



ASSOCIATION CULTUELLE  
LES TÉMOINS de JÉHOVAH  
DE FRANCE

Association cultuelle régie par la loi du 9 décembre 1905  
Bureaux : 2, rue Saint-Hildevert, 27400 Louviers  
Adresse postale : B.P. 625, 27406 Louviers Cedex  
Téléphone : 02.32.25.55.55 - Télécopie : 02.32.25.56.56

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**COMMUNICATION AT THE  
OSCE HDIM MEETING (WARSAW) – OCTOBER 2-13 2006**

The first legal association of Jehovah's Witnesses in France was established in 1906. One century later, in 2006, some 250,000 persons practice this religion in 950 places of worship. Many French families have been Jehovah's Witnesses for five generations.

We would like to thank the French authorities for having legally recognized our status as a religious association. On June 23, 2000, France's highest administrative court, the *Conseil d'État*, confirmed that the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses are religious and do not disturb the peace. Since then, police prefectures in all the administrative *départements* have issued decrees granting this status to local and national associations.

However, in spite of this progress, there is still cause for concern. Certain members of parliament continue to attack Jehovah's Witnesses. The result has been ten years of constant harassment. In 1996, following a commission of inquiry, Jehovah's Witnesses were labeled a 'dangerous sect' in a report which allegedly was based, I quote, "on a very full and detailed analysis" by the *renseignements généraux*, the security branch of the police force, and on "their extremely important work." On July 3, 2006, after ten years of legal proceedings, a ruling by the *Conseil d'État* confirmed that the information in the police report consisted of, I quote, "very laconic assessments of the effects that the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses have, and were of a succinct and trivial nature." In other words, Jehovah's Witnesses were added to the list of sects simply at the behest of a few members of parliament.

Being on the list of sects has given rise to a host of discriminatory acts against Jehovah's Witnesses and a virulent smear campaign which continues to this day. To give just one example, since the beginning of 2006, 67 of our places of worship have been vandalized, including attacks with a Molotov cocktail and firearms.

In 2006, a third parliamentary commission of inquiry on sects has been created. Again, the same members of parliament who have expressed their hostility and bias towards Jehovah's Witnesses in the media are promoting this commission. On June 28, 2006, the day that the third

commission of inquiry on sects was created, only ten out of 577 members of parliament were present at the French National Assembly, and eight of these appointed themselves members of this new commission. The hearings that have been conducted over the past few weeks prove that the main target is Jehovah's Witnesses. Since July, the rapporteur and the secretary of the commission of inquiry have openly attacked Jehovah's Witnesses, describing them as delinquents and criminals, after having labeled their activities as 'mafia-like' in the past. These members of parliament have the backing of a governmental agency, the Interministerial Mission to Combat Abuses by Sects, whose present chairman publicly maligns Jehovah's Witness families in violation of the principle of discretion that is due of a high-level civil servant.

During the first two commissions of inquiry, out of respect for parliamentary activities, Jehovah's Witnesses cooperated and supplied members of parliament with the information that they requested. But we noticed, alas, on publication of the two reports that the information provided was systematically distorted, and that the principles of open debate were flouted. It would appear that the third commission of inquiry, which has been conducting hearings since June 28, has not changed methods and is conducting a prosecution with no defense.

We note in particular comments by members of this commission of inquiry who want to change certain laws, in order to systematically take children out of the custody of their Jehovah's Witness parents, to ban female Jehovah's Witnesses from being child caregivers, and also to prevent parents who are Jehovah's Witnesses from sharing their faith with their children. The aim is to subject a whole community of believers to public opprobrium and stigmatization.

The history of Jehovah's Witnesses in Europe during the 20<sup>th</sup> century has sadly already shown what the persecution of thousands of families for religious reasons can lead to.

Having seen for myself over the past ten years the considerable harm that has come from blacklisting Jehovah's Witnesses, I wish to solemnly draw attention to what is taking place at the moment in France, and I request that these attacks on freedom of worship and human rights not be trivialized.