



CAP pour la Liberté de Conscience

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Inscrite au « Programme d'action sur une culture de la paix » art. A/RES/53/243 ONU'
session du 6 octobre 1999

Review Conference 2010, Warsaw, 30 September - 08 October 2010

Working Session 2

Fundamental Freedoms I **France: Religious Minorities stigmatized**

RC.NGO/9/10

1 October 2010

as “mutating viruses” and “pathology of belief”

ENGLISH

Original: ENGLISH

FRENCH

Created over ten years ago to fight against discrimination of religious or belief minorities in France, the Coordination of Associations and Individuals for Freedom of Conscience which I am representing wants to express its strongest disapproval concerning the statement made on 26 November 2009 by the French Secretary of State for Justice, Jean-Marie Bockel, about minorities of religion or belief derogatorily labelled as “sectarian”.

According to him the growing quest of personal fulfilment and the emergence of unusual religious syncretism are significant of the sectarian phenomenon which “*can be analyzed as pathology of belief on a background of individuation and deregulation of belief.*”

This public statement made in 2009 at the first national conference of the Inter-Ministerial Mission of Fight and Vigilance against Sectarian Deviances (MIVILUDES) is still posted on the official site of the Ministry of Justice to this day. For the French authorities, it is necessary to repress minorities of belief they consider as deviant and to attempt to regulate beliefs.

The Secretary of State added that “sectarian deviances” are “comparable to mutating viruses which spread in often insidious ways the poison of manipulation of human behaviours and spirits”. We understand that viruses as such should be eliminated.

In spite of the French government’s assertions to the OSCE and the United Nations that MIVILUDES does not take in consideration the content of beliefs, the fact is that the main criterion retained by MIVILUDES in its 2008 Report to characterize mental manipulation is that “one or more people start to believe in certain ideas which differ from the ideas generally accepted by society”.

But **States have no business in assessing the legitimacy of beliefs.** France committed by ratifying the Helsinki Accords and the European Convention on Human Rights to protect the right to freedom of belief and to remain neutral towards all creeds.

Although France has been pointed out by the UN Special Rapporteur on Religious Freedom in 2005 for keeping a black list of “sects”, MIVILUDES has now compiled a repository of records on around 600 minority movements established from denunciations, accusations and tattling. Targeted faiths have no access to these records although they have been made available to Justice officials and public authorities.

Our association regularly receives testimonies on the 1995 black list of sects which is still in use to justify discriminatory measures against the targeted groups. This practice is now aggravated with the repository of records of MIVILUDES resulting for minority movements in denials to open bank accounts or to use conference halls, and discrimination of their members in their professional and family life.

Under the impulse of Mr Fenech, judges, prosecutors, police officers and social workers receive sessions of “education” on the minority groups he put on files. A special anti-sect task force has been created to intervene during police operations targeting minority movements to make sure that prosecutions are initiated.

Independence of Justice is not guaranteed in France as long as minorities of religion or conviction are concerned.

Additionally, Mr Fenech has launched a new way of intervention: he organizes unannounced visits by MIVILUDES in the communities, using his official title to force his way into their premises and impose the presence of the media to stigmatize them through an avalanche of slanderous accusations in the media.

A letter of protest sent by members of the Ecumenical Monastery Le Moulin des Vallées in Brittany summarizes the problem: “Mr Prefect, we solicit your help to understand how Mr.

Fenech can legally introduce himself in a monastery, under the cover of a Ministerial investigation, in order to actually help journalists make an unauthorized report?"

We solicit the help of OSCE representatives to intervene with the French authorities and put an end to this policy of intolerance and harassment of minorities of religion or conviction.

Thank you.

M Bécourt Thierry - Président