

Schriftelijke vragen van de fracties ChristenUnie en VVD op grond van artikel 34 van het Reglement van Orde betreffende brandbrief vluchtelingen Christiaan Geurtsweg

Apeldoorn, 22 februari 2021

Geacht college,

1. Bent u bekend met het recente bericht “Vluchtelingen sturen brandbrief over opvang in Apeldoorn: koud, benauwd en vies”¹ en de daarbijbehorende brandbrief?
2. De locatie Christiaan Geurtsweg is ingericht als een *tijdelijk* AZC. In de oorspronkelijke raadsbrief uit 2016 staat een termijn van maximaal 3 jaar², in latere berichtgeving lezen wij over uitstel tot 1 juli 2021³ en in uw laatste raadsbrief dd. 1 december 2020 is dit zelfs verlengd tot april 2022⁴(!).

- a. In uw raadsbrieven dd. [10 oktober 2019](#) en [1 december 2020](#) benadrukt u dat de locatie Christiaan Geurtsweg een tijdelijke opvangvoorziening is die zowel functioneel als planologisch niet geschikt is als permanente opvanglocatie.

Bent u het met ons eens dat deze locatie nadrukkelijk als tijdelijk is ingeschat en qua voorzieningen niet voldoet aan langdurige inzet en langdurig verblijf?

- b. Bent u het met ons eens dat ook wanneer het langer gebruik maken van deze locatie het gevolg is van overmacht (omdat de locatie GGNet/Deventerstraat vertraging oploopt) dit COA zou moeten noden het verblijf in deze feitelijk

¹ Stentor, 19 februari 2021, [Vluchtelingen sturen brandbrief over opvang in Apeldoorn: koud, benauwd en vies](#).

² [Raadsbrief haalbaarheidsstudie naar nevenvestiging AZC en voortgang Christiaan Geurtsweg / CV 2016-002457](#), o.a. besproken in de [PMA van 8 september 2016](#).

³ [Raadsbrief verlenging Christiaan Geurtsweg 10-10-2019](#) en Stentor, [Opening permanent asielzoekerscentrum Apeldoorn jaar vertraagd door vrees voor overlast](#).

⁴ [Raadsbrief 1 december 2020](#). Ook in het recente artikel van 19 februari j.l., lezen we uit de reactie vanuit de gemeente: “De gemeente Apeldoorn noemt de klachten vervelend. “*Het is nu aan COA om deze problemen aan te pakken.*” [De tijdelijke opvang blijft tot uiterlijk april 2022 in gebruik.](#)”

ongeschikte locatie te verbeteren door extra inzet te plegen op het gebied van leefbaarheid, sociale veiligheid, hygiëne, etc.?

Wat kan het college doen om COA danwel de verantwoordelijk staatssecretaris hiertoe aan te zetten?

- c. Sluiting van de locatie Chr. Geurtsweg is gekoppeld aan opening van de locatie GGNet⁵. Hoe staat het inmiddels met de vorderingen voor het permanente AZC aan de Deventerstraat? Het bestemmingsplan hiertoe is op 13 februari 2020 vastgesteld, we zijn inmiddels al een jaar verder. Eind vorig jaar konden we lezen dat er sprake was van vertraging vanwege asbest⁶. Staat de opening intussen nog steeds gepland voor het eerste kwartaal van 2022? En mogen we er dan inderdaad vanuit gaan dat de locatie Christiaan Geurtsweg sluit, zoals ook op op de gemeentelijke website wordt gecommuniceerd?
3. De brief van de inwoners gaat uitgebreid in op het gebrek aan goede communicatie, hygiëne en sociale veiligheid en wat dit met de bewoners doet. Onze fracties zijn geschrokken van de brief en de bijgevoegde foto's. Wij zijn van mening dat deze huisvesting niet past bij onze norm voor humane opvang. Het beschaamt ons te zien dat wij vluchtelingen op deze manier moeten opvangen.

Is het college bereid zo spoedig mogelijk in contact te treden met COA danwel het ministerie van Justitie en Veiligheid om deze opvang per direct te verbeteren?

4. De brief gaat ook in op de coronamaatregelen in de opvang.

In uw [raadsbrief coronavirus 08-05-2020](#) schrijft u aan de raad:

“Het AZC aan de Christiaan Geurtsweg is met ongeveer 400 bewoners op dit moment maximaal gevuld. Er is voortdurend aandacht om de aangepaste gedragsregels met elkaar zoveel mogelijk na te leven.”

Uit de brandbrief van de inwoners blijkt dat het handhaven/faciliteren van de coronamaatregelen in de opvang gebrekkig is:

The safety measures pertaining to COVID-19 are not respected. In many rooms, there are five or six people, and it becomes practically impossible to maintain the 1.5-meter rule. We often see crowds in various parts of the building. Crowding is a health concern not only mentally but also physically as we become more prone

⁵ Zie ook de gemeentelijke website, [Tijdelijke Opvang Christiaan Geurtsweg](#), waarin staat “De tijdelijke opvang aan de Christiaan Geurtsweg gaat in principe weer dicht als het AZC aan de Deventerstraat in gebruik wordt genomen”.

⁶ Stentor, 03-12-2020, [Opnieuw uitstel voor asielzoekerscentrum bij GGNet in Apeldoorn](#) en Omroep Gelderland, 04-12-2020, [“Verhuizing azc wéér uitgesteld. pas over jaar naar nieuwe locatie”](#)

to infectious diseases. It practically does not make sense to fine residents and keep informing us on COVID measures if the building itself is not suitable to adhere to COVID measures. We believe the COA administration's practices in AZC Apeldoorn contradict with its mission of providing safe and healthy environments.

Hoe kijkt het college hiernaar, ook vanuit het oog van lokale handhaving van de veiligheid en publieke gezondheid?

Ben Bloem

Tim Kamphuis

ChristenUnie

VVD

(geanonimiseerde brandbrief incl. foto's in bijlage)

Centraal Orgaan opvang asielzoekers
T.a.v. Unit Staf/Juridische Zaken
Postbus 30203
2500 GE Den Haag

08 February 2021

Subject: Complaint over AZC Apeldoorn CG

Dear Sir/Madam,

I hope this letter finds you in good health and safety.

As we asylum seekers and residents of AZC Apeldoorn CG, we would like to submit this official complaint letter in which we highlight issues with AZC Apeldoorn CG and outline our recommendations for the betterment of the living situation.

While we do not blame any party for creating these issues, we are particularly concerned about their impact on the safety, health, and processes at the AZC.

The issues we would like to present are as follows:

1. There is a prevalence of incidents that threaten the safety of the residents at the AZC. Some residents demonstrate a violent/threatening attitude and engage in harmful physical contact¹. This includes both domestic violence and harassment. Such actions threaten the safety and wellbeing of the residents².

¹ While these incidents are unjustified and unacceptable, it is important to understand their causes and why they continue to occur despite the penalty system. The reason could either be due to emotional frustration or due to the influence of intoxicants or both. We are nearing a full year under COVID-19 measures which have been drastic on everyone and asylum seekers in particular. AZC Apeldoorn, in specific, is a very tight and congested space. Residents in such a tight space have little personal space and thus tend to engage in unacceptable behaviour to discharge their stored energy or express any frustrations resulting in those incidents that can be harmful to the safety of the residents. Many of the residents are staying for long periods reaching well beyond 12 months in some cases. With the insufficient living space and given the length of stay, violent behaviour becomes a natural mean to express frustration since COVID-19 has shut down all activities.

² Providing and abiding by a safe environment is referred to in COA internal law (Article 2: Racism, Harassment and Violence); The Dutch constitution explicitly prohibits all forms of discrimination (See: <https://www.government.nl/topics/discrimination/prohibition-of-discrimination> and

2. There are no proper hygiene measures being taken. Some residents do not clean after themselves in toilets posing dangerous health risks to the residents. Even though there are schedules for the residents to clean, some residents will soon make the places dirty again as they have no concept of hygiene (See attached pictures). It is unfair of the rest of the residents to face this issue alone while other residents who do not clean are not dealt with effectively.
 - a. In additions, many rooms are not clean. Some residents reported seeing cockroaches coming out of the flooring when they were cleaning their rooms.
 - b. It is also unfair only two toilets allocated to dozens of residents per floor. This is not morally nor health-wise accepted.
 - c. Unsanitary conditions and shared use of toilet facilities can lead to harmful diseases such as Hepatitis, E Coli and STDs.

3. The safety measures pertaining to COVID-19 are not respected. In many rooms, there are five or six people, and it becomes practically impossible to maintain the 1.5-meter rule. We often see crowds in various parts of the building. Crowding is a health concern not only mentally but also physically as we become more prone to infectious diseases. It practically does not make sense to fine residents and keep informing us on COVID-measures if the building itself is not suitable to adhere to COVID measures. We believe the COA administration's practices in AZC Apeldoorn contradict with its mission of providing safe and healthy environments.
 - a. Another issue is the enforcement of the face mask. COA staff issue fines and ask us to wear masks in hallways yet they are completely okay with having six people in a room, a practice which we see us irrational.
 - b. When we ask for a room or AZC transfer, we are denied this right under the pretext of the lockdown even though new people are regularly transferred through AZCs across the Netherlands.
 - c. Furthermore, there is no proper ventilation in the majority of rooms where windows cannot be opened, and the fans placed in bigger rooms are known not

to be practical without the opening of windows³. Putting five or six people in a room then becomes impractical given poor ventilation.

4. Security, hygiene, and crowding issues leave their toll on our mental wellbeing. With the vast majority of us residents stuck inside a small building and waiting for very long periods until we settle in the Netherlands (which should not be the situation in Apeldoorn as a POL location), mental health risk factors (stress, overthinking, depression) become frequent and threaten the safety and health of the residents⁴.
5. The catering offered at the AZC is unacceptable. The food is not always healthy and is almost always poorly cooked. As AZC Apeldoorn does not allow cooking, the majority of us, residents, have no option but the catered food provided from the kitchen.
 - a. The protein portion (fish, chicken, meat) are never well-cooked which is a problem for many of us who come from a culture where food is only eaten when well-cooked. We are also offered a lot of fried food (including fish patties and fries) during a single week. Although salad and soup are offered, the cooking method of the main dish is rejected unanimously from the residents.
 - b. We have repeatedly asked the COA to change the food menus, but this has not improved. The Food of Cultures company caters only fortnightly and the remaining days, the food tends to be uncooked, dry, and cold.
6. We are not satisfied with the COA room placement policy. Residents often cannot engage positively with their roommates due to differences in culture and background. This leads to tensions due to poor emotional intelligence. A lot of the residents do not have a basic understanding of diversity and are not in a capacity to respect the diversity⁵.

³ <https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/coronavirus-disease-covid-19-ventilation-and-air-conditioning#:~:text=The%20use%20of%20ceiling%20fans,exchange%20is%20by%20opening%20windows.>

⁴ According to the United Nations high commission for refugees (UNHCR) 1951 convention that the UNHCR wants to ensure that refugees' human rights are respected, that people can exercise their right. (United Nations. Treaty series.vol (8) (1) 137).

⁵ Diversity should be respected by COA and residents alike (See footnote 1); Article 1. the term "refugee - 1 January 1951 and owing to wellfounded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.

- a. Families are mixed with unmarried residents and genders are also mixed on some floors which is not acceptable in our cultures. (there is no respect for diversity and differences in cultures).
7. We do not have open and fruitful channels of communication with COA. We feel that the COA staff often do not understand us or our issues. With the lack of communication, COA betrays its main obligation of serving the AZC residents.
 - a. The COA location manager, never meets or communicates in any form with us. He did not even consider hearing from us about our issues and concerns or hold regular meetings with us. Not having a communication channel with the location manager is problematic. It is unproductive and does not help resolve issues facing the residents. With this poor communication, both COA and us are unable to effectively communicate nor solve our issues.
 - b. The Infobalie is open one hour a day which is not enough to address issues of 350+ residents. Very few tickets are given to the Infobalie visitors. Even if few tickets are given due to the COVID-19, the residents with tickets do not finish their affairs in the short hour. It has recurred in many times that one person stays at the Infobalie for 30 minutes and the rest of the ticket holder are delayed. Residents often have to wait almost an hour before and many residents who need urgent help find themselves delayed till later in the week.
 - c. The contact person with the COA is often unavailable to address issues and is rarely reachable via phone or email. The contact person is also only available after one receives their status. For those of us who do not have a prior experience, we have to be dependent on COA support throughout the whole asylum-seeking experience. When someone heads to the reception to ask for COA's help, the reception often does cooperate or call the COA office. The residents are then asked to go to the Infobalie which is not helpful for urgent matters outside the Infobalie.
 - d. There are insufficient translators. Most of us, residents, speak Arabic but little to none of the available COA staff speak Arabic. At the Infobalie, many residents who do not speak English or Dutch find it hard to communicate and therefore, the situation at the AZC becomes very unproductive.

8. The GZA does not help resolve medical issues and often delay procedures. Many residents go to the GZA office to complain about mental health issues, hygiene, or air quality issues yet the GZA staff tell us to go to the COA/Infobalie and they, on their turn, ask us to go to the GZA. This is not acceptable and can create or complicate health issues. For an example, when GZA sends an email to the COA regarding an urgent health matter pertaining to a resident, the COA ignores the email and ask the resident to go back to the GZA to send the email again.

Finally, we would like to emphasise that the issues highlighted above act as an additional burden on us, residents of the AZC after struggling for a long time to find a safe and healthy refuge. We, therefore, offer the following recommendations.

Recommendations:

1. We recommend adhering to the purpose of AZC Apeldoorn CG which is a POL location. We ask for all residents who have received status, awaiting family reunification, awaiting houses or are in extended asylum procedure (staying for more than 12 months) to be moved to a different reception location based on their category and situation⁶.
2. There should be three or four residents per room at max. Ideally, this should be two per room.
3. Rooms, along with the entire building, should have proper ventilation with windows that can be opened for better air circulation to avoid contamination with airborne diseases.
4. We ask to separate families and young unmarried residents and separate genders as well. These two categories should never be mixed, considering the cultures of the residents.
5. We ask for a reasonable room placement strategy. We also hope that residents have a say in their room and roommate assignments.
6. We ask to implement an evening cleaning shift similar to the morning shift where working residents clean all toilets, showers, and kitchens. Either new residents can be hired for a night cleaning shift or the morning shift workers can be paid double for double shift.

⁶ See types of Reception locations: <https://www.coa.nl/nl/opvang-verschillende-soorten-asielzoekerscentra>

7. There need to be more toilets, otherwise, there needs to be an appropriate ratio of residents to toilets available which can then guarantee proper sanitation⁷.
8. There needs to be a better penalty implementation. The COA penal system is failing to curb violations from the residents and we believe that a stricter implementation of the penalty system can reduce violations and create a safe living space⁸.
9. We recommend contracting with a Middle Eastern/Arab caterer who can better meet the needs of the residents at the AZC on all days. If no new catering agreement can be reached, we ask to provide food cooking facilities. This could either be in the main kitchen or a specific room in each floor where residents of a floor can cook during certain hours in a day.
10. There need to be open and regular channels of communication between the COA and the residents. We recommend including representative(s) of the residents in COA meetings. The goal of these meetings should be to bridge the communication gap and find solutions for problems at the AZC.
 - a. We also ask to meet the location manager, on a regular basis to share our vision and address commons issues.
 - b. The Infobalie should be open for more hours. We suggest at least 1.5 hours on a daily basis. Tickets should be available 15 minutes before.
 - c. The COA staff should hire and employ translators who are present at the camp and can be readily available for translation assistance.
11. We ask to have better coordination between the COA and the GZA. This coordination should be effective enough to solve the resident's health concerns that stem from the living conditions at the camp.

⁷ The human right to water and sanitation:

https://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/pdf/human_right_to_water_and_sanitation_media_brief.pdf; According to Article 22 of the Dutch Constitution says that relevant authorities should promote the health of the residents and provide sufficient living space.

⁸ It is also mentioned in the COA internal law that all breachers of safety and perpetrators of violence will be dealt with harsh measures, yet we have not seen any progress as those who are sent outside of the AZC for some time, return and continue their threatening behaviour.

We believe that adopting our recommendations can significantly improve the situation at AZC Apeldoorn CG.

Lastly, we would like to thank all the COA, VWN and GZA staff for trying to keep us safe and comfortable in Apeldoorn despite the terrible circumstances of the AZC. We expect our demands to be taken seriously and we look forward to hearing back from you.

Sincerely,

Residents of AZC Apeldoorn CG.

Note: Please see our signatures in the attached paper with this letter. Not all residents have signed as they live outside the camp or where not present signatures were collected. Attached are also some illustrations of the issues stated above.

Endnotes

1. Providing and abiding by a safe environment is referred to in COA internal law (Article 2: Racism, Harassment and Violence); The Dutch constitution explicitly prohibits all forms of discrimination. <https://www.government.nl/topics/discrimination/prohibition-of-discrimination>, <https://www.government.nl/topics/domestic-violence/documents/policy-notes/2019/02/28/violence-does-not-have-a-place-in-the-home-tackling-domestic-violence-and-child-abuse>
2. <https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/coronavirus-disease-covid-19-ventilation-and-airconditioning#:~:text=The%20use%20of%20ceiling%20fans,exchange%20is%20by%20opening%20windows>.
3. According to the United Nations high commission for refugees (UNHCR) 1951 convention that the UNHCR wants to ensure that refugees' human rights are respected, that people can exercise their right. (United Nations. Treaty series.vol (8) (1) 137).
4. Article 22 1. The authorities shall take steps to promote the health of the population. 2. It shall be the concern of the authorities to provide sufficient living accommodation. 3. The authorities shall promote social and cultural development and leisure activities.
5. Diversity should be respected by COA and residents alike (See footnote 1); Article 1. the term "refugee - 1 January 1951 and owing to wellfounded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.
6. The human right to water and sanitation: https://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/pdf/human_right_to_water_and_sanitation_media_brief.pdf
7. According to Article 22 of the Dutch Constitution, relevant authorities should promote the health of the residents and provide sufficient living space.
8. See types of Reception locations: <https://www.coa.nl/nl/opvang-verschillende-soorten-asielzoekerscentra>



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