

OPEN LETTER TO SAMMY MAHDI AND ALEXANDER DE CROO

The fight continues for all undocumented people in Belgium

July 30th, 2021

The numerous fights carried out by undocumented people for a life with dignity and in legality have long been invisibilised and even misrepresented or instrumentalised by the media and politicians. We, citizens who stand in solidarity with their struggle, want to demonstrate our unfailing support to undocumented people through this open letter addressed to Sammy Mahdi and Alexander De Croo. We will continue mobilising because this fight is far from over, and nothing can be taken for granted for undocumented people in Belgium.

Let's remember that this past July 21st, no agreement was reached between the federal government and the 475 undocumented people on hunger strike since May 23rd. In order to avoid a human disaster, the strikers at the Free Universities (VUB and ULB) and Beguinage church decided to suspend the hunger strike and put an end to the thirst strike as the health situation became untenable. On the evening of July 21st, approximately 50 people from the Beguinage church were hospitalised. For some, the psychological and physical consequences are irreversible. In this context of extreme fatigue and anguish, a new phase of the struggle has started for the strikers: one of verifying or starting their request for regularisation. In order to facilitate this procedure, Sammy Mahdi had already created a neutral zone reserved only for strikers, starting July 14th.

This neutral zone was closed on Monday, July 27th, in total disbelief. Yesterday, Sammy Mahdi communicated that the closure would be definitive. This closure of the neutral zone has already provoked the disarray of tens of thousands of people living undocumented in Belgium. Therefore, more than 1000 people had gathered as soon as 10am to oppose the closure of the neutral zone on July 27th.

Let's recall that the neutral zone was not something new obtained when the hunger strike was suspended on July 21st. It was already put in place for strikers on July 14th by Sammy Mahdi. Furthermore, this neutral zone was only an educational space, strictly reserved to strikers, in order to evaluate their individual application before it was sent to the Immigration Office, and not a global solution for all.

In view of the vague and arbitrary procedures of the Immigration Office, all the undocumented people in Belgium and their tens of thousands of supporters ask for a revision of the law of 1980. They simply demand clear and objective regularisation criteria, as well as the creation of an independent regularisation commission. At the present moment, no fixed criteria is stipulated (as opposed to France, Italy or Spain). Some undocumented people have been working for years on the territory and others were even born in Belgium. Nonetheless, they are again and again refused regularisation, without any valid explanation, as residence and work permits are granted completely arbitrarily by the Immigration Office.

In parallel, it seems fundamental to recall that the very notion of "illegal stay" is a political construct, as is the status of "undocumented" which is a creation of migration policy. An

undocumented person is a child, a woman or a man who lives and works as they can, and takes part in society while being deprived of their fundamental rights.

The fight is far from over, because, contrary to our federal government, undocumented people and their thousands of allies understand that justice makes sense only when it serves everyone.

We citizens, ask of our federal government to respect the Constitution, respect Human Rights, and provide clear, specific and objective regularisation criteria for undocumented people. We therefore demand that the federal government changes the law. No one is illegal.

Citizens, it is time for every person living in Belgium to finally have the right to be integrated into the Belgian State. We invite you to sign the following petition www.wearebelgiumtoo.be.

Furthermore, we relay the call for a General Assembly that will take place today at 6pm in Brussels (Rue de Livourne 80A, 1000 Bruxelles), for all undocumented people in Belgium, organised by the Coordination des Sans-Papiers de Belgique.

This open letter addressed to Sammy Mahdi and Alexander De Croo is a citizens' initiative co-signed by the Coordination des Sans-Papiers de Belgique, Sans-Papiers TV and We Are Belgium Too.