



TOOLBOX FOR SHELTER CITY BUDDIES

MANUAL BY: JUSTICE AND PEACE
HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AND SECURITY

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Justice and Peace Netherlands is a non-profit organisation based in The Hague that is dedicated to defending and promoting respect for human rights and social justice, worldwide and in the Netherlands.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	5
TOOL 1 – GETTING TO KNOW HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS	6
Box 2 – International protection instruments for HRDs	8
TOOL 2 - BUILDING UP THE PROGRAMME	9
Box 3 – Timeline of the HRD’s stay	11
Box 4 – Elements to consider in making the HRD’s programme.....	12
TOOL 3 - COMMUNICATING PUBLICLY ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS	13
Box 5 – Basic public communication rules	14
Box 6 - The Shelter City Platform	14
TOOL 4 - NETWORKING	15
Box 7 – Conducting efficient meetings	16
Box 8 - Some relevant organisations.....	17
TOOL 5 – HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AND SECURITY	18
Box 9 – Resources on HRDs and security	19
Box 10 – Tools for safe online communication	19
TOOL 6 - PSYCHO-SOCIAL SUPPORT	21
Box 11 – Recognising stress and its symptoms.....	22
Box 12 – Dealing with ‘traumatised’ people.....	23
Box 13 – Psycho-sensitive communication with HRDs	24
TOOL 7 - TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF	25
Box 14 – A few self-care tips.....	25
NOTES	26

“Those who take risks need to be encouraged in their fight for the freedom of expression.”

Olivier (Human rights lawyer from D.R. Congo)

INTRODUCTION

Shelter City is a national network of Justice and Peace Netherlands, in cooperation with Dutch cities and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to protect and support human rights defenders (HRDs). HRDs defend their own rights and those of others. This is a challenging and dangerous task: they are very often silenced, arrested, tortured, and sometimes even disappear. When HRDs are severely threatened or under intense pressure because of their work, they qualify for a stay of three months in one of the Dutch Shelter Cities.

During their stay in The Netherlands, the HRDs continue their work in a safe environment and have the opportunity to obtain some rest and respite. Additionally, they expand their network of civil society organisations and political contacts in The Hague, Brussels and elsewhere. The HRDs also follow training courses on safety and human rights to improve their knowledge and skills. Through public meetings and workshops they also contribute to the raising of awareness of the inhabitants of the Shelter Cities in the field of human rights.

This toolbox is meant for Shelter City “buddies” who work closely with HRDs in a Shelter City. It contains 7 tools meant to equip you to the task of providing daily support to HRDs. Each tool is first shortly introduced, then followed by some practical tips (highlighted in orange boxes). These are meant to provide you with general guidance, rather than imposing you a way of working. As you will quickly notice, you will learn a lot about how to deal with human rights defenders on the spot.

TOOL 1 – GETTING TO KNOW HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Human rights defenders are defined in the EU Guideline on HRDs as:

“...those individuals, groups and organs of society that promote and protect universally recognised human rights and fundamental freedoms. Human rights defenders seek the promotion and protection of civil and political rights as well as the promotion, protection and realisation of economic, social and cultural rights. Human rights defenders also promote and protect the rights of members of groups such as indigenous communities. The definition does not include those individuals or groups who commit or propagate violence.”

The notion of human rights defender is a broad one, encompassing people from all professions (though usually not state officials) who strive to achieve human rights and address human rights violations in a peaceful manner. Human rights issues occur within a broad spectrum, varying from freedom of speech to women’s and LGBTI rights, indigenous rights, access to health care, etc. As a result, the work of HRDs can take many forms, such as collecting and spreading information, providing education on human rights, (international) advocacy and litigation to put pressure on perpetrators, assisting victims, promoting accountability and improvement of government policy.

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

Box 1 – Security challenges of human rights work

State violence, poverty, impunity and political oppression very often characterise the contexts in which HRDs work. Human Rights Defenders worldwide face serious security challenges. The global trends show the deterioration of the working environment for many HRDs. The threats can be of various characters, such as physical, psychological, economic or social. They can originate from different actors: state official, private businesses and interests, extremist groups, etc. The effective absence of rule of law and impunity are generally worsening factors.

According to the [2019 Global Analysis of Front Line Defenders](#), 321 defenders in 27 countries were targeted and killed for their work, the highest number ever on record. More than three-quarters of these, 77% of the total number of activists killed, were defenders of land, environmental or indigenous peoples' rights.

Front Line Defenders reports that the murders of HRDs were not isolated events, but were preceded by judicial harassment, threats and physical attacks. At least 49% of those killed had previously received a specific death threat, and in an additional 43% of killings there had been general threats made to HRDs in that area. In the vast majority of cases, HRDs did not receive the necessary protection and support from state authorities from the time they reported threats to the time they were murdered.

In addition to threats experienced by male colleagues, WHRDs face gendered and sexualized attacks from both state and non-state actors, as well as from within their own human rights movements. Such violations include removal from public or high-ranking positions in NGOs, trade unions, and political societies; smear campaigns questioning their commitment to their families; sexual assault and rape; militarized violence; and the harassment and targeting of their children.

Box 2 – International protection instruments for HRDs

Because the work they do is often dangerous, human rights defenders have received special attention from international instances such as the UN or the European Union, as well as national governments.

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

Although those instruments have the merit to highlight the difficult work of HRDs, their non-binding characters means their impact is mostly symbolical.

TOOL 2 - BUILDING UP THE PROGRAMME

The overall objective of the Shelter City Initiative is to **sustain human rights defenders' human rights work in the long-term**. HRDs coming under the Shelter City programme usually have several aims. In order to ensure the long-term impact of the programme and target activities, it is important to have a clear understanding of the needs and objectives of the HRD. The Shelter City programme can meet objectives falling under four broad categories:

1. **Rest and respite:** a safe space in which to re-energise and re-strategise
2. **Capacity-building:** increase their knowledge and skills in areas relevant to their work (security training, English, human rights courses, etc.).
3. **Networking:** can fulfil different objectives, such as increasing their international profile (and thus the likelihood that people will stand up for them if something happens to them after they return), establish new partnerships, obtain funding, exchange experience... (see Tool 5).
4. **Awareness-raising:** about the human rights situation in their country. This can be done at schools, universities, during public events, etc. (see Tool 3).

These objectives are achieved with the help of **set goals and an activity plan** for each HRD that comes to The Netherlands, together with Justice and Peace

Example of template for the Activity Plan:

	Objective for the stay	Related activities	Use after return?
1.			
...			

Many partners are involved in the Shelter City project (host organisation, university, municipality, Justice and Peace, etc.). Therefore, it is important to communicate well about the HRD's agenda to **avoid conflicting commitments, but also to avoid that the HRD is overwhelmed by the amount of activities.**

A number of HRDs indicated that they did not like that their agenda was being shared with the entire working group. They see certain appointments (such as with the psychologist) as private. As a solution, a 'private' agenda can be created with all the details, specifically for the HRD, local coordinator and the

buddy. Also, a 'public' agenda can be created for the broader working group, in which certain sensitive appointments can be blocked without giving further details.

Box 3 – Timeline of the HRD’s stay

Before arrival

When the HRD is selected by the Selection Committee, Justice and Peace will share the profile with the partners in the city, and introduce them by e-mail. A **first ‘live’ contact** will be planned by Justice and Peace to define the HRDs goals more specifically. **Some activities require beforehand planning** (e.g. if psycho-social support is needed). Relevant courses, organisations, events and volunteers can already be identified and contacted.

First

After arrival at the airport, the HRD is brought to his/her city. The **buddy is their first contact person**, your role is thus particularly important at this stage. The first days will be dedicated to getting acquainted to life in The Netherlands (transport, shopping, etc.), as well as getting to know the partners and volunteers involved in the project. It is also when the **activity plan will be further elaborated**. It is important to repeat practical information (transport, shopping, use of bank card several times).

Stay in NL

Throughout the stay, the HRD will **go to meetings, follow courses, continue their work and get some free time** to relax and recover. **Medical and psychological support** can also be provided. Make sure you **regularly assess** with the HRD how the stay is going and if there are additional needs, or if the HRD thinks the agenda is too full. Be attentive to what they say, but also what they do not (dare to) say. **Common activities with HRDs in other cities** will also take place. Exchange with other HRDs and feeling part of an HRD community is crucial for many of them. A holistic security training and an advocacy training will be held in The Hague. Feel free to invite all HRDs for events in your city!

Before return

Justice and Peace will **prepare the return** with the HRD based on his or her security plan. As first contact point, you will likely be the first to know if anything happens that could hinder the HRD’s return. Make sure you report relevant information to Justice and Peace so that necessary measures can be taken in time. Returning to a tense situation is often difficult for HRDs. You can help them prepare by pointing at their strengths and making them feel they can rely on partners and friends here.

After return

Justice and Peace is in the lead when it comes to following-up on the situation of HRDs after their return. Nevertheless, HRDs will greatly appreciate that you **keep in touch** with them and keep interest in their work and situation.

Box 4 – Elements to consider in making the HRD’s programme

- 1. The HRD’s wellbeing:** HRDs who come under the programme are very often tired due to their long working without time off, and stress caused by threats and pressure put on them. They can also be traumatised or start to process difficult events. Their programme in The Netherlands will fill in very quickly, and although they will very often insist that they want to be busy and accept any proposition of activity, it is of high importance to regularly check with the HRD whether the schedule allows sufficient time to rest. Activities which can involve touching upon painful memories (telling their story in public for instance) should always be carefully considered, and prepared with the HRD. Please note that people have different concepts of ‘rest’, for one person this means not doing anything, for the other it means being busy with activities in a different context.
- 2. The HRD’s security:** to what extent is it desirable for the HRD to speak publicly? What can be the consequences if it is known in the home country that the HRD is staying abroad? Does the HRD want to use a pseudonym? Can photographs of the HRD be shared publicly? Justice and Peace will provide you with some guidelines (see below), but it is important that an assessment is made regularly throughout the stay, on the basis of what the HRD wants, but also of the context where they come from. Sometimes, HRDs are not fully aware of the security implications of publicity. It is our role (buddies, partners, Justice and Peace) to point them out at them so that they can make conscious choices.
- 3. The long-term benefits of the HRD’s stay:** define how the rest, new knowledge, contacts and skills obtained in the three months can benefit the HRD’s work and help improve his or her security when the HRD returns. Keeping the objectives in mind can help to make choices between possible activities when the programme of the HRD becomes too busy.

TOOL 3 - COMMUNICATING PUBLICLY ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

When it comes to awareness-raising, Shelter City aims to have a double impact. On the one hand, **the HRD's presence in the city is a vehicle to raise awareness on human rights issues** within the Dutch society. Through exchanges and debates with the HRD, human rights are made very concrete and tangible to the general public. On the other hand, encounters with the public are a **way for the HRDs to gain visibility and support for their work**. Knowing that their work is known, supported and recognised by a broad range of people is a powerful motivation for HRDs to carry on in difficult circumstances.

There are, however, cases where **public exposure can be counterproductive**. After they return, HRDs can be suspected of having "collaborated with the West" and accused of being "foreign agents". In some countries, this can have serious consequences. In some extreme cases, what is posted online and what HRDs say and do in The Netherlands can provide material to harass HRDs in different ways (defamation, fabricated evidence, blackmail, etc.).

Therefore, the way we communicate about an HRD should always be carefully considered, weighing the pros and cons of publicity. Between not even mentioning that an HRD is hosted in the city, to fully disclosing their name, organisations and where they work, there is a wide range of possibilities. Justice and Peace will always provide advice depending on the HRD's specific background. Note that while HRDs are the first ones responsible for their own security, they might not always be aware of the security consequences of gaining publicity. It is important that they are able to make informed choices.

Box 5 – Basic public communication rules

Justice and Peace has established **some basic rules and guidelines for publicly communicating** about the HRD:

- **Only first name** (or a nickname/pseudonym)
- **No organisation names**
- **No arrival or departure dates**
- **No accommodation address**
- **Ask for consent** of the HRD before publishing anything, incl. photos.

These rules apply before, during and after the HRD's stay. They can be made more or less stringent depending on the cases and after face-to-face discussion with the HRD and in consultation with Justice and Peace. There might indeed be cases where international publicity is an additional protection to the HRD. Sometimes, some topics should not be mentioned but it is fine to talk about some non-controversial activities undertaken by the HRD (e.g. talking about rights enshrined in the constitution is fine, but criticising an authoritarian regime in public might bring the HRD into trouble).

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

In short, common sense and precaution should guide you in assessing whether or not publishing something about the HRD entails risks or not. **The golden rule is to always ask yourself if our actions here do not further endanger the HRD back home.**

Box 6 - The Shelter City Platform

The Shelter City Network currently consists of twelve Dutch cities. To support and improve the consistency and visibility of the Network, Justice and Peace has built the **the website www.sheltercity.nl for external communication**. The website makes it possible to show local target audiences what is happening within the Shelter City initiative and how it contributes to support human rights defenders worldwide. It can also help to get the inhabitants of the Shelter Cities involved.

Every Shelter City has the code and access to manage their own page on the website (www.sheltercity.nl/city). Information about the city, partners involved, events and activities carried out with the HRDs can be published. Each HRD also had its profile page. There is also a common Calendar, News page and Resources tab.

The buddy can take on the role of updating this website with brief reports about events that took place with the HRD, publishing news and updating calendar activities to attract attention of the public. It is however of the utmost importance to handle personal information of the HRD carefully.

The Shelter City Network also has its own Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/ShelterCityForHumanRightsDefenders/>). Justice and Peace will share relevant human rights news and events, updates about our Shelter City guests and other interesting articles for HRDs and the broad public.

Justice and Peace has created a Shelter City Library on Google Drive. The purpose of this library is to create an online internal platform where Shelter City materials are actively shared, such as questionnaires, manuals, and communication materials. Cities can look at the available materials to get inspired and avoid duplication of efforts. For instance, if City X has created an intake questionnaire to prepare for the arrival of the HRD, it could be useful for other cities to be aware of this and see whether this could be used for their city too. We hope to learn from each other's experience and encourage exchange. Also, in this library you find materials developed by Justice and Peace as well as training and resource material on specific topics that we find helpful.

TOOL 4 - NETWORKING

Establishing a network of relevant organisations, civil servants, politicians, researchers, journalists, etc. can help the human rights defender in several ways. On the one hand, HRDs can **provide first-hand information** on the situation in their country, making sure that those issues remain at the agenda of politicians and donors. In return, they can **get support, advice and expertise, exchange experiences**. Having a broad professional network is also a way for HRDs to **increase their international profile**. It can also **add to their security**, as a wider range of people could potentially take action should something happen to them after they return.

Box 7 – Conducting efficient meetings

Before the meeting

- Make sure the **HRD is fully informed** about who they will meet and what the organisation/ institution does.
- Set out a few **objectives for the meeting**, in line with the objectives for the stay. Is it only about exchanging information? Can you foresee any concrete long-term outcome such as funding of collaboration? (Note that this is unlikely to come out after the first meeting, but establishing a personal contact is an important first step). Make sure the HRDs do not have unrealistic expectations about what they can get out of the meeting.
- Make sure the HRD has a **clear and structured story to tell**, but also that there is room for exchange. Preparation is all the more important if the HRD is not comfortable with English: the **language barrier** can affect the quality of the meeting.

During meetings:

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

After the meeting:

- Shortly **debrief** with the HRDs. What could be improved for the next meeting. What are the next steps? How can the HRD capitalise on the meeting and use its outcomes in his or her work?

Box 8 - Some relevant organisations

Note: As we host about 20 HRDs per year, we need to manage our contacts well and make sure they do not get flooded with requests. Always check beforehand whether the organisation is relevant (thematically/ geographically) before requesting a meeting. Below is a non-exhaustive list of organisations. If you do not have the contact details of an organization, or an organization does not respond to your meeting request, please contact Justice and Peace

Development / Human rights

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

Women's rights

Wo=Men
Femmes for Freedom
Mama Cash
ATRIA

LGBT rights

COC Netherlands
ILGA Europe (Brussels)

Think tanks

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

Legal/access to justice/transitional justice

Lawyers for Lawyers
REDRESS
International Centre for Transitional Justice
International Criminal Court
The Hague Institute for the Internationalisation of Law
Avocats Sans Frontières

Peace-building

Global Partner for the Prevention of Armed Conflict
PAX

Journalists/Freedom of express

Free Press Unlimited
Association of Journalists at the ICC
RNW

TOOL 5 – HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AND SECURITY

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

All HRDs who come to The Netherlands will follow a security training with Justice and Peace, where we cover all those aspects and help them establish a security plan. During this training we also encourage HRDs to include other aspects such as organizational security (what measures are put in place in their organization), legal security (Is my organization legal under my country's law? Do I have legal experts to help me if I get arrested?), the security of their family, or financial security (a prerequisite before helping others).

Holistic security is not about looking at the different aspects of security separately. It is about looking at their **interaction**, and **getting a comprehensive picture of the HRD's situation**, including the social, political and economic context. For instance, if you are exhausted and stressed, you will be less likely to identify and adequately respond to threats. If you relocate to be physically safe, but cannot stand being away from your family, you might not be able to function properly. If you do not fully understand how technology can be used against you, you will not be able to fully grasp the potential implications on your security.

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

Box 9 – Resources on HRDs and security

- Tactical Tech's [Holistic Security Manual](#)
- Protection International's [Manual for Human Rights Defenders](#)
- Front Line Defenders' [Workbook on Security](#)
- [Umbrella](#) - Security made easy: app giving digital and physical security tips for individuals at risk
- [Justice and Peace resources page for Human rights defenders](#)

Box 10 – Tools for safe online communication

Digital technologies make it easier for HRDs to document, research, verify, store, receive and publish information on human rights and human rights abuses. But this convenience comes at a cost. More than ever before, HRDs are tracked by state and non-state actors who have at their disposal advanced online surveillance tools. While the use of technology for communications and advocacy is proving to be critical, the growing threats in the digital sphere are becoming more and more prominent. The result, in many cases, is a significant curtailment of freedom of expression and the weakening of the right to privacy. A segment of the tech community has set itself the goal to resist massive data collection, mass surveillance and online censorship. This involves **both a tactical** (incl. risk assessment and behavioral change) **and a technical approach** (technical tools, software and hardware designed with human rights in mind). Here a few tools:

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

Justice and Peace staff is always ready to answer your digital security questions: training@justiceandpeace.nl

TOOL 6 - PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

HRDs work in environments often characterised by socio-political oppression, asymmetric distribution of power and wealth, high rates of poverty, and strong marginalisation of vulnerable groups (including grass-roots activists). Impunity is generally the norm. **Emotionally, human rights work is highly demanding, and the context in which they evolve has a high impact on their personal wellbeing.**

HRDs are repeatedly exposed to high level of violence and are often times targets of it, which may result in high levels of stress, exhaustion and sometimes trauma.

HRDs may find it difficult to talk about their mental health. HRDs are highly committed individual who often perceive personal sacrifices as inherent to their work. A certain culture of martyrdom also prevails within the social circles of HRDs. It is important to emphasize that **self-care is not self-indulgence but imperative for themselves and their work.** It is a matter of sustainability. In their home country HRDs rarely have the time or opportunity to ask for professional help.

Their stay in The Netherlands, where they have the space to reflect and take care of themselves, is a good moment to get support. **Wellbeing is therefore an important focus of the Shelter City programme..**

Due to cultural sensitivities, but also expectations put on them, it might be particularly difficult for HRDs to ask for help. The possibility to see a therapist should always been offered to HRDs – while making clear that Shelter City is not the place to start a fully-fledged therapy. In agreement with the therapist, it is possible in three month to work on stress-management and building resilience, or on reducing PTSD symptoms (e.g. through EMDR techniques). **If the HRD feels like the approach of psychosocial care is inappropriate, always manage the room for them to say so and be ready to stop and try something else.** Alternative therapies can be offered as well: yoga, tai-chi, dance therapy, art therapy, etc. Throughout the stay in Shelter City, it is important to reassess the needs of the defender in terms of wellbeing.

Box 11 – Recognising stress and its symptoms

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

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

Cumulative stress follows prolonged exposure to work and non-work stress factors and may develop into professional exhaustion known as "burn out". The **most common signs of cumulative stress include:**

- **Physical symptoms:** overtiredness, diarrhoea, constipation, headaches, abdominal and back pains, sleeping disorders, appetite changes.
- **Emotional signs:** anxiety, frustration, guilt, mood swings, undue pessimism or optimism, irritability, crying spells, nightmares, apathy, depression.
- **Mental signs:** forgetfulness, poor concentration, poor job performance, negative attitude, loss of creativity and motivation, boredom, negative self-talk, paranoid thoughts.
- **Relational signs:** feeling isolated, resentful or intolerant of others, loneliness, marriage problems, nagging, social withdrawal, anti-social behaviour.
- **Behavioural changes:** increased alcohol, drug and/or tobacco use, change in eating habits or sexual behaviour, increase in risky behaviour, hyperactivity, avoidance of situations, cynical attitudes.
- **Collapse of belief systems:** feeling of emptiness, doubt in religious beliefs, feeling unforgiven, looking for magical solutions, loss of purpose of life, needing to prove self-worth, cynicism about life

Burn out is an exhaustion of normal stress coping mechanisms. Emotional exhaustion constitutes the main characteristic of burn out. The **symptoms of cumulative stress have intensified and become chronic.**

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

- Shock, disbelief, feeling of being overwhelmed
- Strong emotional reaction or detachment
- Confusion, difficulty in making decisions

- Physical reactions: nausea, dizziness, intense fatigue, sleeping difficulties, muscle tremors...

Additional reactions during the **first days and weeks**:

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

In a certain number of cases, the **above signs last for more than one to three months** and **traumatic stress may further develop into PTSD**. This is a pathological condition which will require referral to a mental health specialist. Additional symptoms include: persistent depression, irritability and mood swings, “numbness”, feeling of guilt, feeling of helplessness, loss of faith and hope, loss of appetite, use of substances...

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

Severe psychological conditions such as burnout or PTSD must be diagnosed and dealt with by professionals. **Your role as buddy is to be attentive to signs of distress**, and with the help of your supervisor and Justice and Peace, **direct the HRD to appropriate help**. There are also a few things you can do in interacting with traumatised HRDs (see Box 12). Since traumatic events are characterised as being beyond one’s control, a crucial point is to never treat the HRD as if they are powerless or do not have agency. You can also help them in identifying their strength and capacities (resources, network, etc.) and in changing their inner belief about what they are able to do.

Box 12 – Dealing with ‘traumatised’ people

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

Social support. Living in a safe and welcoming environment, taking a break from their work and getting international recognition for their work are important contributors to the psychological rehabilitation and resilience-building of HRDs. These are in-built elements of the Shelter City programme.

However, **we should remain attentive that HRDs are not isolated during their stay**, have listening ears to talk, but also people to have fun with. At home, the HRD's community, family, colleagues provide them with a support network which becomes far remote when they come to The Netherlands. Additionally, there might be some cultural differences which can be hard to deal with (e.g. coming from a collectivist society into an individualistic society). Finding social contacts through various networks in the city (volunteers, local Amnesty International group, students, etc.) is a good way to help the HRD build a social network.

Box 13 – Psycho-sensitive communication with HRDs

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

Basic attitudes for constructive communication rely on:

- *Empathy*: understand and show understanding
- *Respect*: accept the person and their experience
- *Interest*: show that the HRD and the incidents he or she has experienced are important to you
- *Precision*: be clear in objectives and procedures

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

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

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

Guidance on how to navigate the wellbeing of HRDs in relocation programmes can be found in a publication Justice and Peace contributed to: **the Barcelona Guidelines on wellbeing and temporary international relocation of Human rights defenders at risk**: <https://www.hrdhub.org/wellbeing>

TOOL 7 - TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

Being a buddy, it is important to try and **identify where your boundaries are** and decide for yourself on how much you can take on. Always remember that while you are the first contact for the HRD, you should never feel like you are solely responsible for them. HRDs themselves should be in the lead to take initiatives, communicate, explore, make friends. Your supervisor, and ultimately Justice and Peace, are responsible for their security and their stay. Accompanying HRDs throughout their stay should always remain a pleasure! Do not hesitate to seek support in your team or with Justice and Peace, if you feel the need to talk about the challenges you face.

Box 14 – A few self-care tips

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

NOTES

“Shelter City gave me my motivation back, made me feel important again as a human rights defender.”

Tomy (journalist from Honduras)

TOOLBOX FOR SHELTER CITY BUDDIES

Shelter City buddies are those who provide daily guidance to human rights defenders hosted in their city under the Shelter City Initiative.

This toolbox contains seven tools, offering practical guidance and tips to buddies in their task of accompanying human rights defenders:

1. Getting to know human rights defenders
2. Building up the programme
3. Communicating publicly about human rights defenders
4. Networking
5. Human rights defenders and security
6. Psychosocial support
7. Taking care of yourself

Any question? Contact us at sheltercity@justiceandpeace.nl

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