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Giant teddy bear brings the experience of refugee children to Brussels

A giant teddy bear has appeared at some of Brussels' best-known locations, from Brussels-Central and the Grand Place to Flagey and Saint-Gilles. The unusual sight is part of *Humanity Is Unstoppable*, a new campaign by Caritas International Belgium highlighting the experiences of children forced to flee their homes.

From memories to the screen

The bear is the central character in a campaign film, *Dans ses bras*, directed by Belgian filmmaker Jef Boes. Through the bear's eyes, viewers follow a child's journey from leaving home to arriving somewhere safe and beginning to build a new life.

Most of the film was shot at De Logies van Louvranges in Wavre, a reception centre for single mothers and children. Residents of the centre took part in the film, recreating scenes inspired by their own experiences.

"Together with the residents, we looked for places in the centre that brought back memories," Boes says. "They recreated those moments in front of the camera. At times, it was quite intense, but they fully immersed themselves in it."

For Boes, the teddy bear represents the role played by Caritas International in accompanying people through the difficult transition.

"The bear represents Caritas, which accompanies them on their journey and, particularly for children, helps make that journey more bearable," he says.

For many children forced to leave suddenly, a cuddly toy can be one of the few personal possessions they take with them. In the film, the teddy bear travels with Ousman and his parents, witnessing their abrupt departure and the uncertainty that follows.

But the story also focuses on what comes next: a safe place to stay, school, a new language, friendships and plans for the future.

A safe place to start again

Caritas International says the campaign is intended to underline the importance of dignified reception for people fleeing conflict and other crises.

A safe place, it argues, provides the stability needed to focus on everyday life again: going to school, finding work, building a social network and making plans for the future.

At De Logies van Louvranges, mothers and children receive more than accommodation. With guidance and support they work towards greater stability.

“If you do not know where you will sleep tonight, it is very difficult to think about school, your procedure or your future,” says Marie, who works with people forced to flee for Caritas International. “A safe place is the starting point. From there, you can look ahead again.”

Caritas International says reception systems are under increasing pressure as crises become more prolonged and migration policies become more restrictive. The organisation argues that migration policy should include protection, safe routes and dignified reception.

‘Behind every figure is a person’

Samuel Cogolati, director general of Caritas International Belgium, says the campaign is intended to put a human face on a debate that is often dominated by statistics.

“The migration debate is too often reduced to numbers and barbed wire,” he says. “In doing so, we dehumanise people who have been forced to flee.”

The teddy bear, he says, offers a different perspective.

“It invites us to look at migration from a child’s perspective. Behind every figure is a person with a story and a future.”

The giant teddy bear will remain on display at different locations in Brussels before travelling to Antwerp and Liège.

More information

Watch the [campaign film ‘Dans ses bras’](#):



Press contact: Anke Harthoorn | a.harthoorn@caritasint.be | +32 483 34 79 01

Photos and additional comments are available on request.

About Caritas International Belgium

Caritas International Belgium provides reception and support in Belgium to people forced to flee and others in vulnerable situations. It also provides humanitarian assistance to people and communities affected by war, disasters and poverty around the world.