

Shelter City: The Hague



Human rights violations continue to take place in many countries around the world. Human rights defenders 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 temporary 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.

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 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.

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).

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 visa issuing authority. Additionally Justitia et Pax can currently only shelter four human rights defenders per year. We aim to expand to a total of ten in 2014.

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.

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.

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

Return

Human rights defenders under the Shelter City Initiative are obliged to leave The Netherlands after a period of three months. To ensure a safe return, a support network is set up that can be activated in case of return. Furthermore the importance of expanding the human rights defenders network internationally proves to be a strong tool to further their security.

For more information please contact:

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