

# Shelter City: The Hague



Human rights violations continue to take place in many countries around the world. Human rights defenders are the people who bring attention to these violations. They often do this at the expense of their own safety; they face serious risks, arbitrary detention, torture and even “disappearances”. Some of these human rights defenders might be helped by a short period of rest and respite outside their country of origin as a way to escape these threats.

The Hague Shelter City Initiative offers human rights defenders the possibility for rest and respite by offering them temporarily relocation in the case of imminent bodily harm.

Shelter City is a measure of last resort when shelter in the region is not possible and the safety of the human rights defender in question cannot be guaranteed. An important principle of the Shelter City Initiative is that human rights defenders are able to continue their work, even if they are temporarily relocated.



*Justitia et Pax stands up for human rights and social justice. In The Netherlands and Worldwide.*

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## **Shelter City Initiative**

The Shelter City Initiative is part of the Justitia et Pax strategy to protect human rights defenders. Justitia et Pax views the temporary relocation of a human rights defender to The Hague as a measure of protection only to be used in extreme circumstances. Shelter City provides a temporary safe living and working environment for a human rights defender. Justitia et Pax views the Shelter City Initiative as an essential link in the chain of protection for human rights defenders.

The purpose of the Shelter City Initiative is not to relocate human rights defenders for a long period of time. Rather, the goal is to support and protect the human rights defender locally, where they are to most value to their own community. Before deciding on temporary relocation, all other measures that could protect the human rights defender, such as shelter in the region, lobby and advocacy, should have been exhausted.

## **Relocation**

Besides proving rest and respite, Shelter City allows the human rights defender to continue their work in a safe environment.

The period in the Netherlands can furthermore be used to strengthen the capacities of human rights defenders. This could be done by IT courses, language courses, physical and digital security training, media training or other courses that could benefit the work of the human rights defender. Furthermore, during his/her time in The Hague, the human rights defender can extend his/her international network.

Besides these capacity building activities, Shelter City The Hague also offers medical and psychological care. Therefore a meeting with a general practitioner is scheduled in the first week of arrival for a physical and psychosocial assessment.

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In some cases human rights defenders want to draw media attention to their dire situation as a measure of protection for when they return to their country of origin.

### **Selection**

The Shelter City Initiative can only provide a safe haven for human rights defenders who benefit from a short stay outside of their country of origin (maximum three months). Shelter City Initiative has been given certain parameters by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that the HRD needs to fulfil to be eligible for temporary relocation.

1. The HRD can be a human rights defender in the broad sense of the word (lawyers, NGO's and poets or artists can all apply, as long as their work promotes Human Rights or he/she fights against Human Rights Violations)
2. The HRD should be able to return to the country of origin after 3 months.
3. The HRD should be willing to speak out in public.

It should be stressed that not every human rights defender that applies will automatically be eligible to participate in the shelter programme as Justitia et Pax is not the visas issuing authority.

The selection of human rights defenders is done by an advisory committee. The advisory committee was set up due to the high amount of applications from human rights defenders.

### **Return**

To ensure a safe return after three months, a support network is set up that can be activated in case of return. Furthermore, expanding the human rights defenders network internationally proves to be a strong tool to further their security.

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## Summary

The Shelter City Initiative will try to accomplish the following:

- Provide a temporary safe living and working environment for a human rights defender who is in need of this safety.
- The Human Rights defender fulfils the following criteria:
  1. The HRD can be a human rights defender in the broad sense of the word (lawyers, NGO's and poets or artists can all apply, as long as their work promotes Human Rights or he/she fights against Human Rights Violations)
  2. The HRD should be able to return to the country of origin after 3 months.
  3. The HRD should be willing to speak out in public.
- Offer the human rights defender the opportunity to strengthen his or her capacities by means of computer courses, language courses, safety training, media training or other substantive courses of which the work of the human rights defender will benefit.
- The knowledge the human rights defender gains will trickle down to the local organization where he / she works.



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