



Coordination of Associations and Individuals for Freedom of Conscience (CAP)

OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2016: Freedom of Religion or Belief September 2016

CAP is an association created in 2000 to unite minority religions in Europe to counter discrimination concerning the right to freedom of conscience and belief. It has consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.

For years France has put in place a discriminatory apparatus of fight against minorities of religion or belief stigmatized as "sects".

Since 2009, the Inter-ministerial Mission of Vigilance and Fight against Sectarian Deviances (MIVILUDES) holds a repository of records on hundreds of movements it characterized as "sectarian" on the sole basis of denunciations or complaints against minority belief movements. These records are provided by MIVILUDES to Judges, Prosecutors, personnel dealing with Youth and Family matters, Ministries and other officials.

In parallel, training sessions on "sects" are regularly delivered to these officials, in particular Judges and Police forces. A special anti-sect Task Force has been created, CAIMADES (Assistance and Intervention Unit for Sectarian Drifts), within the Central Direction of the Judiciary Police which undertakes investigations as soon as an individual is suspected to belong to a "sect".

Since its creation in 2009, this Task Force has proceeded to biased investigations upon the denunciations received by MIVILUDES, where the members of minorities were systematically presumed guilty.

CAP received a number of testimonies over the years which evidence their prejudice, such people suspected of shamanistic practices whose homes were raided and were put in custody, groups of persons denounced to MIVILUDES as "dangerous sects" who were interrogated and put under pressure to denounce their "guru", others denounced as being "gurus" who were put in preventive detention for up to 18 months, etc.

The last testimony and request of assistance received by CAP was from a man of Indian origin residing in Canada. His girlfriend in France was organizing meditation seminars and was denounced to MIVILUDES as such. During his last visit to her, they were part of group of 6-7 people in meditation when a whole police force raided and arrested them. They were all armed and behaved as if they were dealing with terrorists.

He was explained that the charges against him were that he "had used fraudulent techniques to manipulate weak minds to defraud them of their money" and "had used Indian techniques and created mysterious Indian atmosphere to influence these people" and that he "belonged to the sect of sex guru OSHO".

This man could not understand the accusations since "guru" in India simply means religious leader and a sect is simply a religious denomination. He was put in preventive detention for six months with prohibition to leave France and has been waiting for trial for now two years.

The apparatus set by France to fight against minorities of religion or belief is unduly repressive and discriminatory, and should be disbanded.

We respectfully ask OSCE to remind the French authorities of their obligations concerning freedom of religion or belief and the rights of minorities in France.