



**FREE LEGAL ADVICE AND STRATEGIC  
LITIGATION SUPPORT FOR NGOS**

*Pro Bono Connect is a project of the Dutch Legal Committee for Human Rights (NJCM).*

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**JOIN US for a LUNCH workshop 20 June 2023 in Amsterdam!**

**Foundations & Social Enterprise: *navigating legal requirements***

Join us for sessions on navigating notarial foundations law, examples of steward ownership that help social enterprises put mission first, and exchange with others facing the same dilemma's!

**Register by June 10th** using the button below, and share your questions for our lawyers!

The location will be shared with registered participants in due course.

**REGISTER HERE**

### **Human Rights Reporting & the Threat of Lawsuits:**

#### **Interview with Olivia van Rikxoort (HVG Law)**

Human rights organisations sometimes struggle to balance their mission of reporting on human rights abuses with the need to protect themselves against defamation lawsuits. In an interview with **Olivia van Rikxoort**, Lawyer at **HVG Law**, a founding member of Pro Bono Connect, we unpack the role that pro bono support can play in helping NGOs to find this balance.

#### ***1. How can pro bono support help human rights organizations to protect themselves against libel and slander accusations?***

Publishing reports and public statements on human rights violations is one of the primary methods for human rights organizations to expose injustices and to obtain (more) societal support. Lawyers can help to avoid making potentially defamatory statements by advising on the boundaries of free speech and the importance of factual accuracy in public statements. More specifically, lawyers can assist in (non-exhaustive):

- (i) accessing the applicable legal system;
- (ii) proof reading any documents prior to publication; and
- (iii) coordinating the adversarial procedure (Dutch: 'hoor en wederhoor').

Furthermore, if a human rights organization (or its representatives) is accused of libel or slander, lawyers can help them to defend themselves against these accusations. This may involve conducting an investigation to gather (and safe guard) evidence, responding to any accusations, and representing the organization in court or settlement negotiations.

## **2. What can you tell us about the international dimension of such requests, and the role of other legal jurisdictions?**

When it comes to libel and slander accusations, there is often an international dimension involved. For example, a statement made by a human rights organization based in one country could be disseminated in other countries, potentially leading to occurrence of damage in these secondary countries. In such cases, the laws of other jurisdictions could be applicable (additionally or exclusively). Therefore, human rights organizations must seek legal advice and representation in multiple jurisdictions. This may involve working with local lawyers who have expertise in the relevant laws and procedures, as well as navigating the different legal systems and cultural contexts involved.

## **3. What steps can human rights organizations take from the outset to better protect themselves against slander and libel lawsuits?**

Human rights organizations can take proactive measures to protect themselves against future accusations of defamation. This could include developing internal policies and procedures for fact-checking and verification of information (e.g. the adversarial procedure), ensuring that all communications are properly reviewed before being published, and providing training to staff on how to avoid making defamatory statements.

### **NGO experience: Pro bono to support day-to-day operations**

As much as we value larger requests concerning human rights research or strategic litigation, we firmly believe that supporting NGOs in their **day-to-day work** allows them to function **sustainably and safely** in their core mission. We therefore encourage smaller NGOs to reach out with **administrative questions** (for instance on **tax, tenancy, or employment law**).

We spoke with **Alix Vuillemin**, Advocacy Director at **Women's Initiatives for Gender Justice**, about the impact of pro bono assistance with such requests:

Women's Initiatives for Gender Justice is a **Dutch based stichting** who recently opened an office in the **United States**. From our new office, we plan to implement projects, hire US-based staff and apply for funding from US-based donors. Our new office is thus central to our expansion and the success of the organisation to carry out its working to advocate for gender justice in and through the law. To make sure we are in full compliance with Dutch law and regulations, we reached out to **Pro Bono Connect** to link us with a law firm to seek advice.

Within weeks, we were talking to a specialised law firm who thoroughly reviewed our questions, helped identified other areas which we needed to get legal clarity about,

and provided us with the legal advice necessary. The process was very effective and we are grateful to have been able to count on the pro bono services of both Pro Bono Connect and the law firm, services that are otherwise out of reach for small non-profit organisations like ours.

### **Improving Access to Justice: LegalCrowd & Individual Pro Bono Assistance**

We were pleased to be mentioned alongside our donor, **Allemansrecht**, and other likeminded organisations in a recent [article](#) by the Dutch legal magazine, **Het Advocatenblad**. Since PBC only works with requests from organisations, we were particularly interested to read about **LegalCrowd's** alternative model of improving access to justice:

With the goal of **improving the access to justice**, LegalCrowd offers a **crowdfunding platform** exclusively for legal action. If you need funding for your case or any legal matter, you can reach out to LegalCrowd via email at [info@legalcrowd.nl](mailto:info@legalcrowd.nl), or visit their website at <https://legalcrowd.eu>. Your legal crowdfunding campaign can be launched within 48 hours.

### **Knowledge Exchange with Peace & Justice NGOs of the Hague Humanity Hub**

The [Hague Humanity Hub](#) is a not for profit foundation that supports and strengthens the ecosystem for a more peaceful and just world, by bringing together the peace & justice community. Pro Bono Connect is excited to exchange our perspective on **strategic pro bono legal assistance** with the members of the Hub on **June 15th**.

[Contact](#) them if you are interested in joining their community or the event!

### **Pro Bono for Larger Projects: Amsterdam Law Clinics in Focus**

Does your organisation need help with a **legal research project** or **strategic litigation**?

Pro Bono Connect also handles large-scale requests such as these. In discussion with the NGO and the **University of Amsterdam**, we are able to place these requests with one of the University's thematic [Law Clinics](#).

Each semester, the Law Clinics allow selected Master's students to work on matters of public interest under the supervision of experienced professionals. These Clinics are a win-win for NGOs and students alike: NGOs receive pro bono assistance from students highly motivated about the given topic and under the supervision of experts,

while students get an opportunity to apply their legal skills to real cases while learning more about the questions that NGOs tackle.

For more information on previous projects, read about the [Environmental Justice Clinic](#), the [Business and Human Rights Clinic](#), the [Fair Trials Clinic](#), or the [Amsterdam International Law Clinic](#).

*For questions, please contact us at [info@probonoconnect.nl](mailto:info@probonoconnect.nl).*

### **Collaborative Access to Justice Pro Bono**

In the UK and Europe, collaborative access to justice pro bono projects typically involve NGOs with local knowledge and experience delivering legal services, joining with two or more law firms, who support the project with a financial contribution and the work of volunteer lawyers. The collaboration aims to address the legal needs of one or more disadvantaged or marginalised groups, complementing existing efforts of NGOs and specialist lawyers, when they lack sufficient capacity to meet demand.

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### **Vacancy: werkstudent**

We are hiring a Content and Social Media Intern!

We are looking for someone to work with us to develop a (initial) communications strategy, write content for our socials, and assist with our monthly newsletter.

#### **Are you a good match?**

1. You have excellent command of the English (and Dutch) languages.
2. You are comfortable with WordPress, Canva, Mailchimp en LinkedIn.
3. You are available for 8-16 hours a week.
4. You are energized by our values and mission.
5. You enjoy working independently and taking initiative.

#### **Are we a good match?**

1. We offer a peek into the office of a small legal & socially-engaged non-profit.
2. You'll get to know our network of commercial law firms and NGOs working on a variety of topics.
3. The UvA Law Hub is a great place to work, full of students and recent grads.
4. Interns receive a small stipend and reimbursement of travel costs.
5. We're very good at what we do, but want to learn from the new perspectives you bring.

**If you think you'd be a good match, please send your CV and motivation letter to [info@probonoconnect.nl](mailto:info@probonoconnect.nl).**

***We look forward to hearing from you!***

### **UPCOMING EVENTS**

- **19 June:** Appeal hearing: Bureau Clara Wichmann's contraception case
- **20 June:** Lunch Workshop for Foundations and Social Enterprises
- **16-18 October:** PILnet Global Forum

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