



## AS IT IS

# Some Belgians Shout: 'King! Open Your Garden'

March 08, 2021

During this time of pandemic restrictions in Belgium, people in the capital city of Brussels want to experience open spaces.

However, public spaces with tree and green grass have become so crowded that social distancing is impossible. Yet one family has a large **garden** in the city just for themselves. And it is creating some anger.

The large garden in the city's center belongs to the Belgian **royal** family. The garden, surrounding their **palace**, is about 200 hectares or almost the size of the city-state of Monaco.

More and more Belgians are now asking King Philippe why his garden should be closed to the public during the world's worst health crisis in 100 years.

So far, however, the garden is closed.

"They hardly ever get in there. Come on! Those gardens are simply empty," said Luckas Vander Taelen. He is a Brussels historian and a former member of the European Parliament.

Also, the royal gardens are surrounded with overcrowded and poor neighborhoods in the Laeken area of Brussels. Most families who live there do not have any outdoor space and lack the money to travel to green areas.

"The local people want a **park** right here because they don't have the means to pay for transport," said Saliha Mahdi. She is a social worker in Laeken.

King Philippe appears not to understand people's anger. He permitted a **drone** to fly over the large garden to show that his family, like all Belgian families, was in lockdown at home. Inside the garden, the royal family had written in large letters, "Courage Strong Together."

Together? asked some. Not really.

The pandemic has made the King's private garden a political issue as the spring nears. The governing parties and some of the opposition parties support the idea of opening the gardens to the public.

"People really need spaces, public spaces...to play, to meet," said Brussels lawmaker Hilde Sabbe. "Couldn't you just let them in?" Sabbe asked of the King.

It is more difficult than simply letting them in, however.

If the garden is opened to the public, should it be managed by the city, the country or the royal family? Also, the palace needs to remain secure for the king, his family and visitors.

Then there is the garden itself. The place is filled with unusual plants and endangered animals. Some fear the crowd will interfere with nature.

The royal family has not commented about the garden. But historian Vander Taelen believes the king will soon decide to open the garden.

"They would show **solidarity** with the needs of their people, of their city," he said.

I'm Susan Shand.

*The Associated Press reported this story. Susan Shand adapted it for Learning English. Hai Do was the editor.*

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## Words in This Story

**garden** – *n.* an area of ground where plants (such as flowers or vegetables) are grown

**royal** – *n.* something to do with a king or queen

**palace** – *n.* the place where a king or queen lives

**park** – *n.* a garden with places for children and families

**drone** – *n.* a type of small aircraft that flies without a pilot

**solidarity** – *n.* showing agreement with someone or something

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