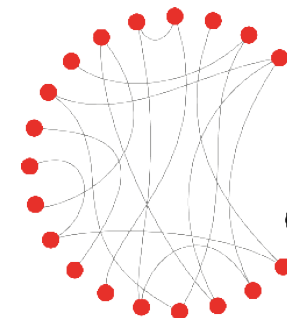




SUPPORTING
CATALYSTS OF CHANGE
FOR JUST SOCIETIES

ANNUAL REPORT 2023



**NETHERLANDS
HELSINKI
COMMITTEE**

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FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear friends of the NHC,

As I look back at 2023 here at the Netherlands Helsinki Committee, I am filled with pride and admiration at the resilience, tenacity and hard-work of my colleagues and our partners.

2023 was a turbulent year for both the region where we work and for our organisation. We rallied together to keep doing the work we do best: supporting catalysts of change for just societies. We did so by launching our organisational strategy, which strongly focuses on bringing about positive change in wider Europe, by supporting change makers in strengthening their capacities and amplifying their voices. Through our unique and historic networks and contacts, we are able to build bridges between catalysts of change from different sectors and countries. Together we stand strong together for human rights, rule of law and justice in wider Europe.

Our strategy also highlighted an important shift in narrative, consolidating the motto of “nothing about us without us” as a consistent starting point in all our work. In 2023, we continued to look for new ways of strengthening accountability; building our work on the strategic needs and demands from the people we work with and for. Furthermore, our strategic choices reflect a core belief in the power of inclusion and equality, and we are determined to contribute to shifting the power balance and embrace an intersectional and inclusive approach throughout our work. Therefore, in the past year, we worked on developing a Diversity, Equality and Inclusion policy for the organisation, and ensured application of gender mainstreaming and inclusive principles in our project proposal writing and activity development.

In 2023, we welcomed the start of several new important projects for the organisation, including the Matra Rule of Law Training , Catalysts of Change, and Advancing Justice and Accountability in Ukraine, across our three programmes: Integrity & Accountability, Human Rights Defence and Rights-Based Justice. We successfully advocated for human rights and the rule of law and completed a number of projects, organised regional conferences and continued to work with partners and networks on issues such as

strengthening, renewing and improving democracy: anywhere in the world.

On a personal note, this is the first time I am addressing you, as Acting Director of the Netherlands Helsinki Committee. Kirsten Meijer, our Executive Director since February 2022, unfortunately fell ill in September 2023, and has been on extended sick leave since. I want to take this opportunity to wish Kirsten well, on behalf of the whole organisation. I am honoured and humbled by the responsibility and trust given to me by the Supervisory Board and my colleagues, to ensure stability and continuity of this unwavering support for our partners and the causes close to our hearts.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank our partners and supporters for their continued trust in our organisation. Together we are bringing our mission of just and rights-respecting societies in the wider Europe a step closer.

In solidarity,

Joeri Buhrer Tavanier, Acting Executive Director





NHC office at Nutshuis in The Hague alit in yellow and blue in support of Ukraine, February 2022

More than two years since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion, Ukraine has been at the forefront of the fight for peace, freedom and democracy in Europe. A fight in which we have witnessed thousands of casualties, crimes against humanity and millions of refugees and displaced people, in a country close to our hearts and our homes. The war in Ukraine is a painful reminder that freedom and democracy can never be taken for granted.

As an organisation that has worked for many years with Ukrainian partner organisations, we continue to stand in solidarity with the people of Ukraine. In 2023, we continued to:

- Work with well-established NGOs and grassroots initiatives working on the protection and promotion of human rights in Ukraine. In total, the NHC disbursed circa EUR 330.000 in emergency grants in 2023 as part of projects implemented by the NHC and funded by the European Union. This support aimed to help these organisations become more resilient and adapt better to the evolving needs of those affected by the ongoing war. The grants also supported initiatives of local CSOs in documenting war crimes on the ground. See more about the project [here](#);
- Document the “intent” of war crimes committed supporting an initiative focused on documenting the subjective element (intent) of certain crimes against humanity, war crimes, and crimes of genocide committed in Ukraine since February 2022;
- Support the [Regional Center for Human Rights Ukraine](#) in the development of an online training collection of videos to better aid volunteers working on war crime documentation. ‘Basics of International Humanitarian Law’ is a video series on a wide variety of themes. The 15 videos highlight the often-ambiguous field of international humanitarian law (IHL) and the necessary accountability mechanisms needed to achieve a more just society. Further, this series of videos highlights the ripple effects of war crimes on cultural heritage, women’s rights and the environment. Find out [more](#) and watch the [videos](#);
- Support the Ukrainian penitentiary system within the [Justice and Accountability for Ukraine project](#) by:
 - Ensuring psychological support for prisoners and prison staff through the expansion of the online platform Samopomich, developed by the Federation Global Initiative on Psychiatry (FGIP);
 - Developing next steps and raising awareness of resocialisation in Ukrainian prisons as a means to strengthen the penitentiary system;
 - Facilitating accountability and victim-centred approach via implementing and expanding the systems of restorative justice;
 - Enhancing the feasibility of alternative sanctions and increasing support for probation among the general public;
 - Assisting with the issue of addressing criminality in the post-war setting, including the specific needs of veterans and the prison population.
- Contributed to strengthening institutional capacity in the field of rule of law within government organisations in Ukraine by offering hybrid training courses for civil servants as part of the [Matra Rule of Law Training programme](#), together with Leiden Law School and The Hague Academy for Local Governance.

WHO WE ARE

THE NETHERLANDS HELSINKI COMMITTEE

In wider Europe today, more and more people are confronted with backsliding of the rule of law and violations of human rights. We face a fundamental challenge of peaceful coexistence on our continent and this has direct and sometimes destructive consequences for citizens, as we can witness on the news every day.

At the same time, catalysts of change can be found everywhere. Even under the most difficult circumstances, brave citizens are standing up for fundamental rights and justice, fighting against existing power structures which perpetuate inequality. Building on our track record of 35 years, we consider it to be our mission to inspire, engage and support these catalysts of change in building just and rights-respecting societies.

We want vibrant civil society organisations that raise their voices in defence of human rights. We want our governments to be held accountable and act with integrity. We want independent, inclusive and humane justice systems that put people first, especially when they are marginalised or historically underrepresented in decision-making. These areas form the cornerstones of our work.

Everybody can be a catalyst of change, and we are ready to support them by strengthening their capacities and by amplifying their voices through advocacy and campaigns. Our networks reach out to civil society, governments as well as the justice chain. With the catalysts of change from these sectors, we are able to mobilise the right peer-to-peer expertise and build bridges between them. Together we stand strong for human rights, the rule of law and justice in wider Europe.

WHERE WE COME FROM

THE H IN NHC

The Helsinki Movement refers to the human rights movement that followed the 1975 signing of the Helsinki Accords. In an era of tension amidst the Cold War, the Accords contained the ground-breaking concept of comprehensive security: the notion that real security is achieved by building democratic, free, and rights-respecting societies. The inclusion back then of civil society in the Helsinki process and beyond, today allows actors to hold governments accountable for implementing the Helsinki principles of upholding the rule of law and human rights.



OUR APPROACH

Despite these challenging times for the human rights movement, we are determined to make a difference, and we see opportunities to contribute to sustainable change. We are inspired by the brave human rights defenders that do not give up on advocating for rights, by the civil servants that want to contribute to reform in their country, and the magistrates that continue to do their job with integrity and determination under difficult circumstances. We are encouraged by the worldwide human rights movement to change the mind-sets and behaviour of those actors that shape the future of wider Europe.

There is no blueprint for change, but we know that change will not happen in isolation. Multiple actors play a role, and the outcome is based on the interplay between power and countervailing powers. It is the actors in both these spheres we want to target with our work, by amplifying their voices, by supporting the change process for more just and rights-respecting policies and laws, and by building bridges to foster cooperation.

Our three programmes are our pathways of change. It is in these areas based on our 35-year track record that we can achieve real impact. We aim to achieve this impact through capacity strengthening and monitoring, policy advocacy and networking and awareness raising and engagement.

CAPACITY STRENGTHENING AND MONITORING

Our Integrity and Accountability programme conducts training courses on the rule of law that encourage learning and exchange between reform-orientated governmental peers.



Our Rights-Based Justice programme hosts workshops with and for justice chain actors in several countries; from prison officers to social workers to civil servants; working on understanding training needs and developing curriculums for probation & penitentiary services.



In our Human Rights Defense Programme, we work to strengthen the capacity of civil society organisations across the Eastern Partnership region through grassroots support on public communication and advocacy.



POLICY ADVOCACY AND NETWORKING

In our Rights-Based Justice programme we work on innovating policies and advocating for reforms across the justice chain. Through our projects we develop prison and probation strategies that are implemented in several countries, including Ukraine.

OUR APPROACH

Our Integrity and Accountability programme engages in advocacy on the rule of law also by contributing to European Commission's annual reports on the state of the rule of law in the European Union.



Our Human Rights Defence programme continues to organise multiple events within the institutional frameworks of the EU, OSCE, and CoE together with our partners from Eastern Partnership countries. In particular, we facilitated visits from Ukrainian aid organisations in the Netherlands, in order to amplify their message towards relevant decision makers and NGOs in the Netherlands.



Facilitating advocacy visit of Ukrainian NGO East SOS in The Hague in May 2023

AWARENESS RAISING AND ENGAGEMENT

Within our Human Rights Defence programme we conduct solidarity campaigns with and for Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) using hope-based communication to raise awareness about and protect fundamental human rights.

Our Rights-Based Justice programme conducts awareness-raising campaigns calling for more inclusive, effective and humane justice systems, for instance

by on highlighting the need for stronger recognition mechanisms that can help survivors of gender-based violence feel supported by those around them, having their suffering acknowledged.

Our Integrity and Accountability programme calls for awareness on the importance of effective anti-corruption measures, with the aim of increasing the capacity and effectiveness of those working to combat kleptocracy, as well as increasing public awareness of the issue of kleptocracy in affected countries.



Screening of Caviar Connection by NHC during November 2023 Fraude Film Festival in Amsterdam

OUR NETWORKS AND PARTNERS

In most countries in wider Europe, we have multiple partners with whom we cooperate. These partners can be civil society organisations as well as governments and state institutions, and we have a strong track record on building bridges between the catalysts of change coming from these different sectors.

We believe in building on existing organisations and networks, to increase impact and to avoid duplication. By joining forces in networks, we stand stronger in our advocacy, we learn and share best practices and we can facilitate cooperation with governments and institutions. Being part of strong international networks also enables us to put international solidarity into practice. When partners are in need, we know this and we can support them. Together we amplify the voices of human rights defenders from the local to the European level and back, resulting in European policies that are responsive to the needs and demands of communities.

We believe that change should start at home and invest in building a human rights community with like minded partners in the Netherlands. We do this as part of several networks in the Netherlands, including also with our neighbours in the Human Rights Space in The Hague, the city of Peace and Justice.

We are always open to exploring cooperation with new partners that share our values and goals. Potential partners are invited to approach us through office@nhc.nl.

OUR NETWORKS

We participate in 19 networks operating within our core competencies: strengthening rule of law; safe-guarding human rights; and strengthening civil society.

KEY TO ACRONYMS

BMO	Netherlands Human Rights Network
CICC	Coalition for the International Criminal Court
CSP	Civic Solidarity Platform
EAP-CSF	Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum
EIN	European Implementation Network
EPD	European Partnership for Democracy
EPTA	European Prison Training Academies Network
CSF	Civil Society Forum
EUROPRIIS	European Organisation of Prison and Correctional Services
HRDN	Human Rights and Democracy Network
JUSTITIA	JUSTITIA Network
LEAP	Legal Experts Advisory Panel
PARTOS	Dutch Network for International Development Cooperation
RARE	Recharging Advocacy for Rights in Europe
THHH	The Hague Humanity Hub
UNCAC	Association for the Implementation of the UN Convention against Corruption
NDC	Nederlandse Democratie Coalitie
CASE	Coalition Against Slapps in Europe CURE (Campaign to Uphold Rights in Europe)
CURE	Campaign to Uphold Rights in Europe



UNCAC

CASE

CICC

EPD

HRDN

RARE

PARTOS

BMO

EAP-CSF

NDC

THHH

JUSTITIA

EPTA

EUROPRIS

LEAP

CSP

CSF

CURE

EIN



OUR PROGRAMMES

Featured Interviews and Highlights



RIGHTS-BASED JUSTICE

Giving Back: Youth participation and inclusion in juvenile justice reform

1. Study visit to Oberstown Detention Campus for Children (Ireland), February 2023



HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENCE

Supporting grassroots partners in Ukraine | Targeted advocacy campaigns & strengthening capacity for documenting war crimes

2. Presentation by Ukrainian grassroots partner during final networking event of "Constituency and Influence for Reform" in November 2023



INTEGRITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Rising Above the Headlines: Protecting Press Freedom and Strengthening the Judiciary in the Western Balkans

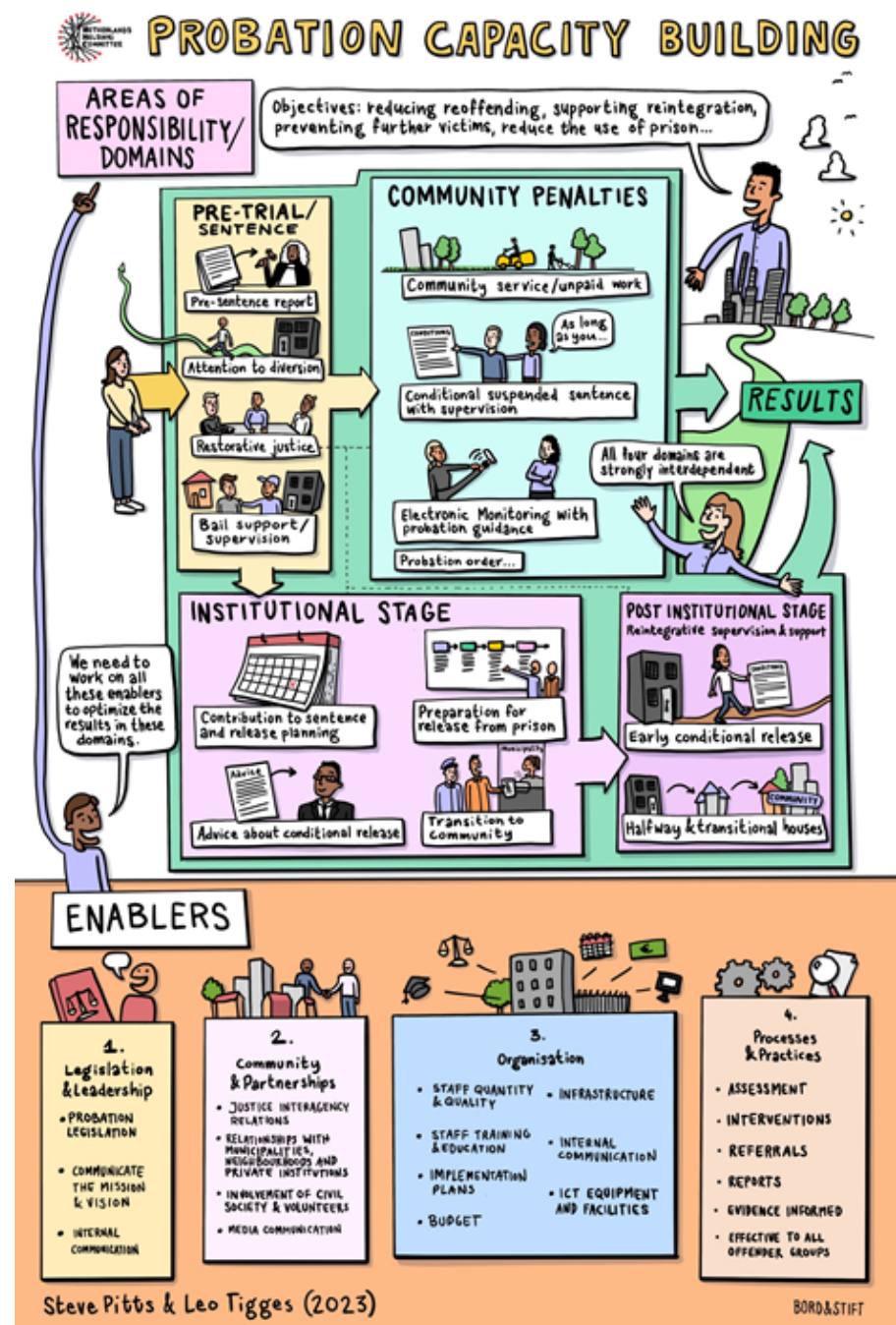
3. Opening of second regional conference of the Media Freedom project in the Western Balkans, December 2023, Jahorina (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

RIGHTS-BASED JUSTICE

Increased pressure on human rights is experienced in particular by people who have traditionally been marginalised in society, including those that are depending on protection from the state, for example prisoners, survivors of gender based violence, victims, as well as ex-offenders. In most societies, we are witnessing a trend towards more focus on security, punishment and protecting rules and procedures instead of people. The examples are manifold: from the shift towards more repressive detention regimes to authorities that focus on chasing fraud instead of fighting discrimination and institutional racism. These trends have a huge impact on people's lives, in particular of those people in society that are already in an underprivileged position. It leads to more poverty and exclusion and less safe societies. At the same time, most governments are, at least on paper, committed to respecting international human rights standards.

We see their commitment, and sometimes strong political will to comply, as an opportunity to hold authorities accountable and to support catalysts of change in the justice system to ensure access to justice and to execute criminal sanctions in a humane and rights-respecting way.

Our ambition is that by 2026 we have contributed to strengthening the capacity of key actors in the justice chain to uphold fundamental rights; more attention to the well-being and rehabilitation or restoration of those affected by crime and conflict - both victims and offenders; and increased collaboration in the whole justice chain. This will contribute to our ultimate goal, which is to have justice systems that are inclusive, effective and humane.



HIGHLIGHT FEATURE : GIVING BACK: YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND INCLUSION IN JUVENILE JUSTICE REFORM

In 2021, the Netherlands Helsinki Committee, in cooperation with Young Perspectives (YOPE), and the Dutch Department of Correctional Institutions (Dienst Justitiële Inrichtingen – DJI), started an EU funded project entitled “Giving Back”. The project aimed to **increase child-friendly treatment of young people in closed institutions** by working towards solidifying the position of young people with lived experiences in the training of professionals working in closed youth institutions.

The Giving Back project (completed in 2024) strived to create meaningful youth, with its main goal being the improvement of child-friendly practices of European youth justice professionals working in Juvenile Justice Facilities, as well as stimulating child-centred learning among European Union Member States. The Giving Back partnership was joined by Oberstown Detention Campus for Children (Ireland) in 2022.

YOUTH-LED TRAINING SESSIONS: THE NETHERLANDS AND IRELAND

As two of the main objectives of the project were to increase the understanding of promising and proven practices of youth participation-based training methods for professionals working with youth in closed institutions in Europe, as well as to enable professionals working with youth in closed institutions to develop youth-friendly communication and participation skills, our partner YOPE set out to design and implement the pilot Youthlab method as part of the project.

The Youthlab training method, now called YOPE Experts Model, is a new approach on the participation of young people in the training of justice professionals.

“It consists of engaging young people that have experience with staying in a closed institution in the development and implementation of a training that specifically focuses on teaching professionals (a) how imposed measures are perceived, (b) how to effectively communicate with young people, and (c) to design criteria for intended measures.” - YOPE on their Experts Model



In the Netherlands, as part of the project, YOPE provided three training sessions for professionals within the youth justice chain using our methodology “Walk in my shoes”, in which youngsters engage with professionals using storytelling to share their experiences. In collaboration with the Department of Correctional Institutions (Dienst Justitiële Inrichtingen - DJI), the YOPE training reached 32 professionals, including DJI policy makers, care workers from a small-scale detention center (KVJJ) and teachers.

The existing Youthlab / YOPE Experts model has been also been adopted by Ireland, which adjusted the model to their own context and needs, with the first training being held in February 2023. An important contextual difference in Oberstown to which the training had to be adapted were the young age of the young people involved, as well as the fact that all youth were still incarcerated. In order to ensure the training was most beneficial to the young people involved, the development included capacity strengthening in various domains, such as victim empathy training and problem solving training. A number of trainings were carried out in 2023 and early 2024, reaching more than 20 residential social care workers, as well as senior management and teaching staff.

The youth participation-based training method has been described by project partners as unique and promising, filling a gap that traditional training approaches have not yet filled. The training has a big impact on justice professionals who do not always understand the background that may have caused the behaviour of young people. The training is also considered to have a beneficial effect for young people who learn to better understand how the system works and that the justice professionals they encounter also have to consider other aspects, such as the victim's perspective.

MANIFESTO FOR INCLUSION: EMPOWERING YOUTH WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE FOR PENITENTIARY REFORM

In early 2024, one of the final outcomes of the Giving Back project was the publication of the Manifesto for Inclusion; a powerful collaborative narrative that aims to foster a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by incarcerated youth, and provides crucial context for effective and compassionate intervention.

As the Manifesto states:

“The inclusion of youth with lived experience is essential for authentic representation in the development of policies, training programs, and prison guidelines. Our unique perspectives provide invaluable insights that cannot be fully understood or appreciated without our direct involvement. We recognize the profound impact that lived experiences have on shaping perspectives and understanding the challenges faced within the penal system. Moreover, when young people feel truly listened to, they experience a sense of empowerment, as if we've been rightfully entrusted with the helm of our own ship.”



“Trust me that I also can make choices for my life, involve me and give me responsibility. See me, hear me out and help distinguish what choices and options I have for my life”- Jason Miedema, YOPE

“Their stories not only inform us, but motivate us.”- Staff member at Oberstown Children Detention Campus

OUR AMBITION

By 2026, we have contributed to strengthening the capacity of key actors in the justice chain to uphold fundamental rights; more attention to the well-being and rehabilitation or restoration of those affected by crime and conflict - both victims and offenders; and increased collaboration in the whole justice chain. This will contribute to our ultimate goal, which is to have justice systems that are inclusive, effective and humane.

OUR APPROACH & OUR ACTIVITIES IN 2023

Assistance in Implementing the Strategy of the Penal System in the Republic of Armenia (AISPIRA)

- Strengthened capacity of prison and probation staff in Armenia through trainings on dynamic security and rehabilitation.

Giving Back: Bridging the gap towards child-friendly justice in closed institutions

- Fostering EU-level connection & strengthening capacity by offering youth-centered model of trainings through our partner YOPE

Justice Reform Monitoring in Armenia (JUREMONIA)

- Facilitated development of civil society platform to work on policy related justice issues

Our Stories Matter: Children Participation in Policy and Decision-making in Prisons

- Lead the project kick off meeting in December 2023 with families and children of detainees in the Zaanstad prison facility

Together against Discrimination: Building a Civil Society Coalition to Improve Access to Justice for Victims of Discrimination

- Fostered connections between the Dutch Anti-Discrimination bureau

and local partners and facilitated a training in Türkiye on complaint handling for national human rights institutes.

J-CAP: Judicial cooperation for the enhancement of mutual recognition regarding probation measures and alternative sanctions

- Advanced cooperation between judicial agencies across Europe by facilitating transnational project meetings in Brussels & Paris

Towards a Recognition Mechanism: Healing for Victims of Sexual Violence

- Raised awareness on need for development of a recognition mechanism for victims of sexual & gender-based violence.

EPTA II: Innovating Together: Connecting European Penitentiary Training Academies

- Fostered connection between coordination bodies for penitentiary training academies and improved detention standards and practices by embedding EPTA into EUROPRIS

Advancing Justice and Accountability in Ukraine: Strengthening and Support of the Prison System

- Successful start of project supporting the Ukrainian penitentiary system & facilitating the development of humane, effective, and responsive justice systems.



HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENCE

The situation of human rights is deteriorating on a global scale. From the increasingly frequent subversion of the rule of law by authoritarian regimes, shrinking civic space and fundamental freedoms, to a sharp rise in nationalist and xenophobic rhetoric and practice in democracies, the universal human rights values and principles are coming under intensifying threat and attack. What was once perceived as a given – a shared culture of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms – is more and more showing itself to be a precarious ideal that must be ardently fought for and consistently defended.

Despite this sobering context, human rights organisations fiercely push back against repression. To support this push back, our ambition is that by 2026 human rights defenders, civil society activists and their organisations become more resilient catalysts of change within their countries; their support base is increased; and their activities have greater impact and outreach, allowing them to effectively contribute to the process of building just and rights-respecting societies in wider Europe.



Solidarity march for Ukraine on Dam Square, Amsterdam, co-organised by the NHC in light of the 1 year anniversary of Russia's full scale attack on Ukraine

SUPPORTING GRASSROOTS PARTNERS IN UKRAINE | TARGETED ADVOCACY CAMPAIGNS & STRENGTHENING CAPACITY FOR DOCUMENTING WAR CRIMES

The majority of human rights defenders and their organisations in Ukraine have stayed in the country since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia in February 2022. Most of them continue their work in at least some capacity, focusing their efforts on providing services to the affected population and on documenting war crimes, but also continuing to monitor attacks against civil society activists. However, since the outbreak of the war, these organisations have been operating in a constant state of crisis, experiencing significant hardships. To address these needs, the Netherlands Helsinki Committee has continued its work with well-established NGOs and grassroots initiatives working on the protection and promotion of human rights in Ukraine. We have supported our partners through disbursement of emergency grants and by offering targeted advocacy and capacity strengthening activities, with the aim of increasing the resilience of partner organisations and aiding their adaptation to the evolving needs of those affected by the ongoing war.

THE REALITIES OF RECORDING HISTORY: THE IMPORTANCE OF DOCUMENTING WAR CRIMES

One such partner, the Regional Center for Human Rights in Ukraine, has been working tirelessly on documenting the crimes against humanity, war crimes, and crimes of genocide committed in Ukraine since February 2022. With the support of the NHC, they have developed an online training collection of videos to better aid volunteers working on war crime documentation. ‘[Basics of International Humanitarian Law](#)’ consists of 15 videos calling attention to the often-ambiguous field of international humanitarian law (IHL) and the necessary accountability mechanisms needed to achieve a more just society. This series of videos highlight the ripple effects of war crimes on cultural heritage, women’s rights and the environment, and simultaneously focus on mapping the different forms of documentation – essential for preventing future atrocities and preserving Ukraine’s historical memory.

CONSTITUENCY FOR INFLUENCE AND REFORM | ADVOCACY AND COMMUNICATIONS SUPPORT

Aside from our support to organisations working on documenting war crimes in Ukraine,

and even before the outbreak of the full-scale Russian invasion, the Netherlands Helsinki Committee has been supporting grassroots civil society organisations (CSOs) working on gender, corruption, and environmental justice in Eastern Partnership countries, including Ukraine. Within the scope of our project on “Constituency for Influence and Reform: Building the Capacity of Civil Society for Meaningful Change”, we aimed to increase the capacity of CSOs in the target countries to plan and implement advocacy campaigns, effectively communicate their goals, and manage organisations.

At the end of 2023, during the final networking event of this European Union funded project, we presented two Ukrainian organisations with the “Civil Society Campaigning Award”. These grassroots organisations were found to have best explored viable partnership and communication opportunities, displayed durability and sustainability of their crowdfunding efforts, effectively set and achieved their goals and objectives, demonstrated added value of the award in supporting the activity of the initiative, as well as the transferability of the knowledge gained to other organisations or initiatives.

The winners were the **Khmelnytsky Energy Cluster and Green Leaf NGO**, who presented their work on the successful launch of community activities in energy management and strengthening institutional capacity of local authorities’ through collaboration, and their work on environmental protection. As Green Leaf noted, it was their participation in this project which allowed them to expand and strengthen their activities; launching a major advocacy campaign with NHC’s support for the recognition of the Kuyalnik estuary as a National Park in collaboration with local counselors, experts, and legal professionals.



OUR AMBITION

By 2026, human rights defenders, civil society activists and their organisations become more resilient catalysts of change within their countries; their support base is increased; and their activities have greater impact and outreach, allowing them to effectively contribute to the process of building just and rights-respecting societies in wider Europe.

OUR APPROACH & OUR ACTIVITIES IN 2023

Catalyst of Change: Supporting a Vibrant Civil Society in Europe

- In 2023, 50+ CSO members in Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia and Slovenia strengthened capacity on proposal writing and project management skills through targeted trainings.
- In 2023, 20+ grassroots partners in Bulgaria and Romania working on women's rights, environmental justice, and anti-corruption were supported through trainings and sub-granting (EUR 300,000+) to be more effective in the promotion of EU values, be more resilient to threats, and be able to quickly respond to concerning trends affecting space for civil society.

Strengthening Monitoring and Advocacy Capacities for Rights in Georgia

- Increased capacity for 20+ CSOs through multi-day trainings on strengthening monitoring and advocacy capacities for rights in Georgia.
- 6 grassroots CSOs strengthened in continuing their work on human rights and advocacy through targeted support (EUR 30,000 +) and trainings.

Keeping the flame of human rights alive in Ukraine and Eastern Europe

- Facilitated better training opportunities for volunteers working on war crime documentation through support for the Regional Center for Human Rights in Ukraine with developing 15+ online training videos on international humanitarian law.
- Increased visibility and support for the work of Ukrainian aid organisation East SOS by co-organising advocacy meeting with Dutch decision makers and NGOs in May 2023.

Resilient Civil Society and Media Respond to the Ukraine War

- Increased resilience of 20+ small and bigger CSOs in Ukraine by providing EUR 290.000 in emergency grants, including support for initiatives of local CSOs in documenting war crimes on the ground.

Constituency and Influence for Reform: Building the Capacity of Civil Society

- Strengthened capacity of 46 CSOs who were awarded €264,313 in grants to aid with implementation of grassroots projects focused on public communication and advocacy.

OUR ADVOCACY

- Organised multiple events parallel to the Supplementary Human Dimension Meetings of the OSCE to amplify voices of partners from Eastern Partnership countries and foster meaningful connections.
- Facilitated meeting of group of representatives of the Ukrainian aid organisation East SOS with relevant decision makers and NGOs in the Netherlands

INTEGRITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The rule of law and its standards of integrity and accountability have seen serious erosion in many countries within the European Union (EU) and in wider Europe, with the independence of the judiciary and media pluralism under direct attack. Weaknesses in the rule of law can have a huge impact on people's lives, as the childcare benefit scandal has shown in the Netherlands. Strengthening the rule of law is not a process that can ever be completed, but rather requires constant maintenance and vigilance. We therefore contribute to the stakeholder analysis for the annual Rule of law report by the European Commission with our own assessment on the rule of law in the Netherlands.

With the increased attention to the rule of law and the renewed urgency for candidate countries to join the EU and its community of fundamental values, we believe there is momentum to stand up against further backsliding and stand up in protection of the rule of law.

Our ambition is that by 2026 we have made progress in overcoming the barriers to change by strengthening catalysts of change: (reform-oriented) civil servants are better equipped to initiate and sustain reforms; civil society is strengthened; politicians speak up and media experiences more protection and freedom, so they can play their role of critical observers. Together, this will contribute to an environment that facilitates the emergence of a robust rule of law culture that is embedded in internationally agreed standards and criteria.



Matra Rule of Law Training Participants, June 2023

RISING ABOVE THE HEADLINES: PROTECTING PRESS FREEDOM AND STRENGTHENING THE JUDICIARY IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

Towards the end of 2023, the Netherlands Helsinki Committee (NHC) together with Free Press Unlimited (FPU) organised a second regional conference in Jahorina, Bosnia and Herzegovina, which brought together more than 80 journalists and members of the judiciary from the Western Balkans, for a dialogue on “Strengthening Media Freedom in Bosnia-Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Serbia”.

Participants included high representatives from the judiciary, as well as active partners from the journalist associations and judicial academies of the three participating countries. The result was two productive days of dialogue on judicial transparency and responsible journalism in the region, and the need for the two communities to work together towards safeguarding media freedom in the region.



Keynote address, Media Freedom Conference, December 2023

The NHC sat down with Nina Hadzihajdarevic; Advisor for the Federal Prosecutors Office of Bosnia & Herzegovina, and Mirjana Golubovic, Head of the Department for Special Skills and Knowledge, Judicial Academy of the Republic of Serbia together with Ivana Obradovic, Judge and Court Spokesperson, Higher Court in Kragujevac, Serbia, for their reflections on the project and the second regional conference.

CROSS BORDER KNOWLEDGE SHARING

Mirjana: The NHC first approached judicial academy and explained everything about this project. We found your approach to be very innovative and were happy to be involved. Aside from gaining new knowledge, it is very beneficial to see how our colleagues from abroad work on these issues, namely the judicial academies in the Netherlands, but also agencies that support this work, both from media and judiciary.

Ivana: The conferences, meetings and trainings we have together with journalists, such as this one, are invaluable to us. We listen to each other; get to know more about the (communications) problems the other faces. Working on strengthening the contacts between journalists and judiciary as everything we do is in the interest of the wider public – and that becomes clear through these types of shared exchanges.

EFFECTING CHANGE: EXPANDING THE CIRCLE OF COOPERATION

Mirjana: This is a great opportunity for journalists and judiciary to meet, from Serbia for instance, and perhaps they are different people than attended the previous conference trainings, so the circle of cooperation is expanding. When a conference is well organised, such as this one, when we have good speakers, when equal attention is given to journalists and judiciary, I think this results in both groups being motivated to work better together in the future.

PRACTICAL SKILLS FOR IMPROVED COMMUNICATION

Nina: In our Centre for the Education of Prosecutors and Officers in Bosnia and Herzegovina, we do not normally offer this type of practical education. I believe it is very important for judges and prosecutors to have access to this kind of education and trainings. The practical nature of the workshops was a real breath of fresh air for everyone involved.

Our goal was for the knowledge and experience gained through these trainings to be implemented not just in external communication, with journalists, but to also be implemented in their day to day work in the courtroom. To speak more clearly, with conviction, to have better communication and presentation skills.

We look forward to more collaboration with you and this project; from knowledge sharing to implementation of best practices.



OUR AMBITION

By 2026, we have made progress in overcoming the barriers to change by strengthening catalysts of change: (reform-oriented) civil servants are better equipped to initiate and sustain reforms; civil society is strengthened; politicians speak up and media experiences more protection and freedom, so they can play their role of critical observers. Together, this will contribute to an environment that facilitates the emergence of a robust rule of law culture that is embedded in internationally agreed standards and criteria.

OUR APPROACH & OUR ACTIVITIES IN 2023

Rule of Law Training programme

- 20+ civil servants from 11 countries gained valuable skills, knowledge and experience on other countries' best practices in tackling discrimination & improving human rights standards especially with regards to minorities.
- 7 trainings planned for 2024 with aim to equip 200+ reform-minded civil servants from 11 participating countries with knowledge of best practices across a wide range of rule of law topics.

Strengthening Media Freedom in Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Serbia

- 80+ journalists and members of the judiciary from Serbia, North Macedonia and Bosnia & Herzegovina engaged in productive dialogue on judicial transparency and responsible journalism in the region in December 2023 (Second Regional Conference, Jahorina, Bosnia & Herzegovina).

Recharging Advocacy For Rights in Europe

- Strengthened capacity for civic space in the European Union by bringing together 25 human rights defenders from across the EU during 5 training camps.

OUR ADVOCACY

- Raised awareness on the importance of effective anti-corruption measures & increased public awareness of the issue of kleptocracy in affected countries (and Azerbaijan in particular) with 100+ members of the public through cooperation with the Fraud Film Festival.
- Raised awareness on shrinking civic space in the Netherlands & in particular concerning developments around calls for 'representation requirements' in CSO lawsuits against the government through our annual contribution to the Rule of Law Report.
- Advocated for increased vigilance rule of law backsliding under the rule of nationalist, right-wing parties by engaging NHC Committee Kees Sterk at the November 2023 edition of #DemocracyDrinks



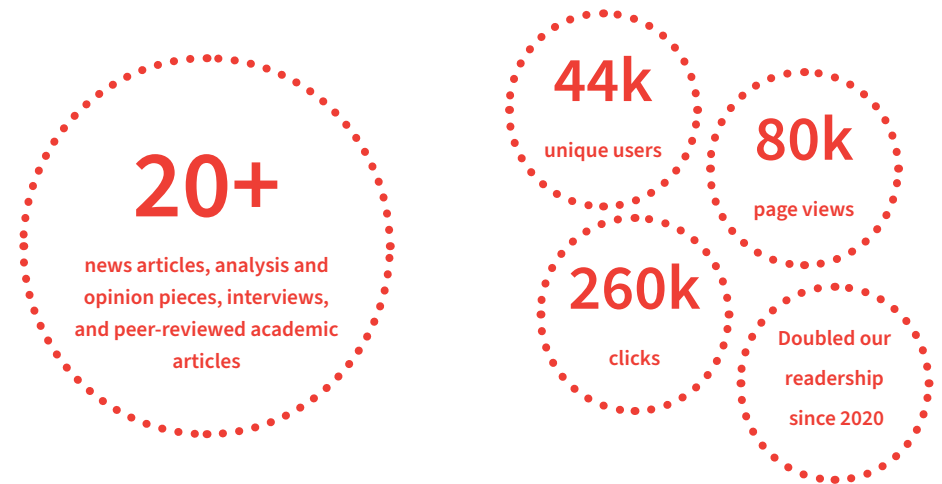
NHC Committee Member Kees Sterk during November 2023 #DemocracyDrinks



The Security and Human Rights Monitor (SHR Monitor) has come a long way in its 30+ years. From the beginning, the *Helsinki Monitor* has been covering developments leading up to the establishment of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and in the decades since, maintaining consistent analysis of issues surrounding the OSCE. A lot has changed in Europe and beyond since 1990, not least in 2023, and the Helsinki Monitor has changed with it, growing and evolving into the multifaceted platform *Security and Human Rights Monitor*.

First, in 2008 and after 18 volumes, the title of the journal was changed from *Helsinki Monitor* to *Security and Human Rights*. This served to reflect the evolution from a publication focusing solely on the OSCE to a journal more broadly covering the intersection of security and human rights, a key concept in the OSCE's pursuit of comprehensive security relating to the human dimension of security. While maintaining the annual publication of the journal, a blog was established in 2010 to provide a resource of well-researched journal articles along with critical and thought-provoking blog entries related to the OSCE and its participating states. Finally, in 2017, the evolution of the Security and Human Rights took another significant step when the journal's widely read blog, www.shrblog.org, merged with the journal Security and Human Rights creating the multifaceted platform that is today called the *Security and Human Rights Monitor*.

Today, the Security and Human Rights Monitor incorporates several aspects including: news articles, analysis and opinion pieces, interviews, and peer-reviewed academic articles that all together continue to provide quality analysis on the work of the OSCE, as well as on security and human rights challenges stemming from the OSCE region and beyond.



SECURITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS MONITOR



2023 ANALYSIS

[What Back from the brink: OSCE Ministerial Council in Skopje takes decisions on OSCE leadership Security Guarantees?](#)

Stephanie Liechtenstein

Web Editor-in-Chief of the Security and Human Rights Monitor and Freelance Journalist.

[Showdown in Skopje: Can We Still Cooperate?](#)

Walter Kemp

Senior Fellow at the Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime, and Strategic Policy Adviser at the Geneva Centre for Security Policy.

[How creative diplomacy has averted a collapse of the OSCE – until now](#)

Stephanie Liechtenstein

Web Editor-in-Chief of the Security and Human Rights Monitor and Freelance Journalist.

[How the OSCE helps collect evidence of potential war crimes in Ukraine](#)

Stephanie Liechtenstein

Web Editor-in-Chief of the Security and Human Rights Monitor and Freelance Journalist.

2023 NEWS

[Exclusive: OSCE Permanent Council paves the way for Malta to assume the OSCE chair in 2024](#)

[Exclusive: Malta under consideration to become OSCE Chair in 2024](#)

[OSCE Moldova mission mandate extended for six months](#)

2023 OPINION

[Nagorno-Karabakh: What Next?](#)

Hrair Balian

Conflict resolution expert with more than 35 years of experience in the Middle East, Africa, the Balkans, Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia.

[Called to the Stand: The OSCE Special Monitoring Mission and War Crimes Evidence in Ukraine](#)

William Goodhind

Monitoring Officer with the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine in 2015-17 and 2020-22.





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1. RARE 2022-2024 cohort.
2. Nederlandse Democratie Coalitie members during the Summit for Democracy, March 2023.
3. Event with Human Security Collective and Justice & Peace during 75 Years of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, December 2023.
4. NHC's Joeri Buhrer Tavanier, 30 Years of Matra Conference, November 2023.
5. NHC at OSCE HDIM Advocacy Event, March 2023
6. Media Freedom Second Regional Conference, Jahorina, Bosnia and Herzegovina, December 2023.
7. Kick off meeting for Advancing Justice and Accountability in Ukraine project, January 2024.
8. Screening of Caviar Connection at Fraude Film Festival, November 2023.
9. East SOS NGO advocacy visit to the Netherlands, facilitated by NHC, June 2023.



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SUPERVISORY BOARD

Responsible for supervising the Board (Executive Director); advising on medium and long-term policies and strategies; and approving policy and strategy plans, reports and the annual state of accounts prepared by the Board.

- Piet de Klerk (Chair)
- Anne Maljers (Vice-chair, Audit Committee)
- Tamara Trotman (until June 2023)
- Mariska Baaij (since June 2023)
- Marjolijn van Oordt (Stakeholder Management & Media)
- Eric Rijnders (Audit Committee)

In 2023, the Supervisory Board met 7 times officially, and in addition met a few times informally between late August and late September. The Audit Committee (Anne Maljers, Eric Rijnders) met 8 times separately.

The Supervisory Board approved the Annual Report 2022; the narrative part in June 2023, the financial part later in the year. The delay was largely the result of the introduction of a new financial system, Exact Online and the departure of the financial manager at the end of 2022. The Audit Committee was in close contact with the accountant to monitor progress and an external consultant was hired to fill the gap and assure that operations continued. In approving the Annual Report, the board granted discharge to the Executive Director of their financial responsibility.

When the Director fell ill in September, the Chair of the Supervisory Board took over the governance of the NHC, in line with the organisation's statutes. However, soon thereafter the Supervisory Board asked Joeri Buhner Tavanier to manage the organisation – which he did.

The Supervisory Board expresses its gratitude to him. Buhner Tavanier officially became Acting Executive Director on 20 December 2023.

In order to create some more flexibility in the governance of the organisation, the Supervisory Board decided on a few amendments in the statutes, which were executed at the notary on 12 December 2023.

In December 2023, the Supervisory Board decided that Kees van Rij would become a member of the Board as of 1 January 2024 and would succeed Piet de Klerk as Chair during the Board's first meeting in 2024.

EXECUTIVE BOARD

Responsible for representing, managing and governing the foundation; developing, implementing and reporting on its annual and multiannual plans and report on financial management; preparing the annual state of accounts, and ensuring its sustainability.

- Kirsten Meijer (on extended sick leave since September 2023)
- Joeri Buhner Tavanier (Acting Executive Director since December 2023)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Responsible for advising both the Board and Supervisory Board on its mission and strategy, relating to trends in the fields of work covered by the organisation.

Members of the Committee are appointed by the Supervisory Board:

- [Brianne McGonigle Leyh \(until November 2023\)](#)
- [Corinne Dettmeijer-Vermeulen](#)
- [Catharina \(Kitty\) Anna Nooy \(until December 2023\)](#)
- [Lodewijk \(Lo\) Casteleijn](#)
- [Maria Anne van Dijk \(until November 2023\)](#)
- [Marijke van Veen](#)
- [Marit Maij](#)
- [Kees Sterk](#)
- [Kees Jan René Klompenhouwer \(since September 2023\)](#)
- [Anna Matczak \(since June 2023\)](#)

OUR SUPPORTING PARTNERS

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Our work would not have been possible without the generous support of our supporting partners. We thank all of them and look forward to continue our cooperation to support catalysts of change in building just and rights-respecting societies.



Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands



Het Cultuurfonds



Nationale Postcode Loterij



Pro Juventute – Fonds voor Jeugdhulp



European Union



Federal Ministry
Republic of Austria
European and International
Affairs

Permanent Mission of Austria to the OSCE



OFFICE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS
PRINCIPALITY OF LIECHTENSTEIN

Permanent Mission of the Principality of Liechtenstein to the OSCE



V-Fonds



Fonds1818



Janivo Stichting

OUR ORGANISATION IN 2023

In 2023, the organisation continued on a path of consolidating in a new direction. We launched and fine-tuned our new multiannual strategy, and started its implementation. We assessed the impact of the changing realities in wider Europe, including the enduring ramifications of Russia's full-scale invasion in Ukraine, and increasing pressure on civic space, and adjusted to these new realities.

In June 2023, we held a Strategy Day with all staff, where we had a chance to reflect on the past year, our new multi-annual strategy, as well as the Action Plan for a Healthy and Motivational Workplace that was adopted in July 2022. We used this opportunity to check-in and assess if we are on the right track, and for collective reflection on what steps the organisation as a whole, and the Leadership and Development Team (LDT) in particular, will need to take in the future.

Following a discussion to improve communication and engagement during the June 2023 strategy day, we discussed setting up a works council/staff representation in 2024. Staff welcomed the introduction of an NHC Function Book, which more clearly defined roles and job groups in the organisation, with the ultimate aim of enhancing transparency and clarity on the variety of functions at the NHC.

However, 2023 was also a turbulent year for the organisation. Joeri Buhrer Tavanier took over as Acting Executive Director, and has – together with the LDT – continued on the path of consolidation of three well-functioning programme teams, and the operationalization of a new financial system. The LDT developed three new annual programme plans from the multi-annual strategy, as well as separate Communications and Advocacy Working Plans for 2024. Internal and external audits took place and recommendations fed into the annual Management Review. Risk management and the Balanced Score Card (BSC) remained an integral part of management/ LDT meetings, and an improved BSC was adopted for 2024. In 2023, some colleagues decided to embark on new paths, and new colleagues joined. In total, 3 colleagues left the organisation,

and 5 new colleagues joined over the course of 2023. On average, 21.46 full-time employees (FTEs) worked at the NHC during 2023.

In early 2024, the certified external confidential councilor reported back to the organisation with her findings on the period June 2022-August 2023, and introduced herself and her activities to new colleagues.

The Supervisory Board engaged the services of an external consultant at the end of 2023, to help us with a general stocktaking of the organisation and to map out several possible long and short term ways forward. We look forward to working together as a team to complete the organisational improvement processes outlined in this report and mapped out further in the Annual Plan.



Supervisory Board during February 2024 meeting - with Eric Rijnders, Mariska Baaij, Anne Maljers, Kees van Rij and Piet de Klerk present (left to right)

“Since joining the NHC in 2019, but especially since taking on the role of Acting Executive Director in September 2023, I have had the opportunity to work closely together with the Supervisory Board, and Piet de Klerk in particular. We highly appreciate his knowledge of the region and the topics that we work on, and his dedication to the cause and our organisation. At the same time, I am certain that in Kees van Rij we have found a very worthy successor as Chair of the Board and I very much look forward to working together in promoting the rule of law, strengthening democracy and amplifying the voices of human rights defenders, in Netherlands and in wider Europe.”
- Joeri Buhner Tavanier, Acting Executive Director NHC

During the NHC’s quarterly board meeting on 14 February 2024, Kees van Rij officially took over the reins as Chair of the Supervisory Board of the organisation.

“I am honoured to be stepping into the role of Chairperson of the Board at the NHC at this important time for the organisation. With a background in the diplomatic service and an in-depth knowledge of the region where the NHC operates, I look forward to working together and further strengthening the profile of the organisation in ‘supporting catalysts of change for just societies’.”
- Kees van Rij, Chair of the Supervisory Board of the NHC since February 2024.

Van Rij brings to the organisation close to 40 years of experience in the Dutch diplomatic service, having recently served as ambassador in Spain, Greece, Brazil and Turkey. Alongside his role as Chairperson of the Supervisory Board at the NHC, van Rij is currently also a member of the Commission on European Integration at the Dutch Advisory Council on International Affairs (AIV); an independent body which advises the Dutch government and parliament on foreign policy, as well as Strategic advisor international affairs at The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies.

Piet de Klerk will remain a member of the Supervisory Board until the end of June 2024. He reflected on the past six years at the helm of the Board:

“I look back with satisfaction on the past six years – years in which we have grown from an organisation that initially carried out a number of separate projects, into an organisation with three very strong programmes – Human Rights Defence, Rights-Based Justice and Integrity & Accountability. And in particular the past year, in which the collaboration – for a number of reasons – was more intense than normally, the Supervisory Board continued to work together exceptionally well as a team.”

In light of the February 2024 Munich Security Conference, Piet de Klerk and Kees van Rij published an opinion piece in Dutch newspaper ‘Nederlands Dagblad’ on 15 February, entitled “[1975 Helsinki Accords: A blueprint for peace in Ukraine](#)”.

Netherlands Helsinki Committee

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