

Dear Minister,

Dear Members of Parliament,

Dear colleagues,

It is my pleasure and privilege to congratulate you, Minister Koen Geens, on behalf of RESCALED, the European movement for small-scale detention.

This prize of 'De Huizen' is awarded to an individual or organization that has made an exceptional contribution to the implementation of small-scale, differentiated and community-integrated detention houses. And your efforts in this context were not only relevant for Belgium, but also for Europe.

This prize might not be as prestigious as the Nobel prize, but in the field of criminal justice, it is an important acknowledgment.

It means that you had the will and the courage to strive for a sustainable concept of detention which will serve our society, and its fundamental democratic values, in the long run, rather than catching votes in the short term.

This will contribute to prisoners' reintegration and reduce the high social and financial costs of crime and imprisonment. By bringing prisoners closer to society, both physically and symbolically, you enable prisoners *and* society to take responsibility for the offenses, for the punishment and for the consequences of both.

Dostoyevsky famously argued that '*The degree of civilization in a society can be judged by entering its prisons.*' This has become a cliché in criminology, but if we are honest, people who have entered prisons in Belgium or in other European countries, will have to admit that our civilized society (which we like to believe we are) has room for improvement in this context.

We all know how important it is for a society to treat prisoners decently.

This is not only for the 10 000 people that are currently locked up in Belgian prisons. It is also for their families, for their children who have to enter prison to visit their parent, and for those who struggle to keep in touch for all kind of reasons. It is also for the victims who like to know that the offender is doing something meaningful during the time spent in prison. And for all people who will live next door to one of these 10 000 people who will get released sooner or later, and for those who will then work together with them. Not to forget all people who work in prison, sometimes in very challenging circumstances. All these people will benefit from small scale, differentiated and community-integrated detention houses.

But this is not an easy topic to gain votes with. And the current political climate did not make it easier. People feel insecure and want the system to change, but at the same time change also increases feelings of insecurity and resistance. Indeed, our society has been characterized as volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous. Therefore, being adaptive, flexible, proactive and innovative becomes increasingly important. Against this background, it has been argued that "the next big thing will be a lot of small things" (for example by Perkins & Repper, 2017; University of Ghent). And this will also be true for the prison system, since punishment has always been, and should be, a product of its time.

In any case, it is fair to say our job is much easier than yours. We can defend a concept in which we believe, which was developed on the basis of experience and research, and we don't have to make compromises. Even more, we can criticize policymakers who do make compromises to the concept.

But prisons are human constructions, they have been constructed and can be reconstructed.

One step at the time. With a lot of patience, perseverance, courage and collaboration between politicians, journalists, academics and practitioners with different backgrounds... And this is how RESCALED wants to support policymakers in this endeavour, by informing the public opinion, sharing

knowledge on detention houses and their implementation, bringing experts from all over Europe together and exchange expertise.

As you know, this European movement was launched in April, but we are happy to announce that soon there will be five national RESCALED coordinators performing this job in Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Portugal and Norway.

So on behalf of the RESCALED team, I thank you for all your hard work to implement small-scale and community-integrated detention houses. And wish to congratulate you again with this well-deserved first prize of vzw De Huizen.

And after all, who still wants to win the Nobel prize when the next big thing will be a lot of small things?

Thank you,

Helene De Vos

On behalf of RESCALED

Belgian Senate, 8 October 2019