

Press statement – Derk Stegeman – Bethel Church

Press meeting for international press, The Hague, 13/12/2018

Thank you all for being here today. My name is Derk Stegeman. I am a minister of the Protestant Church of The Hague and for the moment working as coordinator and spokesman for the Church Asylum here in Bethel. I would like to start with a brief statement to outline the situation to you and to explain to you why we are doing this.

The Tamrazyan family came to the Netherlands almost 9 years ago. Due to political reasons they had to leave everything behind and flee. The immigration procedures took almost 9 years. In this period the courts decided in favor of the family several times - but the state kept going into appeal until their residence permit was denied.

Immigration procedures often take a long time. As a result, hundreds of immigrant children grow up here during these procedures. These children have settled here and are rooted here now. It is highly damaging for these children to be uprooted and to be forced to leave after having lived here for so many years. It is a proven fact that this is traumatic for children. There is a lot of research on this and a recent report by over 30 Dutch experts confirms that it causes severe damage.

This family is in need of help. This family is not safe in Armenia, and the children who have grown up here are at risk of getting damaged. As a church it is our responsibility to take care of people. This is why we offer them the safety they need now.

We are not in a fight. This is not a matter of who wins or who loses. Our aim is to create time and space. We are creating time for a real dialogue with the authorities and members of parliament. And we are creating safe space for the family to stay. We are creating also a space of compassion and justice. Justice that goes beyond law enforcement and compassion that offers space for amnesty.

We plea for the secretary of state, Mr. Mark Harbers, to use his authority and stop the deportation of this family and of those in similar circumstances. We also plea to organize a clear procedure that does not damage people and especially children.

We started our continuous service on Friday, 26 October at half past one p.m. It has been going on for almost 7 weeks now and we will continue for as long as we believe is necessary or useful.

This initiative is made possible with the help of many dozens volunteers, with the help of hundreds of pastors from the entire country and the support of thousands of visitors. What is happening here gets worldwide attention. All of this support is very meaningful to us and we want to thank everyone who is involved.

I would like to finish with something that Barack Obama just said on Twitter. “The thing about hope is that it travels through space and time, first splashing against the rocks, but eventually breaking down the walls of cruelty and injustice. And if we do our best with the time we’re given, others will take hope in our example.”