

Drug Activist Joep Oomen dies at 54

<http://www.voc-nederland.org/2016/03/20769/>

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An online memorial to show support has been opened here.

ANTWERP – On Friday, March 18th, 2016 Joep Oomen has unexpectedly passed away in his home in Antwerp, Belgium. As an activist he has fought for over a quarter of a century for humane and just drug policies and an end to the war on drugs. Joep was co-founder of numerous NGO's for drug reform, including Encod, Cannabis Social Club Trekt Uw Plant in Antwerp and the Union for the abolition of cannabis prohibition (VOC) in the Netherlands.

At an emotional gathering of Trekt Uw Plant in Antwerp the sad news was communicated to the members of the club. After Joep failed to show up for a club meeting on Friday, two board members went to his house. A board member happened to have the key, and after contact with and consent of Joep's eldest son, they went inside. They found Joep dead in his bed. The police conducted an investigation and rules out a non-natural cause of death. Joep leaves behind his wife Betariz, two sons and a grandson.

In 1993, Joep was one of the founders of Encod, the European Coalition for just and effective drug policies. As Encod coordinator he was the driving force behind a unique coalition of organizations and individuals from almost every European country. In 2006, he founded Trekt Uw Plant, the first Cannabis Social Club in Belgium. The club operates on the basis of a judicial directive that allows adult Belgians to grow one cannabis plant for personal use. After a long, hard fight TUP was acquitted twice by the court. The club currently has around 400 members. This pioneering work in Antwerp inspired Michel Degens to start Mambo Social Club in Hasselt in 2014.

In his native country the Netherlands, Joep remained active as well. He organized the Cannabis Tribunal in The Hague and was co-founder of the VOC, the Union for the Abolition of Cannabis Prohibition, which emerged from this first Tribunal. He was a board member of the Legalize! Foundation in Amsterdam and an exemplary debate leader at the monthly VOC meetings, with infinite patience and great diplomatic talent. He used these skills too as treasurer of the Latin American Federation in Antwerp, at the Friends of the Coca Leaf and at Het Klooster (the Convent) in Antwerp, where he organized shelter for the homeless for years.

On the VOC website, chairman Derrick Bergman writes: "Joep was the kind of activist you only very rarely come across. He combined a seemingly inexhaustible drive and perseverance with impeccable integrity and transparency. Joep spoke fluent Spanish since his studies in Amsterdam in the eighties, he became half-Flemish in Antwerp, but in the end he was primarily a world citizen." "I consider myself lucky to have known Joep and to have worked closely with him for eight years with the VOC and Encod. He was not only a hugely effective and inspiring activist, but also a very dear friend."

The funeral / farewell meeting will take place in Wilrijk, Belgium. A date is not set yet.