

# FOCUS ON MIGRATION

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ADMINISTRATIVE  
DETENTION IN  
THE NETHERLANDS

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In English  
and Dutch



IOM International Organization for Migration  
the Netherlands



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Focus on Migration is the periodical of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in the Netherlands. The magazine is published two times a year and contains news, commentary and opinion on current migration topics in the Netherlands, including assisted voluntary return and reintegration, migration and development, and resettlement.

This special edition of Focus on Migration is one of the activities implemented by the IOM project 'Assisted Voluntary Return to Migrants in Detention III (AVRD III)', funded by the European Return Fund 2011 and co-funded by the Dutch Ministry of Security and Justice.

Spiritual Care Service, Dutch Ministry of Security and Justice

# THE NEED FOR COMFORT AND FAITH SHARING

"Many people in administrative detention are struggling with faith issues and the meaning of their lives. They are often deeply religious and want to share their faith and to confess," says Mohamed Ajouaou, Head of the Islamic Chaplaincy, and Jan Eerbeek, retired Head of the Protestant Chaplaincy of the Spiritual Care Service, Ministry of Security and Justice (see box).

The approximately 177 chaplains working in detention centres across the Netherlands belong to seven spiritual backgrounds: Roman Catholic, Protestant, humanist, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist and Hindu. Mohamed Ajouaou: "The chaplains provide spiritual care in individual interviews and in group meetings. This happens in the special prayer or meditation rooms available in each detention centre and suitable for all life philosophies and faiths. It is where, for example, Muslims say their Friday prayers, Christians conduct their Sunday services, and humanists organize reflective meetings. We believe that the Dutch government adequately facilitates the professing of religion for migrants in administrative detention."

"Many of these migrants experience their situation as hopeless," says Jan Eerbeek. "They came to Europe because they wanted to build a future and the opposite has happened. They are now asked to leave the country. We see how people struggle to cope when their hopes and expectations are not realized. We appoint special migrant ministers and involve volunteers and churches outside the administrative detention system to assist. This substantial religious emphasis comes from the fact that these people come from regions in the world



Mohamed Ajouaou: "People dare to open their hearts to us. They expect our consolation."

where religion is a very strong factor in a person's life."

## Faith Creates Trust

Through their personal conversations, the migrant and the resident chaplain are building a bond of trust. Mohamed Ajouaou: "People feel free to tell us how they feel and they expect consolation." But the chaplain's work goes beyond this. "Because people trust us, deeper conversations take place as well. You try to encourage them to do something with their lives, because hope does not come by itself. Together we look at the years that are lost, and we look towards the future and how they can work towards their return home."



Jan Eerbeek: "Many people want to communicate about their faith with someone from their own faith tradition."

## Transit House for Possible Return

The chaplains give attention to migrants who are not allowed to remain in the Netherlands and who want to return, as well as to those who are unable to return to their country of origin. This can happen for various reasons, for instance out of shame because their migration plans have failed or because their country of origin does not cooperate with the return process. Jan Eerbeek: "A few years ago we set up a transit house for these people (ed.: see also page 23). Migrants can stay there for a while. In the meantime, we assess whether their voluntary return is feasible." Several organizations participate in the Transit House, including IOM and the NGO INLIA Foundation.



## Spiritual Care Service, Ministry of Security and Justice

The Spiritual Care Service advises the political and administrative management of the Custodial Institutions Agency (Dienst Justitiële Inrichtingen DJI) about spiritual care needs in detention centres in the Netherlands. All 177 chaplains are both religious ministers and civil servants. They give guidance, based on their faith, to migrants in administrative detention about dealing with the latter's past decisions, current situation and prospects for the future.

(Source: [www.dji.nl](http://www.dji.nl))

### Adviser on Humanity

An important task for all chaplains is to observe and monitor the humanitarian aspects of administrative detention. "In the early nineties, when the Netherlands was using detention boats, we advocated for more activities for migrants, such as listening to music or reading books in their own languages. The Detention Centre Rotterdam started a large library and local

churches collected musical instruments. Over the years, we have organized meetings and concerts in the detention centres with the help of other parties and volunteers." Jan Eerbeek and Mohamed Ajouaou do not comment on the public opinion about the inhumane aspect of administrative detention. "It is important for us to help and guide people in administrative detention. To a chaplain, all people are equal and we give

everyone the care they ask for." Both chaplains feel that their work has had a positive impact on their own faith. "The power that faith can give people in a difficult situation is impressive. This is very rewarding. It is not true that all people in administrative detention are simply miserable. Both of us meet vital people who draw their strength from their faith."

## COLUMN: Olivier Sprée, IOM the Netherlands



### Agents of Change

In the year 1965, the legal provision to detain irregular migrants was for the first time included in the Dutch Aliens Act by a Catholic-led government. Surprised? I was. To my mind, that era is associated with the flower power movement and the reinforcement of the welfare state with its wellbeing-for-all concept. The controversial topic of migrant detention doesn't seem to fit in that era's philosophy. To what extent is there any logic in the development of aliens' detention in the Netherlands?

It wasn't until the mid-eighties that the government actually started to make use of the law. Parallel to the bad weather the Dutch economy was facing, the social climate for migrants deteriorated too.

From that time on, more and more irregulars were placed in detention, with numbers peaking at over 3000 in the first years of the new millennium. Decades went by without much scrutiny of this practice in the context of human rights. It took a fire at the Schiphol detention centre in 2005, which killed 11 migrants, to have the topic placed on the political agenda. It was a tipping point. I recall my first years working for IOM, in ramshackle detention boats floating in a desolate corner of the Rotterdam harbor. Those are history now, having been replaced by safe buildings. Over the years, the facilities have gradually improved. In addition, there are fewer migrants in detention and they stay shorter than before.

Improved, but far from indisputable, as demonstrated in the aftermath of Aleksandr Dolmatov's suicide in detention in January this year. State Secretary Fred Teeven announced he would further modernize aliens' detention, more focus on alternatives to detention included.

You wouldn't expect this move from a right-wing politician. Not more than you would expect a church-going government to lay the foundation for aliens' detention in an era in which the concept of freedom was reinvented.

If it weren't for the 11 Schiphol fire casualties and the suicide of a Russian man, these developments may not have taken place.

Dienst Geestelijke verzorging van het Ministerie van Veiligheid en Justitie

# BEHOEFTE AAN TROOST EN DELEN VAN HET GELOOF

“Het valt op dat veel mensen in de vreemdelingenbewaring enorm worstelen met hun geloof en de zin van hun leven. Ze zijn vaak diep gelovig en willen hun geloof delen en belijden”, aldus Mohammed Ajouaou, hoofd van de Islamitisch Geestelijk verzorging en Jan Eerbeek, inmiddels gepensioneerd hoofd van de Protestantse geestelijk verzorging binnen de Dienst Geestelijke Verzorging (DGV) van het ministerie van Veiligheid en Justitie. (zie kader).

De circa 250 geestelijke verzorgers in alle justitiële inrichtingen in Nederland werken binnen zeven religieuze en levensbeschouwelijke stromingen: rooms-katholiek, protestants, humanistisch, joods, moslim, boeddhistisch en hindoeïstisch. Ajouaou: “Zij bieden geestelijke zorg in persoonlijke gesprekken en in groepsbijeenkomsten. Dit gebeurt in de stifteruimte die in elk detentiecentrum aanwezig is. De moslims hebben er bijvoorbeeld hun vrijdaggebed, de christenen de zondagse kerkdienst en humanisten hebben er bezinningsbijeenkomsten. Wij vinden dat de Nederlandse overheid het kunnen belijden van religie en levensbeschouwing voor mensen in detentie goed faciliteert.”

Veel mensen in de vreemdelingenbewaring ervaren hun situatie als uitzichtloos, aldus Eerbeek. “Ze zijn naar Europa toegekomen met de gedachte er een toekomst op te bouwen. Het tegendeel gebeurt. Ze worden gevraagd het land te verlaten. Je kijkt hoe mensen kunnen overleven in de rauwe werkelijkheid als hun hoop en verwachtingen niet gerealiseerd kunnen worden. Veel mensen willen over hun geloof communiceren met iemand uit hun geloofstraditie”

## Geloof geeft vertrouwensband

Door de geloofsband tussen bewoner en geestelijk verzorger en de persoonlijke gesprekken ontstaat er vaak een sterk vertrouwen. Ajouaou: “Mensen durven bij ons hun hart te luchten en mogen van ons troost verwachten.” Vanuit de vertrouwensrelatie ontstaan er ook diepere gesprekken. “Je probeert mensen aan te sporen om iets te doen aan hun leven, want hoop komt niet vanzelf. Je kijkt ook samen naar de ‘verloren jaren’, naar de toekomst, hier of in het herkomstland.”

## Transithuis om terugkeer te begeleiden

Aandacht is er ook voor mensen die terug moeten en willen keren, maar die niet terug kunnen keren. Dat kan allerlei redenen hebben, zoals schaamte omdat de migratieplannen niet gelukt zijn of omdat het land van herkomst niet meewerkt. Eerbeek: “Voor deze mensen zijn we enkele jaren geleden begonnen met een transithuis. Dat is een huis waar mensen kunnen verblijven, terwijl bekeken wordt of vrijwillige terugkeer op de een of andere manier toch gerealiseerd kan worden.” Bij het transithuis zijn meerdere organisaties betrokken, waaronder IOM en INLIA.

## Adviseur over humaniteit

De geestelijk verzorgers hebben ook een adviserende rol wat betreft de humaniteit in de vreemdelingendetentie. Mede dankzij die inzet is er in het detentiecentrum in Rotterdam een grote bibliotheek met boeken in allerlei talen. Ook zijn er via de kerken bijvoorbeeld muziekinstrumenten ingezameld en zijn er concerten in detentiecentra georganiseerd.

Eerbeek en Ajouaou realiseren zich dat er binnen de samenleving veel kritiek is op de vreemdelingenbewaring op zich. “Ons gaat het er om dat we met onze aanwezigheid, activiteiten en adviserende rol kunnen bijdragen aan de humaniteit. We gaan met mensen een band aan en geven hen de zorg die ze nodig hebben. Dat doen we ook door migrantenpredikanten in te zetten en door vrijwilligers van moskeeën en kerken van buiten te betrekken.”

Beiden vinden indrukwekkend hoe veel geloofskracht mensen in een moeilijke situatie kunnen hebben. “We hebben daar zelf ook veel aan. Het beeld van ‘alleen maar zielige mensen’ gaat lang niet altijd op. We zien ook heel vitale mensen die kracht halen uit hun geloof.”

## Dienst Geestelijke Verzorging (DGV)

De Dienst Geestelijke Verzorging is een landelijke dienst van de Dienst Justitiële Inrichtingen (DJI) en adviseert de politieke en ambtelijke leiding van DJI over de geestelijke verzorging in de justitiële inrichtingen. De geestelijke verzorgers zijn, behalve geestelijk ambtsdrager, ook ambtenaar. Ze begeleiden vanuit hun eigen overtuiging iedereen bij het omgaan met verleden, de actuele levenssituatie en de ontwikkeling van toekomstperspectief.

(Bron: [www.dji.nl](http://www.dji.nl))

## **Colophon**

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Den Haag, 1 oktober 2013

Beste heer Eerbeek,

Hartelijk dank voor uw medewerking aan onze uitgave Focus on Migration van over het  
thema Vreemdelingenbewaring.  
Hierbij treft u twee exemplaren van het blad aan.

Met vriendelijke groet,

Marian Lenshoek  
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