

2016 YEAR REPORT



THE
HAGUE
PEACE
PROJECTS

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INTRODUCTION

This second year report of The Hague Peace Projects looks back on 2016 with pride. It was a year in which the fruits of 2015's hard labor could be reaped and which saw several great successes.

The Hague Peace Projects (HPP) was founded in the spring of 2014, by four human rights and peace-building professionals who saw the necessity for a new approach. They saw a general public that regarded the many wars in the world as an inevitable fact of nature, not something to be passionate or concerned about; the same indifference affects refugees and asylum-seekers. Convinced that benevolence and compassion are the only way to reach peace, they started HPP by bringing people together to fight hate, apathy and prejudice. As an important starting point, they took up the mission to inform people about the backgrounds and root causes of conflicts to mobilize them into action. Important partners in their mission are the diasporas from various conflict areas who hold valuable knowledge and experiences that are indispensable for understanding conflicts and reaching peace.

Just like in 2015, this year The Hague Peace Projects engaged with many different stakeholders and actors in the field of human rights and peace-building, but also branched out into other fields – such as art and education.

The programs which form the core of The Hague Peace Projects' work stayed the same: Research and Action (R&A), Art and Education (A&E), and Media and Journalism (M&J). As in the preceding year, most emphasis was on R&A, but serious and concrete progress was made in A&E. The work on the four conflict areas appointed in 2015 - the Great Lakes Region, the Turkish – Kurdish conflict, the Syrian conflict, and Bangladesh - was expanded and a new area of concern was added, Somalia. A first event, on the elections in Somalia, was already organized in 2016.

To summarize, 2016 saw a repetition of previous accomplishments, such as another edition of the Diaspora Conference on the Great Lakes Region, and also several new successes, such as the art exhibition 'The Survivors' – about the fate of refugee children, and the 'Integration Caravan' – Syrian refugees visit different places in the Netherlands to get to know the country as well as raise awareness of the Syrian conflict. Additionally, 2016 saw a rise in the number of motivated volunteers that make HPP's activities possible.



PROGRAMS

THE GREAT LAKES REGION

This area is a priority region for The Hague Peace Projects. Like the previous year, in 2016 a lot of time and energy was invested in developing relationships with members of the diaspora from this area. It is a complex region with deep-rooted conflicts and distrust, which are extremely difficult to resolve as well as fully understand.

HPP gave special attention to the elections in Uganda in 2016. In a public event on the 13th of February at Humanity House, more than eighty people attended a **lively debate on the future of Uganda after the elections**. Journalists, academic experts and activists analyzed the chance of success for the opposition after 30 years of rule by Museveni. A week later it turned out that Museveni would remain president for at least another five-year term. It is, however, estimated that opposition candidate Besiyege actually had more votes. Through vote rigging, intimidation and a full internet blackout, Museveni succeeded in staying in power.

On the 29th of June at Humanity House, HPP organized a **debate on the extradition of Rwandese genocide suspects to Rwanda**.

These extraditions are highly controversial because of the nature of the justice system in Rwanda. Many fear that other motives might often also be behind the genocide accusations, like being part of the opposition. Talking about the genocide in Rwanda remains very sensitive, which resulted in a well-attended as well as emotional meeting. Shortly afterwards it was decided by the court that the extraditions could take place. Even though parliament voted against it, the Minister of Security and Justice chose to effectuate the court's decision.

Another highlight of 2016 for the Great Lakes Region diasporas was the participation in **Africa Day (Afrikadag)**, organized by the FMS at the Royal Tropical Institute (KIT) on the 5th of November. For this event they organized a workshop titled **"Diaspora, dialogue and peace,"** which was very well received and again proved the relevance of HPP's work; that bringing together diasporas, stakeholders and the general public leads to an inevitable growth of understanding and awareness of global conflicts.

One of the major accomplishments of the Great Lakes Working Group was the organization of the **second edition of Diaspora Conference on the Great Lakes Region** in collaboration with the International Institute of Social Studies. The main theme of the conference was **"The role of media in conflict and peace building"**. The three day conference attracted bloggers, media workers, researchers, artists, peace workers, students, and more. The bringing together of diasporas and other stakeholders created an atmosphere of enthusiasm, involvement and understanding, which resulted in a concrete shared vision and plan of action on how to use media for peace. Symbolic of the good atmosphere of the conference was a public apology made by one of the Congolese participants during a plenary session towards the Batwa people. The Batwa live as a minority in all countries of the region and have historically been ignored and suffered immensely under the tribal, political and land conflicts of the region. This apology was endorsed by all participants and gratefully accepted by the Batwa representatives who were present.



TURKISH – KURDISH DIALOGUE INITIATIVE

The current political situation in Turkey is tense, not only because of the recent coup attempt and the ongoing violence between the Turkish state and the PKK, but also because of the neighboring conflicts in Syria – all of which contribute to general societal tension. The Turkish and Kurdish diasporas also feel these tensions - which are not bound by borders - and some in the Netherlands act on them. HPP's working group on this conflict, a group of engaged Dutch Turks and Kurds, strive to bring moderate members of their diasporas together in order to de-escalate tensions and increase mutual understanding.

2016 was a very good year for this working group. Several successful events were organized, for example, the public dialogue meeting **“Time to Talk, Kurds and Turks in Dialogue”**, on the 25th of June at Humanity House. A similar event was organized at Verhalenhuis in Rotterdam on the 12th of November. At both events a well-thought out afternoon created space for sharing personal stories, being informed about the history of the Turkish Kurdish conflict, and being able to meet and talk to each other in a safe and open setting.

Another result was that different members of the working group were invited for **interviews in national media and meetings with policy makers** among whom were several ministers. An additional achievement includes the **funding that was awarded for the organization of Turkish–Kurdish dialogue events in different municipalities**. This shows the relevant role that HPP can play when conflicts are not met with indifference by the public and political eye and that the intellectual capital HPP brings together has great potential.

That the relevance of this initiative is recognized widely and that the events attract a good number of visitors, shows a determination towards peace. The people who join the events and meetings of the working group explicitly favor peace and reject violence. For them this is not a self-evident message, it is a statement of courage; many people are surrounded by family and friends who do not accept any signs of goodwill towards the “other side”. In this context, especially considering the current accumulation of old and new tensions, it is admirable that this working group has remained stable and active, and has capitalized on the promises and plans of 2015.

All of this shows that this working group, together with HPP, is already achieving its mission – to generate an open dialogue and mobilize the larger Turkish and Kurdish diasporas in the Netherlands to support peaceful solutions. The pace of their progress promises much for the years to come.



FREETHINKERS AND INDEPENDENT VOICES IN BANGLADESH

In 2015 The Hague Peace Projects started to bring together members of the Bangladeshi diaspora living in Europe. As a result of the upsurge of Islamist violence against minorities and free-thinkers, endangering freedom of speech, HPP decided to specifically focus on diaspora members such as journalists, bloggers and writers. Since the publication of various 'black lists' of unwanted intellectuals and intelligentsia, who are considered enemies of Islam, many have fled Bangladesh to escape the constant threat on their lives.

As a result of the scattered nature of this diaspora, there is a more international approach, which also entails that the working group organizes meetings and events in Bangladesh itself. Apart from the broad geographic coverage, the working group has also broadened the topical coverage of its activities to areas such as the environment. It has been involved in demonstrations against the construction of a power plant close to a protected mangrove forest in Bangladesh.

One of the major successes of 2016 was the **Bangladesh Solidarity Bookfair** at Humanity House on the 21st and 22nd of February in The Hague. Together with the freethinker platform Mukta-Mona, an alternative to the Ekushey National Book Fair was organized. This fair is held annually in Dhaka and it was here where the first of the murders on intellectuals took place. The alternative book fair in The Hague was such a success that a 2017 edition will also be organized.

On the 10th of June, The Hague Peace Projects together with the Dutch Humanist Federation and Free Press Unlimited **presented a petition to the Ambassador from Bangladesh** in The Netherlands asking him to take every measure necessary to stop the killing by radical Islamists of minorities and freethinkers.

Another activity that must be mentioned is a **series of meetings with the Human Rights Ambassador of the Netherlands**, in preparation for his visit to Bangladesh. During these meetings he was briefed by The Hague Peace Projects and other NGOs and organizations about pressing matters in Bangladesh. HPP put forward the illegitimate arrest and detention of two writers and shortly after the Ambassador met with government officials the writers were released. In a setting where the Bengal government is reluctant to protect freethinkers and would rather get rid of them and also does little to persecute the murderers of intellectuals, this can be seen as a great success and an example of the importance of diaspora for the situation in their countries of origin.



DEVELOPING A DIALOGUE ABOUT SYRIAN REFUGEES IN THE NETHERLANDS

Due to the crisis in Syria and the consequent high number of refugees coming to the European Union, HPP decided to develop a project aimed to promote a process of mutual integration and understanding between Dutch locals and Syrian refugees and also amongst the diverse groups of Syrian refugees – who can often have an ingrained distrust towards each other as a result from many years of war and suppression. Syrians of all ethnic, religious, and political backgrounds – who may be enemies in the Syrian conflict, now share a common condition. Despite that, their sudden closeness through a shared position creates tensions, but even more so, it creates a possibility for understanding and reconciliation.

Despite the fact that a year has passed since our previous year report, the Syrian conflict remains very much present, both in the form of a brutal war and in the large numbers of refugees. The initial goal of The Hague Peace Projects with regard to the Syrian crisis, therefore, remains very much relevant. This is also reflected in the successful creation of a Syrian working group and the organization of equally successful events and projects.

One, very well attended event was an evening called **“Visualizing Syria”** on the 13th of May. Almost 90 people attended the event with stories of Syrian refugees and interactive activities. It was very special when the Syrian attendees were seated facing the largely Dutch audience, both sides asking questions and answering them. A whole range of topics was covered: the situation in Syria, the situation in the Netherlands regarding newcomers, being a refugee and the way refugees look to the future. The event created a pleasant, open space where everything could be discussed with respect.

One notable achievement that must be mentioned here is the **Integration Caravan**. The working group succeeded in raising enough funds to bring their idea into practice. This idea entails driving a real caravan through the Netherlands, from marketplace to marketplace, to introduce themselves to the Dutch and educate the public about the Syrian conflict, while sharing coffee and small talk - the best way for people to bond. In 2016 the Integration Caravan went to six different municipalities: Den Helder (30 September), The Hague (8 October), Ede (19 October), Dordrecht (26 October) and Middelburg (18 November). Offering free coffee and snacks, a group of between five and ten Syrians met with Dutch passersby, asked questions and shared their stories in order to try and bridge the gap that they often feel between them and Dutch society.

On the 13th of December the Syrian Working Group was **invited for a Lunch Buffet at the Residency of the US Ambassador in The Hague**. One of the participating refugees is an artist and he made several paintings to decorate the residency. About 10 Syrians joined this meeting and they had the chance to tell their stories and connect with a select group of embassy staff to discuss further cooperation.

The ambition and zeal of this working group, and the short amount of time they need to turn ideas into something tangible promises much for 2017.



SOMALIA

The program on Somalia is the most recent addition to HPP's working areas. The Somali diaspora comes from very difficult situations, divided by deep-rooted conflicts and clan divisions and traumatized by numerous wars. These conflicts and divisions also manifest in the diaspora and it is our aim to overcome this and unite; to let this diaspora serve as an example for other Somalis and show that peace is stronger than conflict.

The 1st of October 2016 was a first step; HPP organized an **event on the elections in Somalia**. Members from the diaspora were brought together to discuss political change and the potential for peace in their country of origin. The event resulted in fruitful meetings and discussions, and it showed that there is a group of active and engaged Somalis who are eager to work towards, peace, change and unity. This group forms the basis of the current Somali work group, who strive to maintain a platform for the exchange of ideas, dialogue within the diaspora, and the development of new initiatives and projects for sustainable peace in Somalia.



ART & EDUCATION

Besides the Research & Action program, Art & Education is The Hague Peace Projects' other main program. After its initial successes in 2015, the program grew in importance and impact in 2016. Its intention is to raise public awareness about the causes of war and the things that 'ordinary citizens' can do to promote peace and prevent conflict. As was also shown in 2016, art and education create an excellent context for peaceful and innovative ways to promote unity and understanding.

In addition to the continuation of **'The Fine Art of Peacemaking'** – meetings where peace activists and artists exchange ideas and discuss their views - the **documentary in development** that was announced in the 2015 year report continued to be worked on in 2016. The anticipation is that the documentary, made together with the Alfrink College in Zoetermeer, will be finished in February 2017. For more info on this documentary, consult the 2015 year report.

Additionally, several new initiatives were started and events organized. Three successes to mention here are **'The Survivors'**, **'Living Library'** and the concert **'Op doortocht - moving cultures'**.

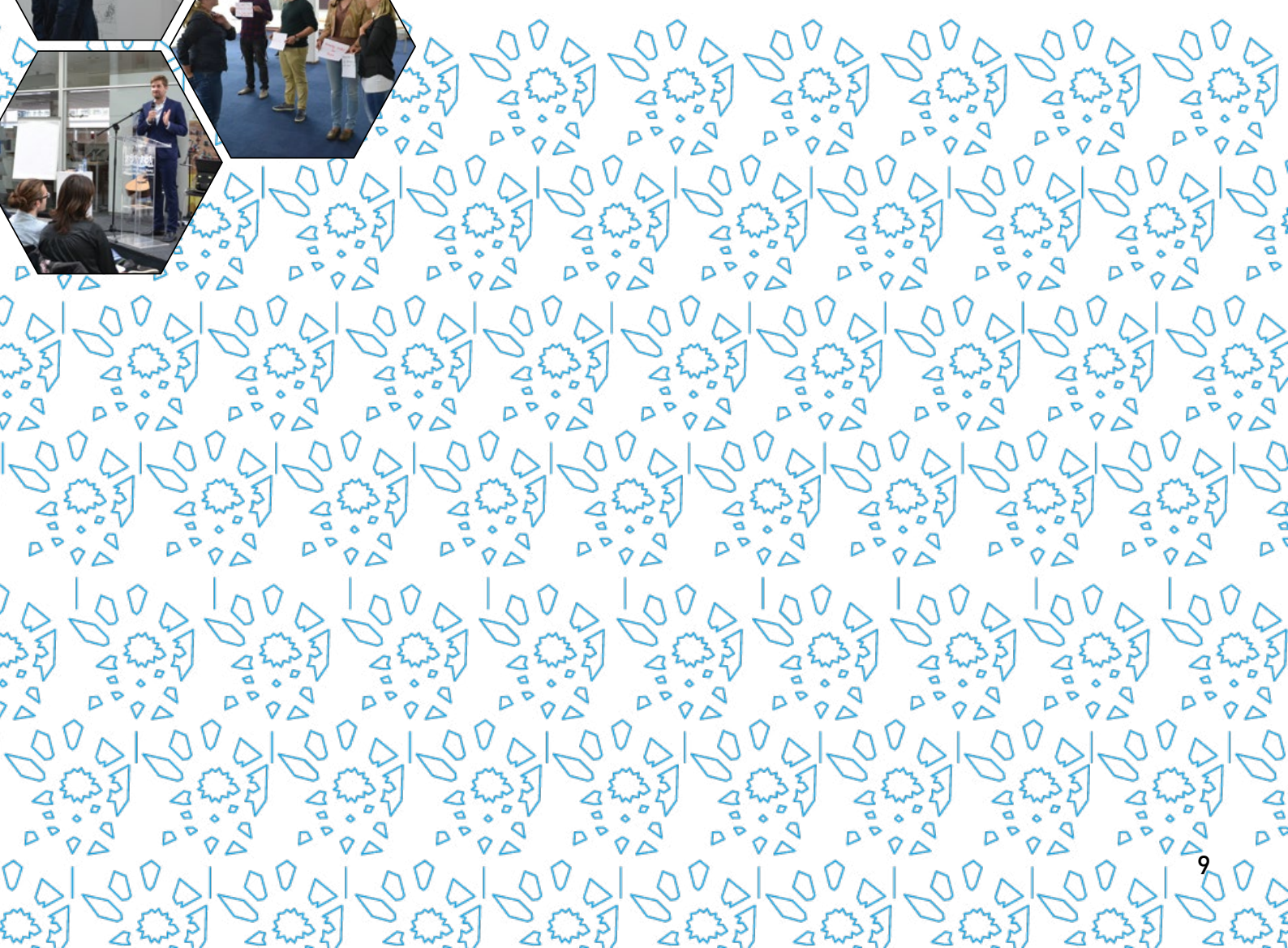
From the 15th of April until the 4th of May in The Hague City Hall, HPP organized the art exhibition **'The Survivors'**. In this exhibition, sixteen mainly Dutch artists responded with a work of art to the drawings of an 11 year old Syrian boy, Taim Safar. Through this chain reaction, the exhibition aimed to create a dialogue on peace and conflict. Taim is one of many children who grew up in a war zone in Syria and were forced to flee. An interesting new development is that HPP managed to crowd-fund a significant part of the costs for the event.

The second highlight of 2016 included successfully establishing a dialogue through the storytelling event **'Living Library'** on the 21st of September, the International Day of Peace. This event brought together peace activists from different conflict areas to tell their stories to the public and explain why they decided to dedicate themselves to peacebuilding. The active participation of the visitors showed the interest of people in the background of conflicts and their willingness to engage in finding solutions.

'Op doortocht - moving cultures' was a concert that HPP co-organized with the choir JIP in April. It presented music from people who have been displaced, either voluntarily or forced, from their homes. Musicians from all over the world were brought together to share their music and stories.

On the 13th of September HPP was involved in the **third edition of the WTHX Festival**, a day dedicated to cross-fertilization between the world of new and emerging technology and the world of justice and peacebuilding. Although existing close to each other in the city of The Hague, they remain often very distant. They could however make great use of each other's capabilities and insights.

Whether it is through visual art, music or literature, all three are effective vehicles to share stories, ideas and feelings, and have proven to be interesting ways of establishing dialogue. Considering the mission of The Hague Peace Projects, many more of such events will be organized in the coming years.



2016 EVENTS & ACTIVITIES

- 13 February** _____ The Importance of the Ugandan Elections for Peace in the Great Lakes Region
- 21 February** _____ Bangladesh Solidarity Bookfair
- 24 March** _____ The Fine Art of Peacemaking
- 15 April - 4 May** _____ The Survivors
- 22 - 23, 28 - 29 April** _____ ... Op doortocht – ... Moving Cultures
- 13 May** _____ Refugee Stories from the Past, Present and Perspectives on the Future
- 10 June** _____ Presentation of Petition to Prevent Killings of Minorities and Free Thinkers to the Ambassador of Bangladesh
- 25 June** _____ Time to Talk – Kurds and Turks in Dialogue
- 29 June** _____ Guilty Until Proven Innocent? Rwandans in the Netherlands Accused of Genocide
- 21 September** _____ Peace Manifestation in Leiden with Great Lakes Working Group
- 21 September** _____ Living Library
- 22 September** _____ WTHX #3 Peace, Justice, Security + Code (participation and moderation)
- 30 September** _____ Integration Caravan – Den Helder
- 1 October** _____ Elections in Somalia: Towards Sustainable Peace?
- 8 October** _____ Integration Caravan - The Hague
- 19 October** _____ Integration Caravan – Ede
- 26 October** _____ Integration Caravan - Dordrecht
- 12 November** _____ Time to Talk – Turks and Kurds in Dialogue
- 18 November** _____ Integration Caravan - Middelburg
- 24 - 26 November** _____ The Role of Media in Conflict and Peacebuilding in the Great Lakes Region
- 26 November** _____ African Peace Party
- 13 December** _____ Lunch with Syrian Refugees at the US Embassy in The Hague

DONORS

All our activities would not have been possible without the generous support of and collaboration with the following organizations. **Thank you all!!**

European Humanist Federation

Free Press Unlimited

Gemeente Rotterdam

Haëlla Stichting

Institute of Social Studies (ISS)

Oranjefonds

PAX

Stichting Dialoog

US Embassy to The Netherlands

Vluchtelingenwerk Nederland

Voordekunst

Wijdoenmee

CONTACT

For more details on our past activities and to keep up to date on our current and coming activities, you can consult our **website** or connect through **Facebook**, **Twitter** or **Instagram**.

Additionally, if you are interesting in joining us, making a donation, or using our expertise, you are welcome to contact us through email or telephone, or visit our office.

LOOKING FORWARD TO 2017

After the founding of The Hague Peace Projects in 2014, this past year, 2016, was one of consolidation as well as expansion. 2016 saw a lot of hard work resulting in several interesting and innovative activities, the successes of which motivate the members of HPP to continue to dedicate their efforts without reservation. The mission of HPP and the relevance of its cause appeals to many people. This is also reflected in the steady growth of the group of volunteers who give their time and energy to the organization.

One of the first targets for 2017 is the organization of the **The Hague Freedom Book Fair**, the follow-up edition of the Bangladesh Solidarity Book Fair. That this second edition is not solely focused on Bangladesh shows the growth of HPP as it covers and tackles an increasingly wider array of issues. The 2017 Book Fair will also cover issues such as Turkey, LGBTI activism in Muslim countries and hate speech in Western societies.

Another project that HPP is looking forward to in 2017 is the **expansion of activities on Somalia and the addition of new regions to its work groups**. There are concrete plans to create an Afghan and a Sri Lankan working group.

Up to this point, Research & Action has been the main component of the work of The Hague Peace Projects. 2016 saw an expansion of the Art & Education activities, but apart from our Great Lakes Conference, Media & Journalism have not yet been further developed. The goal for 2017 is to encourage the working groups to **engage in more media and journalism activities**. Some working groups have already committed to this goal. One important reason to invest in this is to give the activities of the working groups a wider audience and more lasting impact. Currently, their discussions, views, and ideas remain behind closed doors. It is our goal for 2017 to create and maintain an impactful and sustained media presence.



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