

OSCE - HUMAN DIMENSION IMPLEMENTATION MEETING

Submission of European Human Rights Office

Church of Scientology International

Freedom of Thought, Conscience, Religion or Belief

30 September 2015

I wish to speak today on behalf of the religious community of Scientologists around the world regarding egregious violations of fundamental OSCE standards protecting the right to freedom of religion in Belgium. In 1997, the Belgium Parliament published a 670 page Report that stigmatized 189 religious organizations, including Bahais, Buddhists, Scientologists, Seventh-day Adventists, Mormons and Pentecostals by labeling them as “dangerous sects”. As the International Helsinki Federation noted in 2003, this Parliamentary Report led to public hostility, discrimination and the stigmatization and marginalization of members of these religious groups.

Ever since the Report, International human rights organizations have warned that the Belgian government has retreated from its mandate toward respecting religious pluralism. In spite of the principles of non-discrimination and equal treatment, the Belgian government has determined to arbitrarily classify religious groups into two separate categories: 1) religions viewed as law-abiding and beneficial to society; and 2) "sects" viewed as dangerous to society, which are the targets of oppressive and discriminatory measures, and which the government declares must be "fought" against.

Also starting in 1997, a Belgian prosecutor initiated an investigation directed at Scientologists and the Scientology religious community that has lasted for over 18 years and has improperly infringed on the right of Scientologists to freely practice their faith in Belgium. This

investigation, which is a legacy of hysterical and by-gone days, is now scheduled for trial in October 2015. There is no question that impermissible and inaccurate evaluations and interpretations of Scientology religious practices resulting in criminal charges that these practices and beliefs are somehow fraudulent represent an improper Inquisition and that are *expressly prohibited* by numerous decisions of the European Court of Human Rights interpreting the scope of the right to religious freedom as well as fundamental OSCE standards that protect the right to religious freedom.

Each and every day, multitudes of Scientology parishioners around the world participate in the rite of auditing, through which they achieve greater awareness as a spiritual being. Auditing is a core religious practice of the Scientology religion, based on a codified set of religious scriptures. Scientologist ministers, church staff and parishioners sincerely believe in, sincerely practice, and sincerely extol what they believe to be the virtues the Scientology religion and of auditing. This fact alone proves that the contemplation of a fraud charge with any reference to auditing, and the interminable sequestration of religious counseling files as evidence to support such a charge, represent insupportable violations of basic human rights that infringe not only the right to freedom of religion and the right to freedom from religious discrimination, but also the right to be protected by the rule of law.

OSCE participating States promised to abide by fundamental human rights standards protecting freedom of religion in OSCE Commitments such as Paragraph 16 of the Vienna Concluding document. Yet, Belgium is egregiously violating these standards by initiating a heresy trial against basic Scientology beliefs.

On behalf of the Scientology religious community, we call on ODIHR to implement legal standards regarding freedom of religion for prosecutors similar to the 2004 ODIHR and Venice Commission Guidelines for Review of Legislation to ensure that such heresy trials never happen again.