



**THE
HAGUE
PEACE
PROJECTS**

REPORT

Threats to Human Rights Defenders in The Netherlands

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The Hague Peace Projects

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I Executive Summary

The main objective of this research was to showcase that some of the human rights defenders who are currently working in the Netherlands have been threatened either directly or indirectly by external actors. This study has proven that this phenomenon exists, which has been evidenced by the 15 cases at hand. It has also shown how threats and intimidation have caused a lot of emotional and psychological damage to the activists, which has either prevented them from doing their work or has slowed them down immensely. These stories illustrate how threats can escalate and lead to physical harm, and in some cases, even serious damage to the individual and their immediate family. We have observed the tremendous impact that threats and intimidation has on the freedom of speech of migrants with the same political, ethnic, or national background, as well as on the actual persons targeted by harassment itself. All interviewees noted the serious and chilling effect that intimidation has on the entire community that they belong to. In particular, the potential negative consequences on the well-being of family members in their country of origin, compels these persons to stay silent on political and social matters in these countries.

II Introduction

a. Background

Nada Kiswanson, a Palestinian lawyer working on a case before the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague was intimidated and received death threats in 2016 from unknown people, allegedly acting on behalf of Israel¹. A Reuters article from August that year reports:

“She had received death threats by e-mail, via family members and in the form of flower deliveries to her home with accompanying messages. When she purchased an anonymous pre-paid mobile phone number, she received a threat on it a day later. (...) The Jordanian-Swedish citizen had also been called on a family member’s pre-paid Jordanian number while staying in the country, while a relative in Sweden had been called and told that Kiswanson would be “eliminated”. Human rights organization Amnesty International said it was forced to temporarily close its office in The Hague for security reasons after an employee’s personal e-mail was hacked and used to send Kiswanson a death threat.”

Kiswanson found it very challenging to report these threats to the Dutch authorities, as the police seemed to have very little experience and lacked the proper infrastructure to help her. Hence, she decided to tell her story to reporters from the Dutch newspaper NRC Handelsblad². She realised that the Dutch government, although prominently active in the protection of Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) abroad, had no adequate mechanism in place to protect HRDs within The Netherlands who were being targeted by actors from abroad. The progress of the investigation by Dutch authorities had been very slow and Kiswanson eventually saw no other option but to go public with her case. As a result of this incident, and after a long and exhausting lobby by the human rights organisations: International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the Coalition for the ICC (CICC), the Dutch authorities finally agreed to provide protection for a specific group of people: those representatives of NGOs, those working on ICC cases, and those that had been put on a list by the CICC. Although this outcome could be seen as positive in the end, it made our organization wonder: What about those other HRDs in the Netherlands that might be equally threatened but do not work for the CICC? How are they supposed to be protected from external threats?

1 <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-warcrimes-icc-death-threats-idUSKCN10M1G5>

2 <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2016/08/10/ze-dacht-dat-nederland-veilig-was-3652144-a1515668>

b. Human Rights Defenders (HRDs)

Human Rights Defenders play an important role in societies worldwide. According to Amnesty International UK, HRDs are “people who champion and fight for human rights of other people. They challenge brutality, oppression and injustice in every part of the world, often risking their lives to expose abuses and hold powerful people to account, while supporting the survivors of human rights abuses”³. However, their position is usually also a vulnerable one. The intimidation and threats they face from governments and other powerful social actors make their work very hard, and in some cases, even impossible.

c. Human Rights Defenders in The Netherlands and their rights

A number of HRDs are living temporarily or permanently in The Netherlands. Some are staying here as part of exchange programs, work, or studies, while others are living permanently in The Netherlands as refugees. Many continue to work as human rights defenders from The Netherlands.

Before the ubiquitous nature of internet and mobile communication, travelling or migrating to the Netherlands from outside of Europe meant having the ability to escape authoritarian and dictatorial governments. However, an ever more integrating world brought some of the most oppressive policies of these countries closer to the Netherlands. Authoritarian regimes seem to become more and more assertive in their attempts to monitor HRDs residing outside their own state borders. Furthermore, new technological possibilities make it easier for these regimes to find and target activists.

The Hague Peace Projects (HPP), through its work with diaspora communities, has heard many – anecdotal stories of intimidation of HRDs living in The Netherlands. Upon further examination of the works of other partner organizations in The Netherlands, it became clear that the afore-mentioned CICC, FIDH and Amnesty International are also familiar with some of these instances of harassment and intimidation towards HRDs. Therefore, we decided to investigate the existence of similar cases and the tactics being used to intimidate activists.

HRDs living in, and working from The Netherlands should be able to experience a free, hospitable, and protected environment to continue their practices. The United Nations (UN) reporter on HRDs said in his commentary on the UN Declaration on HRDs⁴:

3 <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/human-rights-defenders-what-are-hrds>

4 United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, “Declaration on Human Rights Defenders,” accessed September 18, 2019, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/SRHRDefenders/Pages/Declaration.aspx>

“The State’s duty to protect the rights of defenders is derived from each State’s primary responsibility and duty to protect all human rights, as established in:

- *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 2),*
- *The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Article 2),*
- *The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (Article 3),*
- *The European Convention on Human Rights (Article 1)”⁵*

Complimenting this, the International Service for Human Rights and Amnesty International together with other NGOs and 500 HRDs worldwide have developed a model law ⁶ that governments could use to develop their own legislation for the protection of other HRDs. We should make sure that the Netherlands, within or without the European Union (EU) framework, should be able to protect HRDs inside and outside of its borders.

d. Aim of the Research

This research seeks to find out whether HRDs are being intimidated or threatened in the Netherlands for doing their human rights work. For this research, we have interviewed people who come from: Rwanda, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Sudan, China, Pakistan, Iran and Israel/Palestinian Territories. These countries were selected based on the availability of cases that we could research during our investigation. We believe that a more thorough research project would expose a bigger problem than what we have currently been able to assess.

The research will also attempt to assess the needs of HRDs who have experienced intimidation within The Netherlands, and aims to find ways to offer structural support for the victims. This research will try to formulate some concrete suggestions for appropriate responses by the authorities on a municipal and national level.

5 *Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights , “Commentary to the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms,” accessed September 18, 2019, <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Defenders/CommentarytoDeclarationondefendersJuly2011.pdf>*

6 *International Service for Human Rights, “Groundbreaking Model Law to Recognise and Protect Human Rights Defenders,” Model Law, June 21, 2019, <https://www.ishr.ch/news/groundbreaking-model-law-recognise-and-protect-human-rights-defenders>*

III **Research Questions**

Are HRDs who reside in The Netherlands being intimidated, threatened, or otherwise targeted by foreign state or non-state actors who want to silence them? If so, what tactics are their harassers using against them to prevent them from vocally expressing their work? What can be done to better protect these HRDs?

IV **Methodology**

a. Study Design

The following research is a qualitative study based on thirty-two interviews conducted from July 2017 to October 2018 and from May 2019 to August 2019. Some interviews did not offer substantial information that might constitute imminent threat, however, fifteen interviews presented sufficient information to support the existence of imminent danger. We used qualitative methods, as they provide insights to the varying experiences of HRDs, as well an in-depth understanding of the issue(s) from the concerned group. Yet, the case studies should be considered with caution because they do not aim to provide exhaustive insights into the entire problem at hand. Rather, they offer a broad overview of some of the issues faced by HRDs living in the Netherlands. Furthermore, this study will choose to investigate the topic by utilizing a ‘harm based’ approach instead of a ‘rights-based’ approach in analysing the data collected. This concept means that we do not claim that any rights of the HRDs are being violated by the Dutch government itself but rather that the research showcases that there are certain situations occurring on Dutch soil that are causing harm to the rights of people residing in the Netherlands.

The participants were recruited based on their work as HRDs and activists through the snowball sampling research method. This method is frequently used by researchers to reach out to additional people through referrals made by their initial group of participants as long as they share a characteristic that is of research interest to the people conducting the study⁷. Hence, the researcher conducting this study on behalf of the HPP asked each interviewee to introduce us to other people with relevant cases. HPP, through its connection with diaspora communities, was able to make contact with some participants, who consequently connected us with valued sources.

7 *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Educational Research, Measurement, and Evaluation*, s.v., “Snowball Sampling,” accessed September 18, 2019, <http://methods.sagepub.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/reference/the-sage-encyclopedia-of-educational-research-measurement-and-evaluation/i19094.xml>

We proceeded in a semi-structured manner using interviews since they are considered to be rather adaptable and provided a measure of flexibility, which is more appropriate and useful when utilizing a qualitative research method⁸. In addition, interviews are particularly suitable when carrying out research that addresses sensitive matters, since interviewers can further adapt their responses and handle such situations more delicately so as to gather additional information. Each interview began with an interview guide designed to ask questions and uncover the participants' experiences. However, this was merely a "guide" because we recognize the importance of story-telling and allowing HRDs to express themselves outside of a pre-conceived methodological framework.

The researchers followed a security training in order to ensure the anonymity of the participants in the research. Since HRDs are a vulnerable group, it was of importance that the data they shared with us was secured as well as their identities. We therefore chose trusted platforms of communication, stored personal information in encrypted files and discussed the security needs of interviewees beforehand with regards to the conditions of meeting, etc.

b. Participants

The following table represents the list of the participants along with their countries of origin. In order to protect their identity, each key informant was given an identifier.

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN

IDENTIFIERS OF KEY INFORMANTS

| | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Eritrea | KI 1 |
| Pakistan | KI 2 |
| Sudan | KI 3, KI 4 |
| Rwanda | KI 5, KI 6, KI 7 |
| Dem. Republic of Congo | KI 8, KI 9 |
| China | KI 10, KI 11, KI 12 |
| Iran | KI 13, KI 14 |
| Israel | KI 15 |

⁸ *Malcolm Carey, Qualitative Research Skills for Social Work Theory and Practice (Burlington: Ashgate, 2012), 110.*

c. Country & HRDs profile

This section will present a brief overview of the political situation of the countries mentioned in this research in order to contextualize the work of our interviewees:

Eritrea

After the war with neighbouring Ethiopia, Eritrea has become one of the most oppressive countries in the world, with almost complete control of all civil activities by the government. Led by Isaias Afwerki for almost 30 years, the country has turned into a nation of servants for the regime. Everyone is forced to join the army after secondary school to serve without a fixed end date. Life in the army is very difficult, soldiers are used as cheap labour, and many have tried to escape this life of misery⁹. We spoke to one youth activist from Eritrea.

Pakistan

Although officially a democracy, Pakistan has been led for decades by its army and intelligence service. Senior members of civil society, journalists, and human rights defenders believe that the current ruling party is the civilian face of the Pakistan military. In the lead up to the election in July 2018, and since the tenure of the current government began, human rights defenders, media, and dissidents and have come under relentless attacks. Civic space in the country is rapidly shrinking. Critical voices have been silenced with impunity. Activists continue to face arbitrary detentions, enforced disappearance, torture, intimidation, false police cases of defamation, sedition, terrorism and cyber crime. They are also being put on no-fly lists and forced into exile. It appears that the Pakistani state's crackdown against dissents will not come to a halt any time soon. Parts of the country are unstable due to separatist and militant insurgencies and the military's counter-terrorism operations. We spoke to a well-known and outspoken blogger from Pakistan.

Rwanda

Rwanda, with an ethnic makeup of 85% Hutu's, 14% Tutsis and 1% Batwa has been troubled by ethnic violence since its independence in 1962. Politically dominated by the Hutu majority, its deepest crisis was the 1994 genocide on the Tutsi minority, when an estimated one million people were killed over a period of six months. Since then, the country has been led with an iron fist by Tutsi and former warlord, Paul Kagame. There is no independent civil society or media in Rwanda and every aspect of social life is controlled. People live in constant fear of the secret service and of each other¹¹. We have interviewed three people from Rwanda: two informants who used to work in the judiciary sector, and a minority rights activist.

9 For more information, see: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/africa/eritrea/report-eritrea/>

10 For more information, see: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/asia-and-the-pacific/pakistan/report-pakistan/>

11 For more information, see: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/africa/rwanda/report-rwanda/>

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

The Eastern part of the DRC has been dealing with the consequences of the genocidal events in its neighbouring countries, Rwanda and Burundi. Suffering from dictatorship after its independence in 1960, the state has completely collapsed after the genocide and war of 1994 in Rwanda, which spilled over and equally sparked conflict and genocide in the DRC, resulting in the Congo wars of 1996 and 1998. The UN Mapping report of 2010 estimated that around six million people have died as a result of these devastating massacres from 1993-2003¹². The country was left without proper government or organization, leading to the eastern part being destabilized by the militia, foreign armed groups, gangs, and corrupt military and government officials¹³. We have interviewed one journalist and one founder of multiple human rights organizations from the eastern part of Congo.

Sudan

Sudan suffered 30 years of military dictatorship under Omar Al Bashir and the Muslim Brotherhood. This was an extremely violent period that led to at least four civil wars with the South, which has since become an independent state, along with Darfur, the Blue Nile region, and the Nuba Mountains. Millions of people have died and fled the country. After months of protest, the regime collapsed in early 2019 and the country is currently in a state of transition, which is still unstable¹⁴. We have interviewed one lawyer and one youth activist, both from Darfur.

China

China is officially a communist country even though its policies seem mainly capitalist. Their party system has remained in place since 1949. The country has been condemned for many human rights violations such as the lack of; civil liberties, free press, democracy, and freedom of expression. One problem in particular is the severe oppression of the Turkic-speaking Muslim population of the Uyghurs in the western part of the country, Xingjiang. Reports are now increasingly emerging about “re-education camps” (in fact high security prisons) where an undocumented number of Uyghurs are being held indefinitely¹⁵. We have spoken to many Uyghurs, but chose the stories of three persons because they fit the profile of a Human Rights Defender: two activist community leaders and one journalist. Besides their stories we are aware of many more stories of people who are threatened simply because of their ethnicity and not due to any sort of activism¹⁶.

12 <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Countries/AfricaRegion/Pages/DRCUNMappingReport.aspx>

13 For more information, see : <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/africa/democratic-republic-of-the-congo/report-democratic-republic-of-the-congo/>

14 <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/sudan>

15 For more information, see: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/asia-and-the-pacific/china/report-china/>

16 One example is the case of an Uyghur couple, they have discussed how the wife's mother would contact her from China randomly insisting that they provide their personal information, such as (Dutch) passport numbers, home address, work address and the name of their childrens' school in The Netherlands. The couple are aware that the wife's mother is being coerced by the Chinese police and could hear that the police are present in the room when his mother-in-law calls. They believe that her mother is now being held in a labour camp or some other form of custody because they cannot call her directly. Only the mother sometimes calls and sounds very nervous and keeps asking for these personal details. The couple is very scared for the fate of their family in China and experience stress and depression.

Iran

Ever since the Islamic Revolution of 1979, Iran is led by a political religious regime that has enforced its policies on its people. Opponents have been regularly detained, tortured or have simply “disappeared”¹⁷. We spoke to two people from Iran who work for an NGO.

Israel/Palestinian Territories

Since the occupation of Palestine in 1967, Israel has implemented a policy of marginalization, land theft, arbitrary detention, torture, unlawful killing, economic deprivation, and blockades against the civilian population of the Palestinian Territories. Occasionally it has conducted military attacks against densely populated areas and civilian infrastructure, making normal life for Palestinians almost unbearable. Many Palestinian youth deprived of perspective for the future, have been ‘forced’ into extremism and occasional outbursts of violent protest¹⁸. We have spoken to an activist that is suing high level Army and Airforce commanders for the unlawful killing of his family members during the Gaza raid in 2014.

V Limitations

Although the Hague Peace Projects was able to gather much data from the HRDs that were interviewed, a few challenges were experienced at different stages of the research. Firstly; it was rather difficult to find persons living in the Netherlands that fit the generally prescribed definition of an HRD. This is because our snowball sampling research method was limited, in that our ability to find additional participants was based on the referrals of our participants and not on a randomized sample. Hence, the data we have collected from our interviewees cannot be considered to be representative of all HRDs because we may have only reached a specific subsection of such people within the Netherlands. Secondly; reaching out to such HRDs is also challenging because many people are wary and distrustful of sharing their experiences with our researchers due to the potential dangers involved in reaching out and interacting with humanitarian NGOs. For example, although we were in contact with some Russians and Palestinians who were being harassed and threatened in the Netherlands, they were not comfortable being interviewed for this report. Thirdly; another limitation is the concern or inability to corroborate the information gathered in this report. Due to the sensitivity of the data and the risks associated with being interviewed, the findings of this report are based almost exclusively on these interviews and are hard to verify otherwise. Nonetheless, considering the nature of the work carried out by HRDs and the dangers associated with their activism, both locally and remotely, this likely provides additional credibility to their stories and experiences, especially considering the lengths that they must go to to protect their identities. These HRDs speak the truth because it’s the best weapon they have. Their stories make cracks in the propaganda machines and the hardened exteriors of authoritarian regimes. This acknowledges the dangers faced by human rights defenders to speak out about their experiences of injustice and censorship.

17 For more information, see : <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/iran/report-iran/>

18 <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/israel/palestine>

VI Findings

In this research, we present the information provided by participants who have been intimidated or threatened, or are still being threatened by foreign actors in The Netherlands. A “threat” is defined as “the possibility that someone will harm somebody else’s physical or moral integrity, or property, through purposeful and often violent action.”¹⁹ “Harassment” is defined as “any unwanted physical or verbal behaviour that significantly offends or humiliates you. Generally, harassment is a behaviour that persists over time. Serious one-time incidents can also sometimes be considered harassment.”²⁰ “Intimidation” is defined as “action taken against a human rights defender’s family members, representatives or associates, or a group, association or organisation with which the human rights defender is associated (...) related to a human rights defender’s status, work or activity as a human rights defender.”²¹ Since their experiences vary greatly, the findings are categorized by different levels of threats based on whether they are indirect, direct, substantial, or critical. The severity of the harm caused by these threats can present and explain how the phenomenon of foreign intimidation can curtail one’s right to life, freedom of expression, and right of privacy. These are all fundamental rights afforded to all humans under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights²².

A. Direct Threats

1. Intimidation and violence

This section is concerned with the most critical dangers faced by HRDs. It is important to note that few participants have experienced such a level of threat. Indirect threats and direct intimidation are not to be taken lightly as violence can easily escalate.

On November 8, 2017, an Iranian political activist was shot dead in The Hague after living in the Netherlands for 10 years. Ahmad Mola Nissi was the leader of the Arab Struggle Movement for the Liberation of Ahwaz (ASMLA), a movement for the independence of the Khuzestan province in Iran. He does not strictly fall within the category of HRDs because he was suspected of being involved in violent activities in Iran. Therefore, he cannot be counted as a subject within the framework of this research. However, his example highlights the need for relocation when under serious threat. In Ahmad’s case this was from Maastricht to The Hague, after “opponents learned of his home address” and having been threatened several times before his death. If foreign actors in Iran were able to kill him in front of his home in The Hague, it highlights that even in the Netherlands, activists are still in danger and are not fully protected.

19 J.T. Dworken, “Threat Assessment,” in *Protection Manual for Human Rights Defenders*, by Enrique Eguren (Dublin: Front Line, 2005), 18.

20 We have taken this definition from the Canadian Human Rights Commission: <https://www.chrc-ccdp.gc.ca/eng/content/what-harassment-1>

21 This definition was taken from a policy brief of the International Service for Human Rights to the UN: https://www.ishr.ch/sites/default/files/files/final_good_practice_reprisals_submission_to_2019_sg_report_rev.pdf

22 <https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>

Three of the persons we interviewed have faced violence and/or direct threats to their lives while being in the Netherlands. For example, the case of KI 2. KI 2 worked in the Netherlands and travelled from the Netherlands to Pakistan where their identity was revealed as someone involved in a famous anti-government blog. They were kidnapped and tortured, allegedly, by the army and secret service personnel for twenty-four days along with four other activists. They were released after stories of their disappearance were broadcasted internationally, and following demonstrations and international pressures demanding their release. However, although KI 2 returned to the Netherlands, their perpetrators still make use of direct intimidation techniques to silence him.

In February 2020, KI 2 was attacked and severely beaten in front of their house in The Netherlands by 1 perpetrator while another perpetrator filmed the encounter. This is the most recent incident in a string of threats and intimidations over the past year. In December 2018, KI 2 received a warning by a foreign intelligence service that members of a gang in the Netherlands had been paid to kill him. KI 2 consequently went into hiding for a while afterwards.

KI 2 told us that even before the mentioned attack, people were sometimes watching KI 2's house from a car. They had also successfully isolated KI 2 socially by intimidating their friends in The Netherlands. KI 2 recalls that on one occasion they were supposed to meet two friends in Rotterdam. At the exit of the central station, two unknown men came up to KI 2's friends and told them that KI 2 had sent them to tell his friends that KI 2 was waiting for them in a coffee shop. This was not true, but was simply an act to intimidate and disrupt the social life of KI 2 and scare friends away from him. Indeed, isolating an HRD from their community is a form of violence that has psychological consequences on activists. This incident shows possible evidence of surveillance and phone-tapping as the communications took place via WhatsApp and no one knew that the meeting was going to happen.

KI 9 is the second participant to have been directly threatened and attacked several times. First, as KI 9 went to their home in The Netherlands for a trip, KI 9 found their door had been forced open and his computer stolen. Although some money was next to the computer, they only took the latter, signifying that the computer was their only interest, as it contained information on the participant and their work. KI 9 was directly addressed twice, once in The Hague, and once in Amsterdam. Several people surrounded him and asked "you are [KI 9's name], right?" while grabbing KI 9 by the collar. Because these perpetrators spoke the mother tongue of KI 9's country of origin, it is clear that these people were sent to intimidate KI 9, showing KI 9 that they were able to find him easily. Finally, KI 9 almost got run over by a car twice within a few minutes, demonstrating a likely attempt to kill them or at least intimidate KI 9. Recently, KI 9 found a note on their door saying that they only had one more year to live. A pile of rubbish was thrown in front of KI 9's door, inside the apartment building along with the death-threat. We personally know of another activist from Rwanda who have been physically attacked several times. However, this took place in Brussels and therefore falls outside of the scope of this report.

KI 15 is a Dutch citizen who is originally from the Gaza Strip in the Palestinian Territories. After the destruction of their family's apartment building, as a result of which six of his family members in the Gaza Strip were killed in 2014, KI 15 initiated a court case in The Netherlands²³ against the former head of the Israel Defence Force (IDF) and the former head of the IDF air force. One of these is Benny Gantz, who has been retired since 2014 and became a prominent political figure and prospective new Israeli Prime Minister. KI 15 aimed to hold the generals accountable through a civil procedure based on the concept of universal jurisdiction for intentionally targeting a civilian home, contrary to international humanitarian law²⁴.

At the end of 2018, when financial pressures in connection with this case were rising for KI 15 and his family, and they were considering retracting their case because of this precarious situation, something very serious happened. When KI 15's partner was driving the family car, they noticed something was wrong with the brakes; they were barely working. They had the car checked by a mechanic who ascertained that the front brake cables had been intentionally cut through. They reported this to the police. The police investigated but were unable to trace who was responsible for cutting the brake cables. No traces were found on the cables themselves, nor at the location where the car had been parked. The police and public prosecutor were therefore unable to provide any conclusive evidence as to who was responsible for sabotaging the car. However, the fact remains that the brakes were proven to be intentionally sabotaged, and thereby a very serious attempt had been made on the lives of KI 15 and their family in The Netherlands. Should they would have continued driving in this car on a highway, a very serious and potentially deadly traffic accident would likely have been imminent.

Given that this incident took place during the period when KI 15 and their family were under extreme financial pressure in connection with the court case, and as such were already considering withdrawing from it, they experienced this crime as an action intended to intimidate them, thus providing the final straw that provoked them to finally withdrawing from pursuing this legal trajectory. They perceive this action as a serious form of intimidation that carried the risk of serious injury or death to them, their children, and potentially others as well.

2. Digital direct threats

HRD's have told us that they are aware that they are being followed on social media. Sometimes, as many of our participants experienced, this can lead to direct threats received through digital platforms as demonstrated in the following cases.

23 *In The Netherlands it is possible to prosecute (also non-Dutch citizens) perpetrators of international crimes, when the victim resides in the Netherlands: <https://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0015252/2020-01-01>*

24 *Just recently the court case was dismissed due to the lack of jurisdiction over the Israeli Officials because of their immunity with regard tot heir official position within the state of Israel: <https://www.rechtspraak.nl/Organisatie-en-contact/Organisatie/Rechtbanken/Rechtbank-Den-Haag/Nieuws/Paginas/Nederlandse-rechter-niet-bevoegd-in-zaak-tegen-voormalig-Israëlische-militairen-over-bombardement-Gazastrook.aspx>*

KI 2 from Pakistan received digital threats as well: in one incident Facebook notified KI 2 that a government-backed hacker group had gained access to their data. KI 2's partner received a similar notification. It is of importance to know that this participant is an online activist: KI 2's reporting of human rights violations depends on social media. KI 2 also stated that the government made fake (photoshopped) porn videos and photos of their partner, which they disseminated online in order to generate shame within the Pakistani community. Further, KI 2 asserts that they received numerous threats via online messages, such as "Shut up or we will kill you" adding that they know where their child goes to school. Another incident happened in Rotterdam. KI 2 purchased snacks and boarded a train, whereupon KI 2 received a message mentioning food and saying "Enjoy your Meal". KI 2 believes their phone was hacked in the past using globally well-known spyware. It is common that their personal information is frequently posted online by unknown parties. KI 2 believes that this privileged information appearing online, with very intimate details, is a deliberate scare-tactic suggesting that 'they know everything'.

Originally from Sudan, KI 4 experiences digital direct threats as well. During the interview, KI 4 disclosed that they continually receive messages and threats with fake accounts and numbers from different countries, other than the Netherlands or Sudan. KI 4 recalled receiving the following message: "We know your family, we know where you live, we know what you are doing, and you can't come back to Sudan. We are able to target you in the Netherlands," adding that they are able to pay someone to kill him if KI 4 continues their activities.

Rwandan participant KI 6 declared that they received several Facebook messages with insults, as well as calls, from hidden numbers, which KI 6 does not respond to.

KI 9 is also constantly followed, and receives a high frequency of messages and calls which they suspect comes from actors in the Congolese military or government. In the messages and calls, they tell KI 9 that even though resident in the Netherlands, they can still follow, control, and hurt KI 9, adding that they are not far away. One time, while KI 9 was on the train, they called to tell KI 9 that they knew they were in the train, giving the exact location, direction, and speed the train was travelling at. Participant KI 9 owns two phones and regularly hides them in random locations to confuse their harassers, to give them false leads of their location, as smartphones are easily trackable. KI 9 also frequently travels around Europe hoping that they will lose sight of KI 9. Unfortunately, they were also able to locate KI 9 in France.

Technology and social media make it incredibly easy for governments and non-governmental actors to follow activists and to intimidate, facilitating immediate or rapid contact with them. In the case of the Uyghur respondents, KI 10, having arrived in the Netherlands from China with their partner in 2002, assumed quite some influence within the Dutch Uyghur community. As a result of this activism, KI 10 immediately started to receive intimidating phone calls. Between his arrival in 2002 and 2014, KI 10 was called 4 times. Each time, the secret service would go to KI 10's parents' home. They would allow his parents to call and speak to KI 10, but would thereafter take over the line and demand KI 10 to cease his activism in the Netherlands. The fifth and last time they called was in 2015. Their tone was a lot more threatening on this occasion. They accused KI 10 of working against the communist party through the mobilization of Uyghurs living in the Netherlands. They explicitly demanded KI 10 to stop his activism, or 5 members of KI 10's family would disappear to a camp. Because KI 10 did not give in, these family members did unfortunately disappear soon after.

B. Indirect Threats

Foreign Governments and non-governmental actors exert leverage on HRDs in an attempt to silence them. This can take on various forms. These entities often influence activists in diaspora communities through intermediaries, which is something that all of our key informants have experienced.

1. Pressures affecting HRDs' families and friends

Almost all of our participants highlighted that foreign actors exert pressure on HRDs and activists through targeting their families or friends in their countries of origin. Participants KI 1 and KI 5, an Eritrean youth activist and a former lawyer from Rwanda, brought attention to this issue. In both cases, the respective governments contacted their families to request that they stop their activities in the Netherlands. KI 5 told us that the government was putting so much pressure on their partner and family that they decided to divorce KI 5. Pakistani participant KI 2 disclosed the following account: Intelligence agents visit KI 2's family very frequently and allegedly requested their father to advise KI 2 to stop their activities, declaring: "We have orders to take KI 2's sisters and brothers and we can kill you." KI 2 continued, "My father said I do not listen to him so it doesn't make sense to threaten us, whereupon the person said, 'Well, then we'll see'. He said he would talk to him later and to someone more superior. This person was from the ISI (Pakistani intelligence agency)".

KI 4, a youth activist from Sudan, asserted that they were afraid that someone else will be targeted because of them. KI 4 stressed that one of their friends, working with KI 4 in Sudan, received the following text message: "We know you are working with [KI 4] in the Netherlands, if you don't tell your friend to stop, we will arrest you". KI 6 and KI 8 both experienced similar threats, respectively from Rwanda and from DRC. Their families have been threatened to the extent that they had to move to the Netherlands to be provided with protection and security. KI 8, who is a journalist, also declared that one of their friends was threatened after this friend posted a comment below their Facebook article. KI 9 is a well-known human rights activist from Eastern Congo. KI 9's relatives were killed due to their relationship with the former. It was actually the harasser who informed KI 9 by phone of the murder of their brother, as a means to threaten the participant's own life.

KI 10 also fears for their family in China. KI 10 works as a journalist. Initially, KI 10 was able to obtain a "family reunion" visa for their partner and two children after their asylum in The Netherlands was approved. This means their family was allowed by the Dutch authorities to join KI 10 in The Netherlands. However, after a long procedure, this permission was denied. Since then, the intimidation calls started. Apparently the Chinese authorities thought they could easily manipulate KI 10 if the family stayed in China. The Chinese secret service repeatedly tried to lure KI 10 into various meetings across the globe in order to recruit him into intelligence activities. KI 10 refused. Consequently, KI 10 has lost contact with their partner and two children since the summer of 2017, and has since been unable to reach them via Skype, WeChat or any other social platforms. KI 10 attempted to reach neighbours and friends, but no one had seen them. Supposedly they were "moved to another location". Besides KI 10's partner and children, other family members of KI 10 also disappeared at the same time. KI 10 has been unable to reach their father, brother, and two sisters. KI 10 suspects that their entire family has either been sent to 're-education' camps or killed. KI 10 believes this is punishment for KI 10's work for several International media outlets.

KI 10, KI 11 and KI 12, have all experienced the disappearance of various, sometimes multiple, family members living in China. KI 11 has not heard from their family since 2015. Like the other Uyghur informants, KI 11 believes they are in one of the “re-education camps”. KI 11 comes from a small area with 45.000 inhabitants, and this area has (reportedly) two camps with a total capacity of 20.000 people. KI 11 believes almost half of the town is in these camps.

Thus, a clear picture emerges that certain governments and non-governmental actors regularly take advantage of the relatives still living in the countries of origin of the participants, in order to exercise pressure on HRDs. KI 13 and KI 14 from Iran noted that they had not received threats to their families, but noted that the family does play a big role in the fact that most Iranians do not dare to speak out publicly about their political views in The Netherlands. Most of them do visit their family occasionally in Iran and are aware that speaking out in The Netherlands could lead to being arrested when visiting Iran, as happened to Dutch Iranian human rights activist, Sabri Hassanpour, in 2016²⁵, and many others.

2. Following, tracking, and monitoring

Most of our participants expressed their suspicion that they are being followed, tracked and monitored in the Netherlands. If the prevalence of social media has helped in increasing the awareness of human rights violations, it also became a powerful tool for governments and non-governmental actors to track exiled activists. Some foreign actors engage in elaborate efforts to follow their diaspora, namely through agents seeking to obtain information on such activists.

KI 12 reported that the number of Uyghur diaspora participating in public, political, or human rights activities has dropped drastically since 2015, out of fear of being monitored. KI 1 stated that the Eritrean government made KI 1 aware that they are watching their Facebook account, although they do not receive threats directly through this platform. Consequently, KI 1 stated that they does not post any family pictures on social media, fearing the repercussions for them. KI 1 expressed their reservations with regard to attending gatherings within the community, highlighting that they always go with trusted friends to Eritrean parties, and always double-checks before going to any meetings.

Likewise, KI 2 stated that the Pakistani government keeps track of its diaspora in the Netherlands through spies. For instance, KI 2 recalls going to different events where so-called Pakistani ‘journalists’ were present. KI 2 stated that they are not journalists but spies, even though they have press badges and access. Their job, according to KI 2, is to video tape or live stream the event to the embassy. Therefore, speakers at these events avoid discussing human rights violations in Pakistan as they fear for their families back home. Furthermore, KI 2 declared that all big cities in The Netherlands have community leaders (he points out they are not imams) who track and gather information for the government. On one occasion the Embassy called a student to provide them footage of KI 2’s talk at the VU in Amsterdam. KI 2: “Usually embassies use diaspora to spy on people”. KI 2 stated that their ‘operatives’ are known in the Pakistani community and usually people of Pakistani origin.

25 Thoams Erdbrink, “‘Help me’: 60-jarige Nederlandse-Iraniër zit al jaar vast in Iran voor spionage” (‘Help me’: 60-year-old Dutch-Iranian has been in Iran for Years for Espionage), *de Volkskrant*, June 24, 2017, <https://www.volkskrant.nl/nieuws-achtergrond/help-me-60-jarige-nederlandse-iranier-zit-al-jaar-vast-in-iran-voor-spionage~b50ffaf5/>

The Sudanese participants KI 3 and KI 4, described similar actions by regime actors. They both highlighted the fact that they are being followed during political demonstrations. According to them there are governmental agents present, who, in an intimidating manner, are taking photographing of the participants. Consequently, the government knows their identities and could arrest them or their relatives if they attempt to return to Sudan. Interestingly, KI 4 stated that Sudanese regime supporters often meet and join diaspora events (such as Ramadan); their goal is allegedly to collect information to transfer to the Sudanese Embassy. KI 4 is part of a WhatsApp group with people from the Sudanese diaspora as well as with people living in Sudan. One of the members of this WhatsApp group stated that 'the opposition in the Netherlands is strong'. According to KI 4, this message demonstrates the fact that the opposition is being followed and tracked in The Netherlands.

KI 5 informed that the Rwandan community is being monitored through social media, on Facebook in particular. KI 5 also made the claim that the Rwandan government sends agents that are pretending to be asylum seekers in order to gather information on the Rwandan diaspora in the Netherlands. KI 7, a minorities activist from Rwanda was threatened in a shop in The Hague by an embassy employee who questioned him in a threatening way about their alleged contact with a lawyer and political activist in Rwanda. This embassy employee could only have known about this contact if they had either had access to his Whatsapp account, or if they had opened his mail. KI 6 confirmed this issue faced by Rwandan activists in the Netherlands, asserting being followed and monitored at work events. For instance, KI 6 recalled being verbally abused at The Hague Centraal Station by a Rwandan official working for the Embassy the day after an event on the Rwandan genocide where KI 6 was speaking. The latter was not present at the event, demonstrating that some people close to the Embassy were attending our participant's event and reported their speech to the embassy. KI 7 also noticed some allegedly Rwandan people sitting for more than one hour in front of his house at a bus stop, never taking a bus or tram, but observing who entered and exited their house. One of these persons was later observed following KI 7 back and forth from their journey to the shopping centre and back home.

It is of importance to note that the HPP has also faced issues with Rwandan spies at its events in which academics debate the political situation in Rwanda.

KI 8 from the DRC obtained political asylum because their name was on a death list while they were reporting for the ICC. Although now living in the Netherlands, a reliable source told KI 8 that the actors threatening his family are still looking for information on KI 8, are still monitoring the articles KI 8 is writing and threaten the people liking or commenting on their posts. KI 9 is not threatened through social media because KI 9 avoids it. The reason why KI 9 quit social media was due to frequent direct threats via calls or messages. This is important as nowadays, most activists make use of their social platforms to spread reports on human rights violations in their respective countries. Not being able to use any social media platforms for fear of repercussions is directly undermining the work of activists, particularly in the case of KI 9.

In the case of the Uyghur respondents, KI 12 is currently being followed and tracked in the Netherlands. KI 12 has been warned by the Dutch police to watch out when entering or exiting their car for potential 'violent incidents'. KI 13 and KI 14 reported a different kind of harassment. They have been the subjects of several slanderous articles published in Iranian media about them personally and about their organisation. These articles are full of false and misleading information – for example, accusing them of being CIA or Israeli spies – essentially ostracizing them from the Iranian community. They also noted that just recently, another activist who is the editor of an important dissident Twitter account, received desperate voice messages from a friend in Iran. This friend had been arrested and was forced to call the activist from prison to ask them for the login details of the Twitter account in order to be released.

C. Consequences of intimidation and threats

As previously mentioned, the HPP believed that the Nada Kiswanson case, although relatively extreme, was not an isolated one, but that it is part of a broader, structural issue. The results of the conducted interviews conclude that HRDs in The Netherlands do receive threats by foreign actors, whether governmental or non- governmental. The latter operate through various forms and techniques of intimidation.

A regular method to silence HRDs is through the harassment of their relatives, and represents an additional psychological pressure to refrain from their advocacy work. As stated by most of our participants, they fear that their families and friends will be directly impacted by their work, even if they themselves are not the ones being directly targeted. Uyghur activist K 12 told the researchers: "if not for my partner I don't think I would be alive. They have helped me to deal with my constant stress and depression. I often cannot sleep because I am always asking myself where my children are." Following, tracking, and monitoring appear to be common phenomena in the lives of HRDs. Most of them asserted that they think they are being followed, be it online by hacking their phones or even physically in the streets. Technology has given foreign (state) actors the ability to collect information about activists' locations, their work, their conversations, and their relatives.

We noticed among most interviewees a fear of attending meetings due to the possibility that spies, working for those who endanger their lives, might be present. Avoiding social events and contact increases psychological pressures, loneliness, depression and paranoia, and adversely affects the work of the activists.

Psychological effects have been stressed several times during the interviews. KI 9 for instance, asserted that they live in a state of fear and paranoia that has a direct and paralysing effect on their work: "I have been to many psychologists already and have also taken medicine, but I have become totally passive. I cannot concentrate or focus on anything. Sometimes it gets a little better but then I get another threatening phone call and my world collapses again". It also affects their families negatively: KI 2 from Pakistan said: "My six year old is now making Lego contraptions and putting them in all corners of the house, saying: I've got cameras installed, so they cannot easily get here anymore". This monitoring has a direct impact on the content that is posted online and/or expressed during meetings by activists, as well as influencing their participation in demonstrations, or even just attending simple communal celebrations and religious holidays. In other words, being followed by foreign actors has a direct negative impact on how our participants navigate through their work and personal life.

All interviewees mentioned the impact of intimidation on the migrant communities they belong to. Even if most of the threats never lead to actual violence, the chilling effect on the community is strikingly similar in the stories. It can be conclusively stated that the intimidation of community leaders that speak out politically against their countries of origin has a drastic silencing effect on the wider community. This phenomenon is a danger to the freedom of expression in The Netherlands. KI 2 from Pakistan stated: "Since the last incident, a friend from my country told me that they have sleepless nights because they don't feel safe in The Netherlands anymore, even though it was me, and not them who was attacked." KI 11 said: "I can see that my community is afraid. I used to gather the whole Uyghur community in The Netherlands during festivities and cultural events. Now only very few people come if I send an invitation, afraid that they will be betrayed by someone else and targeted themselves".

D. Dutch authorities

One of the important issues concerning this research was whether Dutch institutions provide an efficient and proactive response to threats experienced by HRDs. Thus, the final section of the findings refers to question 12 (See Appendix 1) of our research interview, namely "Did you approach the Dutch authorities, if so how, who and what action did they take, if any?"

The common theme in our response from participants to this question was that they feel a lack of protection or support by Dutch authorities, especially when facing indirect threats. KI 1 stated that the police did not understand them when KI 1 went to report their issues, namely that he felt in danger when the Eritrean president came to the Netherlands. KI 2 expressed that they went to the local police many times (4/5 times). Every time KI 2 reported these issues to the police, from threats on Facebook to an incident involving the creation of fake porn, the police took notes and wrote reports of KI 2's issues. However they stated that the police did not provide any visible followup. He declared "the police do not understand". Only after an article about the attack in front of their house had appeared on national news did the police show an active interest, and re-started a previously launched investigation that did not yield any results.

KI 4 asserted that they did not approach the police because KI 4 believes that the police cannot do anything about the issues they are facing, and because the Dutch police cannot protect relatives that live in other countries. Participant KI 5 stressed that, in order to get the police involved, one needs direct threats, and that KI 5 feels safer in another European country. In a similar vein, KI 8 from the DRC asserted that they did not go to the police because KI 8 is certain that they cannot do anything for them, and they do not take it seriously. A reason for this is because threats, or feelings that one is being followed, is difficult to prove. KI 9 repeatedly went to the police and showed us the reports they made each time. However, the police investigations were not able to find any evidence about the origins of the threats. When we accompanied KI 9 to the police and the researchers talked to them, they acknowledged that they know that these incidents are happening, but stated that it is difficult to act upon them. KI 12 asserted that when they reported the threats that they were receiving from the Chinese government to the Dutch police, the police said that they could not do much. In the meantime, there appears to be some form of ad hoc construction between the Chinese Liaison of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with one Uyghur community leader, and one local police office, to facilitate other Uyghurs to file a report.

KI 2 was contacted by phone by the Dutch police who stated that it was difficult to track people due to late action. KI 2: "Police action only started after media reports. Not everyone has access to the media and so many people don't get help." The police also stated that they may have lost useful footage from surveillance cameras as they generally get overwritten every 24-48 hours. KI 2 believes that HRDs need special attention, and that it is crucial for police investigations that actions are timely.

The researchers also followed two cases closely as they were happening during the period of this research. We accompanied one of the Key Informants several times to the police, in order to file a report about a serious direct threat. In neither case did this lead to any results. Although not all our participants went to the Dutch authorities, those who did expressed disappointment, and that the police did not have the capacity to understand their particular need for protection, especially when facing indirect threats. This is why this research argues for the necessity of an infrastructure that is specialized in these types of issues, where protection for HRDs can be rapidly provided.

VII Conclusions

1. Despite the limitations of this study, which are inherent to the nature of anecdotal evidence, this research has shed light on a previously unexplored issue. The results overwhelmingly indicate that within the Netherlands, the interviewed HRDs are susceptible to different types of threats and intimidation from foreign state or non-state actors, and even violence in a few extreme cases.
2. The findings indicated that HRDs are generally targeted based on their actions in the Netherlands, and that their family members and loved ones can also be targeted, especially if they live abroad. Threats of intimidation directed towards family members abroad are an effective way to further silence such activists. The threats can be categorized as being either direct or indirect, and substantial or critical, based on the extent to which the HRD or their family members are intimidated or targeted.
3. This research has indicated the absence of an adequate legal and structural framework to protect HRDs who have been granted asylum within the Netherlands, even when many such HRDs have become Dutch citizens. When many HRDs turned to the Dutch authorities for aid, they were unable to assist because the threats were difficult to prove, and the perpetrators were not usually Dutch nationals or residents. As such, the need to provide national support and protection for such activists is extremely important, and these cases must be further emphasized within the Netherlands.
4. It has become clear that threats, intimidation, and harassment towards community leaders who are vocal on human rights issues has a severe silencing effect on the migrant communities that they belong to. Even if most of the threats never lead to actual violence, the dramatic effect on the community is clearly shown. This effect is a strong reason for the Dutch authorities to act promptly and unequivocally with regard to the protection of HRDs, and towards the states and actors responsible for this harassment.

VIII Recommendations

a. Research

This research is only a broad overview of some of the issues faced by HRDs in the Netherlands. It does not argue that all activists face the same level of threats, nor does it claim that all activists are being threatened. Simultaneously, the list of countries provided in this research is not exhaustive. Activists coming from other countries might also have suffered threats and intimidation in The Netherlands, but we cannot confirm this as information and informants are very hard to find. Therefore, more research must be made to offer a broader picture to further the understanding of the threats and violence against HRDs in the Netherlands.

b. HRD's protection

As previously stated, this research argues for the need of effective protocols and procedures with regards to reporting and following up on threats faced by HRDs in the Netherlands. According to Section 15 of the Model Law for the Recognition and Protection of Human Rights Defenders, HRDs should not be subjected to intimidation or any form of retaliation based on their work²⁶. Internationally, the Dutch government promotes several ways to protect HRDs, as stated in its policy documents²⁷.

Therefore, the Netherlands is obliged to respect the engagement stipulating that the State should 'take all necessary measures' in the protection of HRDs and the threats that they may receive in the context of their work. This is also in accordance with Sections 26 and 27 of the Model Law, which explicitly proclaims the obligation of the state to protect HRDs against intimidation, retaliation, or interference in their work. Section 28 further emphasizes the importance of investigating threats against the lives of HRDs²⁸. As such, a necessary measure would be the eventual creation of a specialized protocol to report and deal with threats. In order to do so, this would require a more rigorous and clearly outlined procedure in which complaints and reports are investigated promptly and thoroughly, with the potential for a follow-up for further examination to better ensure the safety of HRDs.

26 *Model Law for the Recognition and Protection of Human Rights Defenders, "Section 15," accessed September 18, 2019, https://www.ishr.ch/sites/default/files/documents/model_law_english_january2017_screenversion.pdf*

27 *<https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/mensenrechten/mensenrechten-wereldwijd>*

28 *Model Law for the Recognition and Protection of Human Rights Defenders, "Section 26-28" accessed September 18, 2019, https://www.ishr.ch/sites/default/files/documents/model_law_english_january2017_screenversion.pdf*

To a certain extent, it is difficult to prevent threats and intimidations from happening since it goes beyond Dutch borders. The Dutch authorities only have a limited power of diplomacy to protect the relatives of HRDs that are living outside the Netherlands, nor can it control everyone in the diaspora of the countries concerned by our research. However, The Netherlands could appoint a government agency within one of the ministries, preferably the National Coordinator of Terrorism and Security (NCTV) department at the Ministry of Internal Affairs, that could act as a centre of expertise, research, and consultation. This 'focal point' would collect, register, and investigate similar threats, look for links between threats and/or attacks and provide a coordinated response to these issues. This is an essential building block to ensuring that the lives of HRDs are better protected within the Netherlands because it will allow the procedure of reporting to the Dutch police and government to become more standardized. As such, HRDs will be more able to continue their work without fear of reprisal or intimidation, having left their countries of origin. Finally, the Dutch government should also support those programs of Dutch NGOs that provide physical safe spaces, assistance, and digital security training for HRDs living in the Netherlands.

During the interviews, some of the participants highlighted issues amongst Dutch authorities and the Dutch police system to protect HRDs in the Netherlands. They themselves also gave numerous other recommendations to address these issues:

- Physical protection
- Police and State awareness, including research into how police deal with threats coming from other countries.
- Police security training
- Tracking of digital threats
- Procedure should follow immediately after report of the threat
- Country database to increase the awareness of human rights violations in countries
- Citizenship for political asylum seekers
- Acknowledge the structural nature of threats against HRDs. Do not label incidences as isolated. Start the conversation. This may facilitate easier conversation and a better flow of information within the international scene and prompt more action globally
- Forge a closer alliance with IND and visa offices in determining who is acquiring visas; enables the early decline of visas applied for by threatening parties. If threatening parties are not known to the government or intelligence services; more rigorous visa requirements may be applied to persons with close/explicit/overt relations with the respective home governments in the respective countries

All of these recommendations, as well as the HPP's proposal to create a focal point specialized in these issues, can provide an appropriate response to the experiences of activists experiencing intimidation and harassment in the Netherlands.

c. External Recommendations

Outside of the confines of the national level, this research recommends that the global level should similarly respond to the threatening experiences lived by HRDs. These external actors can be found on the European level and NGO level. Such recommendations include:

1. European level:

- Establish cooperation between the affected Member States; eg. create/forgo alliances between nations on how to monitor the cross-border movements of spies and intercept intimidation tactics towards human rights defenders and their wider communities.

2. NGO level:

- Continued and persistent support for victims; create safe spaces where victims can congregate and share their experiences with each other and relevant organizations, provide (digital) security trainings for HRD's in The Netherlands.
- Lobby at the EU and national level to prompt both national and supranational reactions and law reforms/additions

3. Victim level

- Victims should be encouraged to seek the help of the police
- Any act, irrespective of how small, should be reported to the police (could be insight into a bigger threat lying ahead)

Appendix 1 : Interview guide

1. Name, date of birth, nationality

2. In what year did you come to the Netherlands?

3. Why did you have to leave your home country? Could you explain your story?

4. Where do you live currently?

5. Are you being targeted by foreign state actors in the Netherlands?

a. When was it? (Establish a detailed chronology)

b. Where did it happen?

c. What time of day was it?

d. Were you alone or was someone there with you? Did they witness what happened?

e. Did you tell other people about it?

f. Did you document it in any way?

6. Why do you think you are being targeted?

7. How are you being targeted?

a. What methods were used?

i. How has technology been used?

b. Possible follow up: Are there members of your family or the community who have also been threatened?

8. How frequently are you being targeted?

a. Has it increased in frequency or nature?

9. In what way are these threats affecting you?

a. How is it affecting people close to you? Or those working with you or relying on you?

b. What impact has it had on your work?

10. Do you know who is targeting you? How do you know this?

a. Can you think of any other credible explanation for what is happening (other than government agents)?

b. In other words, who else or what else could it be?

11. Was it clear to you who you could turn to for help?

12. Did you approach the Dutch authorities, if so how, who and what action did they take, if any?

a. Do you feel like they understand you?

b. Do they listen to you?

c. Can you tell me about any good and bad experiences with the authorities when you approached them for help?

i. Follow up: What could have made that experience (even) better?

d. What would you like the authorities to know or think about that you have not already discussed with them?

i. Do you feel like that is something you could tell them?

e. Have you approached other parties for help?

13. What kind of support would you like to receive from the Dutch government?

a. Possible follow up: Are there members of your family or the community who check in on you, or to whom you can turn when you feel threatened?

b. Would you mind if I contacted some of them to talk about ways to help you?

14. In what ways have you tried/are you trying to counteract and respond to these threats and constraints imposed on your work?

15. Can you connect me to other people in the same situation as you?

16. Is there something you would like to mention which you feel is important and I have missed?