

Victim statement (right to speak)

David Nooitgedagt, Chairman Hippo Mundo Charity Foundation

To the Gelderland District Court, 24 and 25 February 2022

Your Honourable College,

1. My name is David Nooitgedagt and I am representing the victim in this fraud case, the Hippo Mundo Charity Foundation (hereafter HMC).
2. Most people present at today's hearing will have noticed that the case heard by your court today has received a great deal of media attention. As victims in this criminal case, we have found many of the publications to be highly inaccurate, speculative and in some cases downright provocative. We are afraid that many have been given a very wrong impression of HMC and what this case is really about.
3. Therefore, on behalf of the Foundation, I am grateful to be able to tell you briefly about how we, as victims, view this case and what consequences it has had for us.
4. HMC is a Dutch charity foundation that has been working for many years now in mainly two ways - not with money from member donations, but with money that originally came from results from participations, from entrepreneurs who wanted those results to be spent on charity.
5. One way is that HMC has had projects that aim to promote Christian mission in countries and areas where Christian congregations are developing, with the result that Christians in those regions can come together. So far, we have carried out such conference centre projects (church buildings) in Africa, India, China, Oceania, South America and various countries in Eastern Europe.
6. The other way in which the foundation has been involved in recent years is humanitarian aid in the form of social entrepreneurship. Often in the same areas where the Christian mission takes place. In those countries, there is often a distressing lack of paid work, there are very limited educational opportunities and in many cases there is immediate humanitarian need. The best help we can give people in this situation is, according to our philosophy, to provide employment and give them a meaningful education with which they can work and sometimes support entire families.
7. Over the past two decades, we have improved the lives of many hundreds of people in this way. The social enterprises that were started within HMC were eventually run and staffed entirely by local people. Profits from these enterprises fully benefit the local economy and the local population that so desperately needs this.
8. In early 2016, HMC had a number of projects in the pipeline, including the construction of several new church buildings in Africa and Eastern Europe.
9. You can perhaps imagine, against the background I have just described, what it means for an organisation like HMC if EUR 8 million is unlawfully siphoned off from its assets.

10. HMC could not continue at that point, had to put mission projects *on hold* and divest its social enterprises, so humanitarian work also stopped at that point. We saw that people who desperately needed our help also became victims of the fraud.
11. In various ways, the impression has been created that it was so easy for the accused to carry out his fraud and the picture has been painted that there was poor control at HMC. And of course, if some 8 million euros disappears, it is not difficult to conclude that things should have been done differently anyway, because this is what you want to prevent. But then two things are important: firstly, after all internal and external investigations, no other fraud has been found, and secondly, it is important to see the whole picture of the case we are discussing today:
12. The directors of HMC were and are volunteers; during the day they are engaged in very different activities in a paid job and they use their free time for the activities of HMC. Therefore, it was soon clear that because such a large capital had to be managed, there was a need for a professional structure. For this reason, the foundation turned to Jonathan van der Linden, among others. He had a background with the FIOD and competencies in the field of finance, audit and tax law. He was the one who was then also paid to take care of the internal control in the structure. But - even more important in this context - HMC did not want one person to have too many mandates. Therefore, on the advice of an external advisor, HMC entered into an agreement with a large, professional, international party in the field of company management and administrative services, precisely so that it would take care of the internal control, payments and financial administration of the holdings in which the majority of the assets were located.
13. How easy was it to steal money from the HMC structure? We hear and read in this case about falsification of documents, about instructions to administrative staff on how to process transactions in order to hide what actually took place. We see the picture of a carefully prepared fraud over a long period of time. We now know that, in order to make the fraud possible, it was necessary to set up a new legal entity in distant places and give it a misleading name, that bank accounts had to be opened in the Caribbean and in Dubai.
14. This shows that the funds in HMC were not up for grabs. The fraud then became possible because of abuse of trust.
15. I just said that the actual victims in this case are in poor countries. But there are other victims in this case. Shortly after Mr Van der Linden was suspended from his pre-trial detention, a media offensive began, targeting HMC. The source of most publications was the suspect and his then lawyer. Various media have been open about this in the course of time. It has become known to us that Mr. Van der Linden, together with his lawyer Mr. Verbruggen and a certain Mr. Ben van Wijhe, participated in a meeting with Psy-Group, an Israeli company of former Mossad employees, which offered influence operations and "boots on the ground" against a target of his choice, in this case HMC and its surroundings. Psy-Group has become known for the so-called Mueller investigation in the United States into interference in Donald Trump's election campaign. In addition, we have been the victim of a series of extortions and threats since 2016; a suspect in that case was arrested in Spain in September last year and has been on remand in the Netherlands ever since, awaiting trial later this year. You can imagine that this whole thing has become an absurd and Kafkaesque reality for us. We had been robbed of EUR 8 million and then we ourselves were dismissed as sinners, extorted and threatened.

16. HMC has an ideological basis in the Bible and its statutory objective is to support Christian and humanitarian causes. Many of the projects of HMC have been carried out in cooperation with organisations that are related to the Christian faith community Brunstad Christian Church, or in the Netherlands: Christelijke Gemeente Nederland (CGN). This cooperation was distorted in the media. Stealing money from humanitarian causes and poor people is not nice. Stealing money from rich "sect leaders" who "exploit" their members, "evade taxes", "use child labour" and more - as expressed in the media and for example on the intranet of the Tax Authorities - is sensational, distracts attention from the thief and *triggers* society's sense of justice. This unjustified image was exactly what Van der Linden and his former lawyer had in mind.
17. Back in August 2016, Mr Van der Linden's then lawyer sent this story out into the world. Nobody was talking about Christian mission, employment in Africa, Asia and Ukraine. Even though it was difficult to deny that he had stolen 8 million euros at the time he left CGN, the suspect was portrayed as a kind of whistleblower, an outlier, someone who would dare to shine the light on dubious matters within a supposedly shadowy religious community. This hit us in the heart. And it was the world turned upside down.
18. I could fill days about what we have been through in recent years, about how bloody unfair it was. About how untrue the accusations are. About investigations by the Norwegian Økokrim, the equivalent of the Dutch FIOD, where Van der Linden's accusations became the reason for a Norwegian criminal investigation. An investigation that concluded with the conclusion that all the evidence showed conclusively that the accused's accusations about other people and organisations were completely unfounded. I can tell about how the constant witch hunt in the media made children come home crying from school or work. About how children experienced teachers and classmates at school shoving newspaper articles about this dangerous sect under their noses. About how job applicants removed every link with their voluntary work from their CVs because of the image that had been created about it, how boards had to use all their powers of persuasion to convince the tax authorities, banks and local authorities of their integrity, and so on and so forth. But I promised to be brief. In any case, I cannot be complete here about what this case has done to us.
19. The defendant must take responsibility for what the media has done to us in recent years. But a great responsibility also lies with the media themselves. Some of them have allowed themselves to be used to implement a strategy of the defence that has tried to turn public opinion against the victim.
20. However, the case concerns HMC, not Christelijke Gemeente Nederland or Brunstad Christian Church. But the reality is that our fellow believers, church members in the Netherlands and Norway and elsewhere, have also become victims in this case. They have been completely unjustly implicated in this case, and they have become the playthings of a case in which they have not been able to defend themselves.
21. However, I would also like to mention a positive development. In the summer of 2020, the Midden-Nederland District Court passed judgment in the civil case we had brought against the suspects. The outcome was, as could only be expected, in our favour. This verdict has become final. After that we have seen that the suspect has taken responsibility for his actions and our impression is that he sincerely wants to cooperate in order to bring back the stolen money. Of the missing money, at this moment, more than six years after the event, about EUR 3.3 million has been recovered. We are hopeful that most of the

money belonging to the foundation will be returned. Mr van der Linden has apologised. Yes, forgiveness is also a core value for us, so as far as we are concerned, someone should be given a chance to make something of the rest of his life.

22. I would like to emphasise that we at HMC have no desire to maintain or further escalate a conflict, either with the suspects or with the media or others. Our interest is not that the suspects be severely punished. Our only great wish is that, with the money due to HMC, we will have the peace and quiet to be able to do again what HMC was founded for, namely to help people who need our help in one way or another. As far as we are concerned, that would be the best outcome of this case. As a bright spot, I can report that one of my fellow board members of HMC is currently in Africa to discuss current and new projects. And I myself was in Poland this month in the church building that we built there, for a Christian conference where Christian young people came together from Poland, Ukraine, Hungary and Romania.
23. I would like to conclude by thanking you for giving me the opportunity to stand here before you and say something about our experiences. I hope that I have been able to contribute by highlighting aspects of this case that have not been presented before, or have not been presented properly or correctly. I hope that it has also become sufficiently clear that I am pleased with the development of this case over the past year, where the defendant has shown the will to cooperate in repairing the damage suffered. I therefore hope that this case will finally settle down and that we can once again focus fully on the charitable, Christian and humanitarian objectives of our foundation. Thank you very much.