Digital Immigrants Vs Digital natives)
- Weak digital security practices by individuals and organizations
- Only safe as the least secure person in your organization
- HRDs don't invest/given financial support to strengthen their digital security

Please understand:

- That all human rights are cross cutting. Internet rights are human rights
- perils of digital age
- that physical security and digital security go together
- behavior changes in our world
- the importance of investments in technology
- the importance of investments in capacity building

Risks for female HRDs

- Stalking
- Online Harassment

### *Main Recommendations*

- Pro-people policies linked with aid/trade agreement
- Invest in Digital Security of HRDs especially WHRESs
- Influence to help protection FoE/Safe environment to practice free speech
- Criminalization of Free speech should be condemned
- Invest in enhancing knowledge of UN/HR charters, covenants and support mechanisms
- Support formulation of policies at national and international level to provide safety and protection to HRDs.

### *Additional Recommendations*

- Developing of Mobile Security must be enhanced more (Support and Encourage)
- Embassies and HRDs communication are not secure. Ministry should also take precautions on Digital Security when communication with Human Rights Defenders.
- We need to simplify the heavy digital security materials for activists
- Follow Ups on trainings and help desk support should be accessible for HRDs
- Reach out to Special Rapporteur. Do specific report focusing on digital security issues
- Embassies in different countries can help in building a trust network and partner with the local organization in capacity building on digital security for Human Rights Defenders
- To develop accessible channels for HRDs

## 4.5. Conclusions and Recommendations of the Seminar

### 4.5.1. By the EU and Member States

- Send Shelter City evaluation to other Member States and seek their experience to take the program to another level.
- Share best practices: Develop EU guidance note for embassies and missions, focus on people, not on paper
- Strengthen communication: organize regular meetings, also in remote areas
- Seek longer term support to HR organizations
- Digital Security Awareness: see to tailor-made solutions to provide safe access; also train diplomats. For example, with an e-learning course.
- Find creative solutions for access to finance that may be restricted by other measures
- Improve burden sharing between various partners in a network.

#### 4.5.2. By the Human Rights Defenders

- In view of the seriously shrinking space for HRD's: take measures to restore an enabling environment
- EU Missions and Member States need to be actively involved and to offer safe places to meet regularly
- Provide space for personal security and develop mechanisms of intervention for their support
- Do not reward countries that restrict HRDs through financial or legislative measures
- Stand up against human rights violations
- Provide a range of intervention mechanisms together with local HRDs
- Make sure to also speak to trade and economics and security sector and other relevant actors
- Integrate HR within financial, business and security discussions
- Make sure UPR, World Bank etc. also talk to civil society
- Include HRD voices in advocacy work also by donors
- Help to ensure financial stability and continuity for HR work
- Monitor the work HRDs need to work in a transparent and accountable way, but not be hampered to do their work
- Research proposal
- Governance agenda can go against HRD agenda, seek ways out of hindrances.
- In the parallel session, attention was also asked for power relations between donors and receiving partners.
- Also: access to funding by a small NGOs is too difficult
- Idea: apply range of measures in case of severe HR violations, from silent diplomacy, up to full sanctions.

#### 4.6 Public event

The public event on 22<sup>nd</sup> January which was attended by more than 170 people, offered an opportunity to discuss the main topics of the seminar directly with human rights defenders: the Shelter City Initiative and the EU Guidelines; are these mechanisms effective and will they become more relevant now that human rights are increasingly under pressure world-wide? The third topic was digital security; can digital security for Human Rights Defenders and other critical actors be guaranteed, and how can this be done?

The three panel discussions were chaired by Lionel Veer, Netherlands Human Rights Ambassador.

## 4.7. Closing Speech

The closing speech at the public event of the international seminar was given by Mr. Wim Geerts, Director-General for Political Affairs (DGPZ) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (on behalf of the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs).

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

*Our Foreign Minister was supposed to address you right now. You'll have to do with me, because he is in Montreux, where international negotiations are starting to try to end the flagrant human rights violations taking place in Syria.*

*And just looking at the case of Syria, it shows how relevant the title of this seminar is: "Speak truth to power".*

*Only recently our Minister visited Cuba. During that visit we also discussed human rights. Not everybody was convinced of the importance of a visit to Cuba, but I strongly believe in engagement instead of isolation.*

*Last week, we supported a debate with a large group of Syrian women, who will participate in these peace talks. These women are of crucial importance to enhance the process. The Netherlands therefore strongly promotes their participation in the talks. These courageous women are an example of the need to speak truth to power. And that is what many of you here today are doing. Speaking up to the authorities in your country, fighting for democracy, for justice and for human rights. And I respect and admire you for that.*

*On a personal note, I took human rights as a minor in my studies. I have been in the public service for 25 years, where this topic was always one of my main interests. Human rights is what makes me tick. Each and every day. Everywhere, at any time.*

*Let me quote Mrs. Margaret Sekaggya, the United Nations Special Rapporteur for Human Rights Defenders who said: "It is not easy being a human rights defender; in too many countries it is dangerous, plain dangerous."*

*I'm thinking of journalists, everywhere in the world. Speaking truth to power cost them more lives the past years than ever before. I am thinking of some of the great people we met through our Shelter City project and who are here today.*



## Threats to Human Rights Defenders

*Courage is what it takes. In many parts of the world Human Rights Defenders are falsely accused, or unfairly convicted. They are threatened, tortured or even executed. And there seems to be a negative trend. Democratization processes did not take flight as expected. We have actually seen the space for Human Rights Defenders shrink over the years.*

*In some countries we see systemic intimidation of Human Rights Defenders. Laws are created to silence Human Rights Defenders which have a numbing effect on their freedom of speech and their ability to continue their activities.*

*This intimidation can result in extreme situations. In different countries journalists and bloggers are publicly shamed for publishing investigative stories in which they expose corruption by the existing powers. Unfortunately, people in power are willing to go far to silence critical voices. This makes me think of the events on the central square in Kiev today.*

*Another example is the problems NGOs face because of legislation that prevents them from raising funds. Some countries presume that funding coming from abroad might turn NGOs into foreign agents or traitors. Their access to funds from abroad is restricted. This curbs their right to freedom of association and their efforts to protect human rights.*



## International Policy

*What can we do about this situation as an international community, is one of the questions we have been looking at these past days. Back in 1998, we committed to protect Human Rights Defenders with the adoption of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders. It states that all individuals, groups and organs of society have the right and the responsibility to promote and protect universally recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms.*

*The EU has followed up on this commitment with the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders in 2004. These guidelines are meant to offer guidance on how to implement human rights obligations for our diplomats in the field. With the 10th anniversary of the EU guidelines on Human Rights*

*Defenders coming up, it is a good idea to look back. For this reason we invited you all to evaluate what we can do together to assist people on the ground.*

### What Does The Netherlands Do?

*It is with these challenges in mind that we decided to focus on Human Rights Defenders as one of the central priorities in our Dutch human rights policy.*

*The Netherlands wishes to address these challenges by supporting Human Rights Defenders in various ways:*

- *By offering shelter for those who need to temporarily get out of the dangerous conditions they face every day.*
- *by working with our EU colleagues*
- *By devoting the necessary financial means to be able to provide training, capacity building and public attention.*

### Shelter City

*Of course, when Human Rights Defenders have to seek shelter, the most favorable and durable option is to support them in their own country or region, so they can continue to act as drivers of change. But when this is not possible, the Dutch Shelter City program provides a temporary solution. The aim is for them to be safe, to be able to continue their work and to inform others about the situation in their country.*

*I would like to thank the city of The Hague whole heartedly for participating in this important initiative. For being the first Shelter city! The Hague is renowned as the legal capital of the world, the city of peace and justice, and it has the ambition to be even more for all of its citizens. I am very glad the City Council members are here with us today and I would like to thank you for making this happen. Without your enthusiasm and commitment, together with the hard, hard work of Justice and Peace, the shelter city project would not have become a success.*

*And not only should the support of the city's authorities be mentioned, the initiative needed the support of the people of The Hague, and indeed got it. One of the criteria we formulated was the establishment of contacts between the Hague citizens and the Human Rights Defenders. This has led to many meetings, for instance with students, media and professionals. It has turned out to be an opportunity for people in the Netherlands to listen to and learn from four extraordinary people.*

*Last year, we had guests in the Shelter City project from Cuba, Russia, DRC and Sudan. I am glad two of the four that came to The Hague last year are here with us today. Asha is a family lawyer from*

## Speak Truth to Power

*Sudan fighting violence against women in her country. And Irene, from Congo, also a lawyer, who is now working for the International Criminal Court in The Hague. It was invaluable to directly hear your experiences and learn from you for future exchanges.*

*The Hague was the first Shelter City in The Netherlands, but we are very glad with the new addition of Middelburg. We hope to be able to host up to ten Human Rights Defenders annually over the course of the next three years. The municipalities of The Hague and Middelburg have already agreed to provide temporary homes for Human Rights Defenders and we hope other interested municipalities will follow soon.*

*A 2012 mapping of the EU showed there are 200 temporary shelters provided yearly in the EU member states. This is a significant amount, but does not meet all demands. The Netherlands therefore feels strongly there would be merit in further expanding the initiative and exchanging best practices. I hope that the participants in the seminar will be able to use the positive experiences with our Shelter City program to make various cities across the EU enthusiastic about becoming a Shelter City as well.*

## Drawing Attention

*The Netherlands also draws attention to the position of Human Rights Defenders in bilateral contacts, in the UN Human Rights Council and in political dialogues.*

*Our annual award, the Human Rights Tulip, was awarded this year to Aahung, a Pakistani organization promoting and protecting sexual and reproductive health and rights. And it is good to hear that this has given her initiative a boost in Pakistan.*

*In addition, the Netherlands supports capacity-building and training for Human Rights Defenders and their organizations through our embassies. Many of our embassies have their own Human Rights Funds. We find being able to support grass roots human rights organizations of crucial importance. Diplomacy and funding is not enough. We need to speak up for freedom.*

*As part of International Human Rights Day, on the 10th of December embassies around the world are asked to highlight the important role of Human Rights Defenders, to organize events, roundtables for journalists, or sometimes closed sessions for LGBT organizations, when having a public meeting is too dangerous.*

## EU Guidelines

*But we cannot do this alone. Speaking with one European voice is of course more powerful. Strong, concerted EU action is crucial, with EU delegations and member state embassies coordinating their activities in the country concerned.*

*The Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders assist these diplomats in their approach to Human Rights Defenders. The EU Guidelines need to be duly and fully implemented. To this end we are working on a toolbox which provides practical guidance on how to implement the guidelines for our colleagues on the ground. I hope this will provide a new incentive to EU delegations across the world to provide protection and support to Human Rights Defenders. Or as one of the seminar attendants stated it: "we need to focus more on people, less on paper".*

*It was very good to be able to discuss the effectiveness of our EU actions. I am glad to present the following recommendations coming out of the seminar:*

## Communication

- *Diplomats and Human Rights Defenders often share the same goals. We need to work more as a team, share information, and keep each other informed of actions undertaken and on relevant developments.*
- *Important to ask Human Rights Defenders what their needs are and try to facilitate those individual needs, financially and through dialogue and networking. Long term funding and commitment are needed.*
- *We should not only focus on bigger organizations, but be accessible also for individuals and grass roots.*
- *Silent diplomacy works, but sometimes visibility is more effective and public attention provides security. An example: it can be important to attend court cases; just being present can already have a big effect.*
- *EU delegations and member states should set up local implementation strategies and monitor progress*
- *The EU Guidelines are as good as the people working on it, but we have to make it less dependent of individual committed diplomats. We need more people, not more paper.*

## Areas of focus

- *Shrinking space of Human Rights Defenders should be at the center of our work. In all areas of our work, not just human rights. For example trade, security policy also needs to guard and not infringe on the space of Human Rights Defenders.*

## Speak Truth to Power

- *Restrictions faced by NGOs to receive financing from abroad should be addressed at various levels. EU will continue to look for ways to finance HRDs directly without putting them in danger.*
- *Awareness on digital security among HRDs and among EU diplomats on their communication with HRDs should be raised. For example by offering basic training.*
- *Temporary shelter can be of the utmost importance to Human Rights Defenders. We would like to see if we can take the Shelter City program to a next level within the EU.*
- *The relationship between business, trade and human rights was often mentioned. Trade should be made more human rights oriented. The Netherlands has just published the Dutch Action Plan on Business and Human Rights and we will now start implementing it.*

## Internet Freedom and Security

*As the internet and mobile communications have become part of our everyday lives, their role in the act of speaking truth to power has become central. Yet internet freedom is often denied around the globe, journalists and ordinary citizens are routinely arrested because of their activities online.*

*In the past two days we discussed possibilities to enhance digital security. Human Rights Defenders should themselves take measures necessary for their protection. A lot of research is being done on encryption technology, secure email exchanges etc. We should try to make those new techniques more widely available.*

*An example of what we do: The Netherlands started a partnership, a club of countries, called the Freedom Online Coalition to make sure that we keep investing in an open, safe and free internet, keeping regulations to a minimum. We also set up a multi-donor Fund, the Digital defenders partnership. It focuses on supporting people who are fighting for freedom in cyberspace with their activities, and to protect them against the pressure of governments.*

*With regard to digital security the main recommendations from the meeting were:*

- *Invest in digital security for Human Rights Defenders, but it has to be tailor-made.*
- *To invest in digital security training for embassies.*
- *To provide a safe environment for free speech and digital access at embassies.*

## Conclusion

*As Mahatma Ghandi once declared: "a small body of determined spirits, fired by unquenchable faith in their mission can alter the course of history". We are grateful we had the opportunity to host a group of such determined spirits at the ministry of Foreign Affairs these past two days.*

*I truly hope this meeting has offered an opportunity to be both empowered and inspired by each other. I would like to thank our partners Justice and Peace and Human Security Collective for our joint effort.*

*We will follow-up on this seminar by informing our EU colleagues that were not present here today. We will send them and the special rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders the recommendations coming out of our meeting. The Dutch human rights ambassador will also brief the EU Special Representative on Human Rights, Stavros Lambrinidis, on the outcomes. With the celebration of 10 years of the EU guidelines later this year in Brussels, we will discuss how we can improve their implementation in practice.*

*I promise that the Netherlands will keep playing its part in defending human rights around the globe, and defending individuals like you, who stand up and speak out. I hope you will feel the strength of our support and commitment. And after this conference, when you leave this*

***"...after this conference, when you leave this building and go home to continue your work, know that you are not – and never will be - alone."***

**Mr. Wim Geerts**

*building and go home to continue your work, know that you are not – and never will be – alone.*