

Dear people,

What wonderful poems by our city poet Bob ter Haar and children's mayor Zoëy! And also so well depicted in the various beautiful places our city has to offer.

On behalf of the City Council and the College of Mayor and Aldermen, I warmly welcome you to our Junushoff, one of the pearls of the city. This traditional New Year's reception is such a success that we can no longer fit all of us in the town hall... which is why we have decided to welcome you here.

Actually a very nice tradition, as the Junushoff has been the venue for these and other official receptions many times in the past. An example of Wageningen's rich cultural offering. And this year it is exactly 145 years since the original building of the Junushoff opened its doors. Very appropriate, then.

It is now mid-January, so looking back at 2024 is really no longer necessary. And perhaps it is just as well that we can close the year and start a new one. We pause to remember all those who died in the past year and whom we miss. Particularly during the holiday season behind us, that loss was even greater; how wonderful that, on the council's initiative, the greenhouse on the market attracted so many visitors who were able to share their stories of love and loss.

Meanwhile, the state of the world does not seem much better than last year. Not only is it a bleak time of year, but it also seems to be a bleak time in our history with more wars and more war victims than we ever thought we would experience at the beginning of this century.

And this in the year we commemorate 80 years of the liberation of the Netherlands and the end of World War II, in our City of Liberation.

But before I say more about that, I would first like to tell you what we as Wageningen are leading the way in. In which we ourselves are making a difference.

In Wageningen, we continue to build our future. People, our residents, the many volunteers, everyone who works hard in our town, make up the beautiful municipality we are. I know Wageningen as the town that always runs a step faster. The town that sets a good example. The town that does things slightly differently and better. We dare to do that in Wageningen. That's the Wageningen I love.

We work on social security. We want to be a social city and now have the most progressive income security policy in the Netherlands. There is a lot of attention for this from the rest of the country - yes, even from the cabinet in The Hague. With the Social Participation Budget, we offer residents more subsistence security, by taking into account basic needs and other income such as allowances. National organisations such as Divosa see it as a progressive example within the Participation Act. We dare to do this in Wageningen.

We are building for our residents. And we need to, because Wageningen is among the fastest-growing municipalities in our country. With more than 15 per cent growth until 2035, according to the Central Bureau of Statistics. And young people are eager to be able to take a new step in their lives with a place of their own. Besides completion of Kortenoord, everything is being prepared for the construction of Vadapark next to Hoogvliet, a big step has been taken towards construction on the Dreijen with another 550 homes and the municipality has purchased the Menzis office on the Lawickse Allee for housing. As a municipality, we will develop that site ourselves. We dare to do that in Wageningen.

We offer refugees a humane home. We already have 1,000 refugees in our city and at the same time we see a swerving, harsh and unclear national policy. Refugees should never be a plaything for political gain. That is why we want to continue to offer humane reception in Wageningen. Together with COA and the many local organisations and volunteers without whom the reception in Wageningen would never be possible. We dare to do this in Wageningen.

We think ahead as a city of knowledge. We are proud of Wageningen University & Research, which has the knowledge to solve world problems, from climate change to food scarcity. At our Wageningen vocational school where students learn to bake the bread and prepare the food that will be on our plates in the future. We are a city of knowledge and doing. We are proud of our students who actively participate in our Wageningen society. Because how great is it that the students of KSV Franciscus raised more than 5000 euros for the Toy Bank Wageningen during Franciscus Request. The efforts through organisations like Present and the beautiful music tonight by Student Orchestra De Ontzetting are also seen and heard.

Right now, we are asking the state, the province and the region to be as proud of Wageningen as a City of Life Sciences as we are. And together with all knowledge cities in the Netherlands, we protest loudly and clearly against this cabinet's savage cuts to research and education. We dare to do that in Wageningen.

We have a clear vision of our city's future. With Wageningen 2045, we have described which city we want to be in 20 years' time. The bar is high: we want to lead as a social and sustainable city in housing, greenery and energy. It's great that so many residents and organisations have contributed to the realisation of this vision. It really is a vision of the city. And I have to admit: sometimes, as mayor, I thought 'this is taking so long, when will it be finished?', but I have learned that a bit of patience really pays off, because participation like this can only be done well once. We dare to do that in Wageningen.

All the goals we have together, we want to fulfil as a municipality. That's why we take a critical look at ourselves, at the municipality as an organisation.

Last year, we investigated our administrative capacity. We looked in the mirror, so to speak, and asked all kinds of organisations in our city, but also surrounding municipalities, how do they view Wageningen? The answer is positive! And that is also really worth a compliment to the council, the board and the organisation. If we make sharp choices (because not everything is possible!) and take a good look at what we want to achieve in which region and with which partners, Wageningen can face the future with confidence. Still, we want to investigate what merger would mean for Wageningen in the long run, also because our neighbouring municipality Renkum is now investigating. We are debating this in the municipal council. We dare to do so in Wageningen.

This year, Wageningen is the city hosting the great commemoration and celebration of 80 years of liberation on 4 and 5 May. Preparations are in full swing. We are organising this together with Wageningen 45, the province of Gelderland and the National Committee 4 and 5 May. As mayor, I am confident that we will once again deliver our message as City of Liberation. The message of freedom and of peace. With thousands of runners during the liberation bonfire relay, an impressive 5 May reading, a beautiful parade with veterans and a festive and above all convivial Gelderland Liberation Festival.

And how necessary it is to draw attention to more than the liberation 80 years ago. Besides 80 years of liberation, this year marks the 80th anniversary of the founding of

the United Nations with the signing of the UN Charter. Especially now, it is necessary to stand firm for international law and the peaceful resolution of conflicts, as the first member states of the United Nations did on 16 June 1945.

I read out the beginning of this important text in English:

'We the peoples of the United Nations determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind, and to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small.'

The belief and commitment to settle conflicts through institutions and methods other than war seems to be trampled on these days. Peace has become a commodity. Whether it is the war in Ukraine or in Palestine and Israel, political leaders disregard the ground rules of humanitarian law and increasingly the law of the jungle prevails. In word and deed. Besides taking in refugees in a humane manner, we must continue to speak out for peace without being naive.

With the International Court of Justice, the Permanent Court of Arbitration and the International Criminal Court, the Netherlands is the country that should lead the way in promoting peace and justice. And not a bit reluctantly behind, but ahead. Peace is not a swearword and let us continue to call attention to it, especially now, exactly 80 years after that last war that so scarred our city. We dare to do so in Wageningen.

Dear people,

In all dares and ambitions, we need each other. I would like to ask Bob and Zoëy to come forward and raise a glass with you in front of the new flag of Wageningen 80 years of freedom to the coming year and to the city we all love so much. Together, we dare the world. To 2025!