



FECRIS, the European Federation of Information and Research Centres on Sectarianism, is an umbrella organisation of 51 associations in the 30 following countries: Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Byelorussia, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Norway, the Netherlands, Poland, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the Ukraine, the United Kingdom and the United States. In July 2005 the Council of Europe granted it advisory status.

Some of the more serious breaches to human rights and dignity that we have to deplore today are not always the responsibility of governments or States.

No, they are the results of the activity of certain groups known to some as "cultic movements"<sup>1</sup> and of people belonging or close to these groups who under cover of spirituality, esotericism, a search of well being, or personal achievement, exert an intolerable influence on other human beings, without distinction of sex, age, or nationality.

If we have considered it essential to come and speak to you about this, it is because we realised that, true to their manner of being, masters in the art of manipulating, these organisations and people have learnt to use the platform that the OSCE, on the occasion of its annual conference, has created for true victims of the breach of human rights and that they dare come forward and present themselves as victims of religious discrimination, persecuted by governments, thus completely inverting the reality of facts.

Please do not be fooled on who the real victims are!

Here we are speaking of those victims whose "life is often broken forever by the spiral of cultic commitment, by trustful submissiveness to individuals driven by the lure of power or profit, or simply completely devoid of moral sense and consideration for their similar".

Here we are speaking of the victims of cultic groups which undermine human rights and fundamental freedoms by plunging and maintaining individuals under their influence, pushing them to carry out acts or abstain from acting in a way seriously prejudicial for them.

Here we are speaking of those groups whose behaviour constitutes a true challenge to human rights since they have taken refuge behind one of these rights - freedom of religion - better to flout all other rights.

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<sup>1</sup> FECRIS is concerned with cults, sects, (the more usual term in France), sometimes called New religious movements. We understand that sectarianism has a different connotation in different countries sometime connected to the inter-religious conflicts within Christianity. In France, and in a number of other countries, a "sect" is not a movement of religious dissension.

After having abused of the confidence of their followers, after having in one way or another broken laws specific to each country, laws which protect the integrity of human beings, these organisations, these networks, these people discredit and badger those who leave them and want to denounce what they have lived. The pressures exerted on the former followers and their families are generally enough to dissuade the victims from undertaking legal proceedings. There is no need to recall in this forum that **freedom to believe**, to follow ideas, also means **freedom to believe no more** and to leave a group.

When these victims manage to attract the authorities' attention on what they have suffered and refer the matter before a Court, and the authorities of democratic countries, respectful of the independence of the executive and judicial powers, activate the legal machine against their cultic activities, then these organisations, people, networks, turn their combat against the States which have acted - i.e. Germany, Belgium, France or Austria. They also attack some of the organisations that we represent before the law courts so as to ruin them financially and reduce the time and means devoted to their activity of accompaniment of the victims and their families.

It is a real battle that we are talking about: the interests of these groups, often unclear for those who have not completely understood their operating mode, motivate these actions, scandalous from the victims' point of view, but coherent for the organisation seeking a freeway to confirm its domination.

That is why they very quickly understood that they had to use international institutions like yours, shamelessly placing themselves on the same footing as those which legitimately come to ask for your support and which I greet with respect. Sometimes advancing openly, sometimes masked, these groups seek respectability by the taking part in humanitarian activities or by supporting great causes but their final objective remains to recruit new followers and to create confusion among those who know them only through these misleading activities.

We who represent the victims of these groups, the men, the women, the destroyed families, we ask the governments not to yield to pressures and intimidation by these organisations. We ask them to take into account their victims and to help them as well as those who accompany them, to apply with necessary vigour the laws which really protect the indefeasible rights of humans to live free and in dignity.

We ask YOU not to let yourselves be misled by the double language of those who come here with, as only objective, to appear in the acts of your work; so as to better delude their victims present and future, by using your renown to recommend themselves and also to try and block the action of national authorities aimed at sanctioning the illegal, immoral behaviour and practices of these groups, only to find their national reputation smeared before the international community.

Let us not back the wrong horse, do not be misled into backing the wrong victims. The noisiest, the busiest are generally not the true victims and it's an insult to the majority of those who are really concerned and who suffer from the intolerance and totalitarianisms of all kinds to put them all in the same bag.