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French Government acts to protect secularism from religious extremists

National Secular Society (18.12.2012) - The French Government appears to be lining up for a full-scale confrontation with the Catholic Church, which is increasingly trying to interfere in political processes.

The socialist administration has announced it intends to establish a new agency to ensure the nation's secularism is protected from religious extremism.

The agency will monitor extremist groups — not just Islamists, but of all faiths — and if they show signs of what the Interior Minister, Manuel Valls (right), called "religious pathology" legal action to dissolve the organisation will be taken — and foreign imams preaching hatred and violence will be deported.

Speaking at a conference on secularism, Mr Valls pointed to the incident last year when a French Islamist had gone on a killing spree, shooting to death three soldiers and four Jewish people. He said this illustrated how quickly religiously radicalised people could turn to violence. Mr Valls and two other government ministers said that the new agency would protect and promote the tradition of "laïcité", which is the French version of secularism. The previous government of Nicolas Sarkozy had undermined this principle by pandering to the Catholic Church.

"The aim is not to combat opinions by force, but to detect and understand when an opinion turns into a potentially violent and criminal excess," Mr Valls said. "The objective is to identify when it's suitable to intervene to treat what has become a religious pathology."

Mr Valls made clear that this was not an anti-Muslim exercise, but would cover all religious extremists. He mentioned the ultra-traditionalist Catholic group Civitas, which has aligned itself with the fascist *Front National* Party. He said the police were already monitoring Civitas as many of its activities already skirt the law.

Valls said the government had a duty to combat religious extremism because it was "an offence to the republic" based on a negation of reason that puts dogma ahead of the law. He cited extreme religious groups in other countries, Salafists, ultra-Orthodox Jews and others who sought to separate themselves from the modern world.

Announcing his initiative on Sunday, the President, Francois Hollande, said the new agency would also study ways to introduce classes on secular morality in state schools.

Education Minister Vincent Peillon told the conference the classes would stress the French values of equality and fraternity that teachers say pupils — especially in poorer areas with immigrant populations — increasingly do not respect. "We have to teach this and it's not being done," he said. "If we don't teach it, they won't learn it."

Valls urged the more militant secularists at the conference not to see religions as sects to be opposed and to understand that established religions could help fight against extremists. "We have to say that religions are not sects, otherwise sects are religions," he said.

Meanwhile the confrontation between the Catholic Church and the Government over plans to legalise gay marriage is ramping up. The Church has called several large-scale demonstrations throughout the country in opposition to the plans, while last weekend up to 150,000 people marched through the streets of Paris in support of the proposals.

Now, Housing Minister Cecile Duflot has warned that she might soon requisition unused church buildings in Paris for the homeless this winter. She told the Bishop of Paris that she "would not understand if the church does not share our goal of solidarity".

Ms Duflot, a Green Party member, denied any connection between her threat and the debate over gay marriage, which her party vigorously supports. But Christine Boutin, a Catholic ex-MP accused the Government of "Cathophobia".

Turban pride restores as Sikhs wins school turban ban case against France in UN

The Times of India (14.12.2012) - The UN Human Rights Committee (UNHRC) has ruled that France's ban on the wearing of "conspicuous" religious symbols in schools - introduced in a law adopted in March 2004 - violated a Sikh student's right to manifest his religion, protected by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

"The UNHRC has made our nine year wait for justice worthwhile, since the French law was passed against religious signs in public schools in 2004.

The UNHRC has once again proved to be the beacon of light for the freedom of thought, conscience and religion by upholding that the Article 18 right under the ICCPR to manifest ones religion, cannot be overridden merely by pleading secularity without producing any evidence that the Sikh Turban would affect the right of other students or would affect order in the school," said Legal Director, United Sikhs, a Sikh NGO, Mejindarpal Kaur while talking to TOI over phone from Paris on Friday.

The State repays 6.3 Million euros to the Jehovah's Witnesses

Le Monde (14.12.2012) - Could the French government have saved an expenditure of 1.8 million euros? This question arises as the 15-year legal battle between the Association of the Jehovah's Witnesses (JW) and the French state comes to a conclusion. According to statements by representatives of the Jehovah's Witnesses on their website, the French government has complied with a decision rendered by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in July 2012, requiring the state to return funds which it "wrongfully" seized in a controversial repayment of back taxes.

The Jehovah's Witnesses acknowledge having received, on December 11, a payment of "6,373,987.31 euros", the equivalent of the funds seized in 1998, 4.5 million, plus interest and court costs. After the decision of the ECHR in July 2012, the government had three months to file an appeal; otherwise it would need, within that same three month period, to repay the previously seized funds.

The litigation, which came to the ECtHR after years of legal proceedings, focused on whether offerings of tangible gifts should be tax exempt just as donations and bequests

are for religious associations. Following the publication of the parliamentary report on religious sects in 1996, which declared the Jehovah's Witnesses to be dangerous but whose contents have subsequently been recognized to be without legal foundation, the association has been the subject of tax audits, resulting in a tax on its tangible gifts.

"The end of a tragic period"

After years of judicial procedures, the European Court, in June of 2011, embarrassed France in ruling that it had violated religious liberty. The ECtHR recognized, therefore, that the article of the General Tax Code, invoked by the French government as the justification for the tax, was neither "precise" enough nor "predictable" enough. Without recognizing discriminatory practices against the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Court nonetheless admitted that there had been "interference in the right of the petitioning association to practice religious freedom" in as much as the taxed donations "constituted the essential source of its financing."

In the estimation of the Jehovah's Witnesses' lawyer, Philippe Goni, "The government's reimbursement censures their policy of the last fifteen years.

We are finished with this tragic period during which an attempt was made to destroy this association and in which the French legal system did not play its appropriate part. The raising of mortgages on buildings belonging to the Jehovah's Witnesses [also decided in 1998] should logically follow.

Guy Canonici, the representative of the Jehovah's Witnesses in France, which claim 250,000 members, hopes that this decision will put an end "to all sorts of criticisms which the Jehovah's Witnesses regularly had to endure.

We were dragged through the mud, accused of tax evasion." And even though he says that he is "naturally satisfied with the decision," he "regrets that France was convicted because of the actions of individuals and of current intolerant ideas.

The Interministerial Mission for Monitoring and Combatting Cultic Deviances" (Miviludes) still considers the rejection of blood transfusions by the Jehovah's Witnesses problematic. Georges Fenech, its former president who is currently a member of the National Assembly and was particularly concerned with monitoring the Jehovah's Witnesses, acknowledges its end but will not relent: "It was a question of fiscal litigation, but the concerns over their practices in health matters and in the education of children remain." Mr. Fenech will probably become the head of a future working committee in the National Assembly.

A final future piece of litigation involving the Jehovah's Witnesses concerns the question of prison chaplains. After several refusals by the justice minister to permit ministers of the religion to visit detainees, the decision is in the hands of the Council of State, which must soon decide the matter. In the current context, Mr. Goni has high hopes that this case will also come to a positive conclusion for the association which he defends.

Translation French-English by Human Rights Without Frontiers

Perception of discrimination based on religion & belief : France and Belgium the worst pupils in a survey of the European Commission

Excerpt

HRWF (27.11.2012) - **“Discrimination on grounds of religion or beliefs is more commonly perceived as rare or non-existent than widespread:** 56% of Europeans think it is rare or non-existent (5% non-existent, 51% rare) and 39% that it is widespread. Five per cent “don’t know”.

However, **as in 2009, there are very wide differences between countries.** Discrimination based on religion or beliefs is seen as most widespread in France (66%), followed by Belgium (60%), Sweden (58%), Denmark (54%), the Netherlands (51%) and the UK (50%). The survey shows that belonging to a religious minority is an important factor here, with 54% of these Europeans indicating that discrimination on the grounds of religion/beliefs is widespread in their country.

At the other extreme of the scale, less than 15% of respondents in the Czech Republic and Latvia (both 10%), Slovakia (12%), Ireland and Bulgaria (both 13%) and Lithuania and Estonia (both 14%) say that discrimination on the basis of religion/belief is widespread in their countries. Again, a comparison of the 2012 results with those obtained in 2009 shows that **views have not evolved in the same direction throughout Europe.** In some countries, perceptions are more positive (more people now say discrimination is non-existent or rare), whereas in others the opposite trend is noted (fewer people now hold this opinion).

Focusing firstly on the countries where the trend is positive, double-digit improvements can be found in Slovenia and Greece (both +13 percentage points), and in Malta and Austria (both +12). In five further countries improvements of at least 5 points are recorded: the Netherlands (+8), Bulgaria (+6), and Estonia, Romania and Finland (all +5).

The most negative development has been recorded in France. Here only 28% now say that discrimination on the grounds of religion or beliefs is non-existent or rare (-9). There have also been large falls in Cyprus (-6) and Belgium (-5).

The socio-demographic and cultural factors that influence perceptions of discrimination on the grounds of religion/beliefs include:

- Belonging to a minority (self-defined);
- Having personally experienced or witnessed discrimination;
- Having a diverse social circle;
- Being young;
- Being to the left of the spectrum politically.”

See http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_393_en.pdf , especially pages 49-52

Most French see Islam too influential in society: poll

Reuters (25.10.2012) - An increasing majority of people in [France](#) believe Islam plays too influential a role in their society and almost half see Muslims as a threat to their national identity, according to a poll published on Thursday.

The survey by pollster IFOP in Le Figaro newspaper showed that 60 percent of people believed that Islam was "too important" in [France](#) in terms of its influence and visibility, up from 55 percent two years ago.

It found that 43 percent of respondents considered the presence of the Muslim community as a threat to their national identity, compared with just 17 percent who said it enriched society. Forty percent of those questioned were indifferent to the presence of Islam, Le Figaro said.

"Our poll shows a further hardening in French people's opinions," Jerome Fourquet, head of Ifop's opinion department, told the newspaper.

The struggle of secular France, whose people are mainly Catholic, to assimilate the largest Islamic population in Europe was thrust into the spotlight in March when Muslim Mohamed Merah, went on a shooting spree in southwest France that killed three Jewish children, a rabbi and three soldiers.

"In recent years, there has not been a week when Islam has not been in the heart of the news for social reasons: the veil, halal food, for dramatic news like terrorist attacks or geopolitical reasons," Fourquet said.

The prevalence of halal food and rising immigration - particularly from Islamic north Africa - were hot topics in the campaign for the presidential election as Nicolas Sarkozy sought to appeal to voters of the far-right National Front.

Sarkozy eventually lost to Socialist Francois Hollande but a contender to lead his conservative UMP party, Jean Francois Cope, put Islam back on the agenda this month by suggesting Muslim youths were tearing pain au chocolat pastries from children's hands during Islam's fasting month of Ramadan.

The publication of the poll also came after a far-right group occupied a mosque in the western city of Poitiers at the weekend and issued a "declaration of war" against what it called the Islamisation of France.

Mohammed Moussaoui, president of the French Muslim Council (CFCM), said fear of Islam was being stoked by political manipulation of concern over immigration and fears the growing Muslim population could lead to the imposition of sharia law.

"Islam has left the spiritual sphere to become a political subject," he said, in response to the poll. "Attempts to associate marginal practices with mainstream Muslim religion fuels the rejection of every aspect of Islam."

The survey, carried out on October 15-18 on 1,736 people, showed a growing resistance to the symbols of the Islamic faith. Some 43 percent of those questioned were opposed to more mosque building, up from 39 percent in 2010.

Sixty-three percent opposed Muslim women wearing the veil or Islamic headscarves in public, compared with 59 percent two years ago. Sarkozy's previous conservative banned the wearing of full-face veils.

French Muslims demand group ban after mosque attack

The French Muslim Council (CFCM) urged the government on Monday to ban a far-right group that occupied a mosque on Saturday and issued a "declaration of war" against what it called the Islamization of France.

Rueters (22.10.2012) - CFCM President Mohammed Moussaoui said the Council also wanted better protection for mosques and Muslim cemeteries against racist attacks, which he said jumped sharply in 2011 and continued to rise this year.

Some 73 protesters from a movement called Identity Group seized a mosque in the western city of Poitiers on Saturday and unfurled a banner referring to Charles Martel's historic defeat of advancing Muslim troops there in 732.

They stayed for more than six hours before police ejected them.

In a video posted on its website, the movement issued what it called a "declaration of war" on multiculturalism. It also called for a referendum to block further immigration from outside Europe and further construction of mosques in France.

"We demand the dissolution of this group," Moussaoui said.

The public prosecutor's office in Poitiers has placed four of the protesters under judicial investigation for spreading racial hate and discrimination.

Moussaoui said the protest, the first time a mosque in France had been occupied like that, represented "a new escalation in violence against Muslims".

Violent acts and threats against Muslims rose by 34 percent in 2011 compared to 2010, and went up again by 14 percent in the first half of this year, he told reporters.

The protesters had come from as far away as Lyon and Nice, near France's eastern borders, he said.

Europe takes action to protect freedom of religion

The launching, tomorrow in Paris, of a new observatory of cultural and religious pluralism testifies that there is a growing concern in Europe about defending religious freedom.

Motivated from the beginning by solidarity with Eastern Christians, this mobilization could lead to genuine new policies.

Inspired by historic practices of the U.S. State Department, it will nonetheless have its own unique character.

Is religious freedom facing a growing threat?

La Croix (03.10.2012) - A perceived growing threat to freedom of religion in the world is one of the reasons for the renewed attention on the subject. The Pharos Observatory "of Cultural and Religious Pluralism", established today in Paris, is devoted to monitoring, according to its website, "more and more frequent and more and more serious attacks on freedom of conscience, on freedom of expression, and freedom of religion around the

world." The "Arab Spring" particularly creates growing unease most notably concerning the place of Islam in the new constitutions.

In contrast, it should not be forgotten that the communist countries of the past of the old eastern block—as well as Cuba, Vietnam, or China today—were well known for repression of religions, but did not illicit the same type of concern. This can be explained by "strategic" reasons, as a resolution of the 27 foreign ministers of the Council of Europe acknowledges in June of 2009. P. Henri Madelin, Jesuit, author of a report on the subject for the Foundation for Political Innovation, stressed, "The most secular of the western powers recognize that religion plays an important role in international relations and that to neglect this factor is to limit their foreign policy options." The creation by Bernard Kouchner, in June 2009, of an agency on religions at the heart of the Direction of the Prospective of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is revealing in this respect.

What is religious freedom?

Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Man (DUDH) indicates, "Every person has the right to freedom of thought; this right implies the freedom to change religion or belief as well as the freedom to practice his religion or his belief alone or with others, privately or in public, by teaching, practices, worship, and ritual." If certain countries—like France—are tempted to protect only the individual dimension of religious freedom, others—like Algeria—limit themselves to the toleration of its communal dimension—the celebration of mass for example—but categorically refuse to admit an individual the right to believe or not believe.

As with all liberties, freedom of religion is restricted by the needs of "public order", such as those which led France to forbid protests against the film "L'Innocence des musulmans" (Innocence of the Muslims). The relation between freedom of religion and the freedom of expression—protected by article 19 of the DUDH—is however complex. Since the first caricatures of the prophet Mohammed in 1999, the countries of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) have attempted to pass a resolution in the UN against "the denigration" or "the defamation" of religions. The push for such a resolution has recently reappeared with increased attention. But both the European Union and France in particular, distinguish between the criticism of religions and the incitement of religious hate, which is punishable by sanctions, and therefore oppose this resolution.

What is the best way to protect religious freedom?

In the United States, where religious freedom is at the heart of the first amendment of the Constitution, the effort to protect it has a long history and covers movements that Europe considers to be intolerant. In 1998, Congress enacted a law, the "International Religious Freedom Act" which, since that time, has placed the promotion of religious freedom at the heart of American international policy. In fact, the State Department created a special office and charged it with compiling a much discussed annual report, remarkable for its list of "countries of greatest concern." Father P. Madelin notes, "When the American president visits a country, he always carries a list of persons imprisoned for religious reasons."

On the Old Continent, the concern is more recent. "France, in particular, has traditionally been more concerned with freedom of conscience, while freedom of religion was regarded as an Anglo-Saxon concept", notes Valentine Zuber, lecturer at the École Pratique des Hautes Études (Practical School of Higher Studies) and author of a thesis on religious tolerance. In addition, until recently, the Council of Europe has played its role in defending the "right of freedom of thought, of conscience and religion" in its member countries, by means of the European Court of Human Rights. But rarely have these countries integrated these freedoms into their foreign policies. This situation is changing, under the pressure, notably, of numerous observatories which have appeared in the last

few years. One diplomat observed, "The exodus of Iraqi Christians in the first decade of the 21st century and even more the two attacks in late 2010—on the Syriac Catholic cathedral in Baghdad and on a Coptic church in Alexandria—have pushed the chanceries to more action." Immediately after these events, the European Parliament adopted a resolution "on the situation of Christians in the context of freedom of religion". The 27 foreign ministers, in their turn, voted on a text, but not without attaching differences among the countries—notably Poland and Italy—which desired to be explicitly acknowledged as Christian, and those countries—Great Britain and the Nordic countries—which feared encouraging a "clash of civilizations"...

More and more, and the request emanates from Christians from the East themselves, the defenders of religious freedom realize that limiting their fight to the realm of religion alone is not sufficient, especially since, as Johanna Touzel, spokesperson for the Commission of Bishops of the European Community (Comece), notes "religious persecutions always have a political dimension".

What can France do?

Because of its "special mission" regarding Christians in the East, France has taken the lead in this effort, according to a diplomat from the Quai d'Orsay (The French Ministry of Foreign Affairs). With others—Austria, the Netherlands, Italy, Germany—France ensures that the new "guidelines" of the European Union in the field of human rights, discussed over several months, emphasize freedom of "religion and belief". The same diplomat explains, "The idea is not to copy the American punitive model but to devote the means necessary to obtain results over several years. We could propose a constructive engagement with countries which wish to cooperate with us in the protection of their religious minorities." The president of the Republic, François Hollande, should, in addition, send a message of support to the Pharos Observatory in order to "reaffirm, in the general framework of the rights of man, his own commitment to freedom of religion and belief."

The researcher, Valentine Zuber, for whom the promotion of religious freedom must also "take place in France, warns, "The Quai d'Orsay, particularly since the arrival of Joseph Maïla at the agency on religions in the Direction of the Prospective of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has had an original voice on these subjects. But other more restrictive concepts are expressed in France and may find more than an echo in public opinion."

Observatories

In North America

United States: The American Department of State has published a report each year since 1998 on "the state of freedom of religion in the world". The Conference of Catholic Bishops in the United States announced in September 2011 the creation of a Committee for Freedom of Religion, under the direction of Monsignor William Edward Lori, Bishop of Baltimore.

Canada: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs created in January a Bureau of the Freedom of Religion.

In Europe

The Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) publishes an annual report "on crimes inspired by hate" in its member countries.

The Observatory of Intolerance and Discriminations Against Christians, founded in November 2011 in Austria by the Council of Episcopal Conferences of Europe (CCEE), publishes a statistical report once a year.

The Observatory of Religious Freedom was created in June 2012 in Italy by a joint initiative of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the City of Rome. It was entrusted to the Catholic lawyer Massimo Introvigne and has for a mission the assignment "to control and prevent attacks on religious freedom in the world".

The Pharos Observatory of Cultural and Religious Pluralism, created by the initiative of diverse individuals, religious or not, is endowed with a grant from the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but is independent of the ministry. It puts on its trilingual internet site case studies, country by country.

Translation French-English by Human Rights Without Frontiers

The prison chaplaincy issue: Jehovah's Witnesses v. France

Human Rights Without Frontiers recommends to the French authorities to put an end to religious discrimination in prison and to allow detainees to have access to JW chaplains

HRWF (17.09.2012) - For many years, the French authorities have denied the Jehovah's Witnesses the right to have prison chaplains, even those who are volunteers.

To prevent the authorization of officially appointed chaplains who would work with detainees in the prisons, the president of Miviludes emphatically asserts that such appointments might lead to dangerous problems, as well as proselyting inside the walls of the detention centers. (1)

Over 20 years ago, Jehovah's Witnesses who were conscientious objectors could freely practice their religion in prison...

Nevertheless, as Jean-Claude Pons, the spokesperson for the national consistory of Jehovah's's Witnesses, has pointed out on *France Culture*: "Over twenty years ago, Jehovah's Witnesses who were conscientious objectors were in prison. At that time, ministers of our religion could visit them and rooms were provided in which religious ceremonies could be held." (2)

None of that posed any problem in the past. On the contrary, the Directorate of Prison Services respected and trusted them because they made great contributions to the well-being of the prisons in which they were held.

As soon as the Defense Ministry found a solution by which the conscientious objectors could replace military service with different types of civil service, their absence in the prisons produced a real sense of loss.

"Those who were immediately the worst off were the prison directors. In effect, they lost their most zealous supporters. Model prisoners, the Jehovah's Witnesses were given trusted assignments which greatly contributed to the success of the holding prisons." (3)

Why do Jehovah's Witnesses want prison chaplains?

In recent years, the Jehovah's Witnesses have diligently searched for a solution that would end the perpetual impediments to spiritual aid that they wish to bring to prison detainees who have expressly asked for it.

They have tried to remain satisfied with the use of prison visiting rooms for their ministerial visits, but have found the conditions there unacceptable, whether it was because they were purely and simply denied the opportunity to meet with prisoners, with the excuse that their visits would not promote the detainee's social integration (4), or because they were denied permission to bring with them their Bible or other religious works. (5)

Also, those prisoners who had legally subscribed to the Jehovah's Witnesses' magazines "The Watch Tower" and "Awake" were denied access to them because it was claimed that they were published by a deviant sect. (6)

Granted, the justice ministry has from time to time and in various places put an end to these attacks on the freedom of religion, but an officially authorized status for Jehovah's Witnesses chaplains by the Chancellery would ensure a better respect for the religious practices of the Jehovah's Witnesses (or its sympathizers) in the prison environment.

There are other problems that granting official status to Jehovah's Witnesses chaplains would help solve. First, meetings with ministerial visitors in a common meeting room do not permit any private interaction, even confidential discussions, and moreover count against the quota of family visits.

In addition, Article R. 57-9-6 of the Penal Procedural Code stipulates that chaplains be allowed to have conversations with their adherents "outside of the presence of a supervisor, whether in the visiting room, in a room provided for that purpose, or in the cell of the prisoner." These conditions prove to be indispensable for all pastoral activities.

Finally, if no Jehovah's Witnesses chaplain exist in penal institutions, no religious ceremonies for that religion can be organized, certainly a religion of minority status, for those who have chosen to practice the faith.

Does the low number of requests prevent the naming of Jehovah's Witnesses chaplains?

To justify their refusal to accept Jehovah's Witnesses chaplains, the prison administration and the "Keeper of the Seals" (Minister of Justice) responded to the Jehovah's Witnesses appeal by stressing that there were not enough prisoners claiming to be members of their church. But is this a realistic argument?

From a legal point of view, the Paris Administrative Court of Appeal has ruled that "no statutory law or regulation can set conditions for the naming of a prison chaplain based on a minimum number of prisoners capable of appealing for spiritual help (7)." The administrative courts of appeal in both Nancy and Douai have also arrived at the same conclusion.(8)

Furthermore, administrative practice shows that this pretext for denial is not applied to other religions. On the contrary, *Le Monde* has revealed that the public authorities have, on their own initiative, talked to the *Buddhist Union of France* (UBF) in order to nominate several Buddhist chaplains (9). Yet, as the somewhat surprised Buddhist Union admits, the typical number of requests from Buddhist prisoners amounts only to about twelve per year. By comparison, the Jehovah's Witnesses, according to the same article, count about a hundred such requests a year.

Moreover, as the president of the UBF justly points out, making more authorized chaplains available will allow more detainees to make their spiritual needs known, since the steps to do so will thereafter be easier to process and better accepted.

Is there a risk of proselyting by prison chaplains?

Article R. 57-9-6 of the Penal Procedural Code stipulates that "persons detained can, at their request, meet with chaplains from their religious tradition as often as is necessary."

Chaplains are not able to tract (go door to door) in the prisons nor do they have free access to the prison cells for proselyting. They are only allowed to go among the prisoners who claim to belong to the same religion and expressly request the visit of a minister of the religion authorized by the prison administration.

Likewise, according to article D. 439-1 of the Penal Procedural Code: "Chaplains consecrate all or part of their time to the duties defined in article R. 57-9-4 depending on the number of prisoners who wish to meet with those authorized chaplains who work at that particular facility."

It is thus clear that spiritual help and religious services are offered only to those who express such a need. In the unlikely possibility that it be otherwise, any attempt to go beyond the well-defined limits of the law would no doubt be prevented by prison officials.

Human Rights Without Frontiers recommends to the French authorities to put an end to religious discrimination in prison and to allow detainees to have access to JW chaplains

Source : Droits des cultes et Témoins de Jehovah's (Davy) <http://www.droit-tj.fr>

Translation French-English by *Human Rights Without Frontiers*

Footnotes :

- (1) RTL Midi, *RTL*, 19 May 2011, 12h30.
- (2) Journal, *France Culture*, 30 May 2011, 22h.
- (3) *Libération*, Saturday 25 and Sunday 26 February 1995.
- (4) Tribunal administratif de Limoges, 16 October 2008, n° 0700710.
- (5) *Le Monde*, 29 May 2010, p. 12.
- (6) Tribunal administratif de Lille, 1 July 2003, n° 00-1519.
- (7) [Cour administrative d'appel de Paris, 30 mai 2011, n° 10PA03567](#) ; [Cour administrative d'appel de Paris, 30 mai 2011, n° 10PA03589](#) ; [Cour administrative d'appel de Paris, 30 mai 2011, n° 10PA03618](#) ; [Cour administrative d'appel de Paris, 30 mai 2011, n° 10PA03619](#).
- (8) [Cour administrative d'appel de Nancy, 13 octobre 2011, n° 11NC00211](#) ; [Cour administrative d'appel de Douai, 25 octobre 2011, n° 11DA00554](#) ; [Cour administrative d'appel de Douai, 25 octobre 2011, n° 11DA00555](#) ; [Cour administrative d'appel de Douai, 25 octobre 2011, n° 11DA00556](#).
- (9) *Le Monde*, 8 and 9 January 2012, p. 11.

Detainees are denied the right to get a Bible from a Jehovah's Witness

HRWF (10.09.2012) - In French prisons, detainees testify they are not allowed to get a Bible from a Jehovah's Witness and 100 prisoners at least are denied the visit of a Jehovah's Witness chaplain. After years of legal battles, during which the justice minister has appealed decisions favorable to the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Council of State will soon rule on this chaplaincy case. MIVILUDES which always claims that it is opposed to 'sectarian drifts' and not to religious groups as such does not want an end to be put to this discrimination... See the report of Le Monde in its 4 September issue.

The irredeemable criminal and the Jehovah's Witness

Le Monde (04.09.2012) - For ten years, despite heavy opposition from the **Prisons Administration Directorate**, a member from the Jehovah's Witnesses made visits to Michel, a detainee judged lost to society, and accompanied him step by step in his redemption.

During the first several visits, Michel (the name has been changed at his request), "did not utter more than ten words during the entire visit. It took three years for him to open up," remembers Pascal Slinger, the member of the Jehovah's Witnesses who, during a decade, made visits to the prisoner, condemned in 1989 to prison for life, without parole for twenty years, for a murder and two rapes. Arrested in 1984, this reformed felon "irredeemable," according to his own words, had already passed ten years behind bars in the 1970s for these crimes.

Allowed out on parole since 2005, this man of 72 years today loves to talk. With a massive build, crew cut gray hair, lively spirit, this septuagenarian can talk forever about his journey of incarceration which led him to most of the holding jails in France. But two subjects animate him the most: the Bible and Jesus. On these two topics he speaks with emphasis and with the fervor of a convert, never losing a certain assurance.

He swears that the discovery of the sacred texts of scripture changed him. "I learned from the Bible that Jesus was not an object but a long-suffering being. And that it was therefore possible for me to put things in order and change my life. That brought me peace," the former prisoner testified. "But my first ten years in prison were not able to bring me back to the right. I left prison the same way I entered," remembers Michael, "incapable of recognizing my guilt."

From the beginning of his second incarceration, he remained persuaded for a long period that he would never leave prison alive. At the request of his mother, a strong influence in his life, he agreed to read the literature of the Jehovah's Witnesses, then to meet with one of their members. This first step led him to request psychological counseling, then to begin a training course. Now living in Alsace, this native of the south of France today consecrates his life of freedom "to hiking in the mountains and to reading the Bible" and to the community of Jehovah's Witnesses in the city where he is serving out the end of his sentence. He insists, "The path for my life is to testify that there is no place from which one cannot come back."

Like the most faithful Jehovah's Witnesses, he attends religious services two times a week. And like all the faithful, he "participates in preaching," the famous proselyting door-to-door approach of the Jehovah's Witnesses with one of his fellow coreligionists. "Given my past, the association asked me to preach only with men. For the seven years

since I left prison, I have accepted being under supervision, even if, as far as I am concerned, there is no longer any ambiguity in my relations with women.”

Prison regularly produces stories of redemption such as this one. But Michael’s conversion is noteworthy because it happened in a visiting room after and before two strip searches and, for many years without the Bible. Contrary to other religious believers (Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Muslims, Orthodox, and Buddhists) which are recognized by the **Prisons Administration Directorate**, Jehovah’s Witnesses detainees do not have the right to receive visits from Jehovah’s Witnesses chaplains. The organization, recognized as a religious association in 2000 by the Council of State, continues to fight legal battles to be able to send their own chaplains to visit prisoners (there are currently about 100 requests, according to the Jehovah’s Witness spokesman) and to offer to the detainees who desire it, visiting conditions equivalent to what other religions already enjoy: access to cells, prayer times in isolated rooms, permission to keep books or religious objects linked to the religion.

After years of legal battles, during which the justice minister has appealed decisions favorable to the Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Council of State will soon rule on this case. For the Jehovah’s Witnesses, who have been criticized for many years for their practices and for their beliefs—often judged by outsiders to part of a deviant cult—this case constitutes one of the last steps toward a relative normalization in the French religious environment for the Jehovah’s Witnesses.

Pascal Stanger hopes to see an evolution in the situation of the Jehovah’s Witnesses in prison in order to “better collaborate with the system.” “Without permission to visit as a chaplain, I can only enter the prison as a family visitor. For ten years I visited Michael in the prison visiting room, a large room with small partitions, filled with children and embracing couples. The conditions there make it difficult to approach subjects of faith and to help someone progress spiritually. We were often interrupted at the end of the regulation hour and a half by the supervisor at the moment when the discussion became the most interesting.”

He especially remembers that he was forbidden from coming to the visiting room with a Bible. “I learned entire passages by heart in order to discuss with Michel or I sent him photocopies but none of them were ever delivered. Everything was very arbitrary. Authorizations depended on the supervisor who was present. Michel pleaded his case and, at the end of eight years, I was able to bring a Bible.”

Repeatedly, the Jehovah’s Witnesses have seen themselves opposed by the prison administration for fear of their “proselyting,” with its risk of “disturbing the peace” within the secure environment of the prison. Mr. Stanger who currently visits three prisoners, who are not all members of the Jehovah’s Witnesses, swears that his goal “is not to convert them but to help them.” For the last several months, he has tried to send a Bible to a prisoner who is a Jehovah’s Witness. The Bible was sent back to him in the mail. “The direction of the prison sent him to a Catholic chaplain.”

A long fight to not be described as a sect

Le Monde (04.09.2012) - Until the end of military service in 1996, the young male members of the Jehovah’s Witnesses, whose religious beliefs pushed them systematically to be conscientious objectors, spent several months in prison. These times have ended but the complicated relations between this association, which claims 250,000 members, have not improved even with the end to military conscription.

In 1995, a parliamentary report, since judged to be obsolete, had established a list of 172 “sects,” which included the Jehovah’s Witnesses. Their active proselyting, their visions of the end of the world or their rejection of blood transfusions were regularly blamed as reasons. Since the report was issued, the association has regularly butted

heads with the ministry of justice and the Interministerial Mission for Monitoring and Combatting Cultic Deviances (Miviludes), despite the recognition of its religious status by the Council of State in 2000.

At the end of the 1990s, the association filed objections to financial regulations and to the taxation of "*dons manuels*" [gifts of tangible objects], offerings by faithful Witnesses members, contrary to the prevailing rules for religious associations. After several years of litigation, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) passed judgment that France had violated religious liberty in this case. Lacking an agreement between the Jehovah's Witnesses and the French government, the ECtHR estimated, at the beginning of July 2012, that France must reimburse the Jehovah's Witnesses more than 4.5 million euros, which the judges estimate were "unduly" seized by the public treasury.

For a dozen years, the association has also fought legal battles of "about fifty cases" that concerned requests for Jehovah's Witnesses prison chaplains. The administrative courts have generally ruled in favor of Jehovah's Witnesses in these cases, while the minister of justice has generally appealed these decisions. The Council of State must soon make a judgment. The creation of "religious parlors" at one time was mentioned as a possible solution to these requests. Currently, besides volunteers, around 200 Catholic chaplains, about 60 Muslims, around 80 Protestants, and about 40 Jewish chaplains are employed by the prison administration.

Translation French-English of these two articles by *Human Rights Without Frontiers*

French mayor retreats after suspending fasting Muslims

By Tom Heneghan

Reuters (01.08.2012) - A French mayor has revoked the suspension of four Muslim camp counselors following an uproar after he said they could not work properly because they might be weakened by their all-day fasting for Ramadan.

Muslim groups threatened to sue the Paris suburb of Gennevilliers for discrimination for recalling the four after an inspector found on July 20 - the first day of the Muslim holy month - that they were not eating or drinking during the day.

Lawyers for the counselors, who had accompanied children from the suburb on a town-sponsored stay at a summer camp in southwestern France, said they might also take the issue to a labor court.

Potential weakness due to Ramadan is also an issue at the London Olympics, where more than 3,000 Muslim athletes are competing. Some have delayed their fast until after the Games while others are fasting as they would any other year.

Muslim leaders presented the case as an issue of religious liberty, while the town's Communist mayor Jacques Bourgoïn insisted his concern was only for the safety of the campers.

"This is a discriminatory act," said Abdallah Zekri of the French Muslim Council told BFM TV. "France has religious liberty, it is a fundamental freedom and it must be respected."

Bourgoin said he revoked the suspensions because the public uproar over the issue prevented the calm discussion of safety issues that he planned to take up again later in the year.

"This has been blown out of proportion and we can't discuss it calmly," he told Europe 1 radio on Wednesday. "Many people interpreted this as discriminatory, but we did not take this decision in that way."

More calm and comprehension sought

The mayor's office said in a communiqué on Tuesday evening that the counselors' contracts specifically noted they had to make sure both themselves and the children they monitored were regularly nourished and hydrated.

Bourgoin said the town required that because two children were injured in a traffic accident two years ago when a fasting Muslim counselor fainted at the wheel of the minibus in which she was transporting them.

This requirement applied only to monitors on long trips with round-the-clock responsibility for children, he added.

France is home to about 5 million Muslims, Europe's largest Islamic minority, and disputes between them and local officials trying to apply the country's strict separation of religion and the public service sometimes lead to tensions.

France has banned full Muslim face veils from public spaces and prohibited schoolgirls from wearing headscarves.

The clause in the counselors' contracts requiring regular meals does not mention Muslims, but it clearly applies to them because they are presumably the only ones who would fast now.

Dalil Boubakeur, rector of the Grand Mosque of Paris, said exceptions to the Ramadan fast would normally be made only for pregnant women and ailing persons.

"French Muslims would resent any infringement of this religious liberty," he said in a communiqué.

"In this period of Ramadan, French Muslims would hope for more calm and comprehension from the national community."

The 1905 Law, Islam, private education: the priorities

Le Monde (02.06.2012) - For the Socialists who have just taken power, the questions relative to secularism include two advantages: they provide possible markers on the left for the president's five-year term and they do not cost much for the state's budget. But they could also prove to be thorny because the historical division in the Socialist Party between those who want to promote an inflexible secularism and those who are more pragmatic could reappear in the heart of the government. The new team, with Manuel Valls who, as the Minister of the Interior, is in charge of religious affairs and supports an "exacting secularism," must make decisions on several difficult decisions. Some of the issues the team itself has put on the table and others it inherited.

The First Two articles of the Law of 1905 in the Constitution

The promise is part of the 60 proposals of Françoise Hollande. These two articles of the law specify that, "The Republic ensures freedom of conscience. It guarantees the free exercise of religion. It does not officially recognize, financially support, nor subsidize any religion." Symbolically, this measure intends "to reaffirm the separation between religion and governments" and to put an end to "a geometrically variable secularism," as Mr. Hollande's advisors explained during the campaign. The initiative could, however, run into legal difficulties and open the possibility for the government to participate indirectly in the financing of religions: long-term leases (of a very long duration), loan guarantees, tax exemptions, and building repairs.

The socialist candidate has already had to specify that his proposition would not challenge the current arrangement in Alsace and in Moselle—even going so far as inscribing it into the constitution—and that the proposition assumed a thoughtful reflection on specific regimes in the overseas collectivities, where religions are subsidized by the governments. The measure remains eagerly awaited by the secular camp, anxious to break with the preceding administration's five years in office and its "positive secularism," with its assumed benevolence toward religions.

Deportation of Imams

The government must make a decision on the request in February by Claude Guéant, the Minister of the Interior, to deport the imam, Mohammed Hammami. On May 15, the Commission on Deportation issued an unfavorable opinion. Other commissions must meet to examine the open cases within the framework of the "rounding up" of anti-Islamists that took place in the wake of the Toulouse and Montauban killings by Mohammed Merah.

The French Council of the Muslim Faith

Supported by every succeeding minister of the interior since its creation in 2003, the French Council of the Muslim Faith (CFCM) has in the last year—the date of the last elections—been seriously weakened. Two of the three great Muslim federations (the Great Mosque of Paris, aligned more closely with Algeria, and the Union of Islamic Organizations of France) have not participated in it, leaving only one, the Assembly of Muslims in France, aligned more closely with Morocco, the official representation of Islam.

Would the Socialists, who were there at the beginning of the discussions leading to the creation of a representative authority with Pierre Joxe in 1989, really want to involve themselves again in a situation filled with divisions, personal conflicts, and complicated relations with Algeria and Morocco? In addition, many Muslims are asking, in more or less good faith, that the "interference" in this case from Place Beauveau (the Interior Ministry) come to an end.

Veiled Women

For the moment, the Minister of National Education, "abiding by the law" will uphold the ban on veiled mothers accompanying students on field trips, first proposed by his predecessor and explained in the back to school circular letter of 2012. According to his aids, in the absence of contrary legal rulings, the minister will abide by the ruling of the administrative court of Montreuil which in November 2011 upheld the ban. The government could, on the other hand, strike down a law passed by the liberal Senate which limits the wearing of religious symbols by workers who provide child care at home.

Canon of the Lateran or not?

After his election, François Hollande was invited by the Vatican to receive the title of Canon of the Lateran, at Rome. A symbolic title, under the Fifth Republic, only Georges Pompidou and François Mitterrand have refused the offer. Nicolas Sarkozy, on the other hand, took advantage of the opportunity to develop his concept of a positive secularism, underlining, among other things, the superiority of the "priest or the pastor" and teachers as transmitters of values.

Private Education

In a letter addressed to secular associations in mid-April, François Hollande undertook to rewrite the circular decree of the Carle Law of 2009, which under certain conditions, obligates a mayor to pay the school expenses of a child living in his town, even if the child is attending a private school in another city. He also promised to repeal the decree of 2009 on the recognition of diplomas between France and the Vatican, even if this document is optional.

Jehovah Witnesses

For several years, the Department of Justice has opposed prison visits by Jehovah Witnesses chaplains. This refusal is contrary to the Code of Administrative Justice. The Council of State must make a final judgment before summer. Likewise, the government must, in the coming months, settle the tax dispute between the State and the association of Witnesses which has lasted for fifteen years.

Translation French-English by Human Rights Without Frontiers

France must reimburse 4.6 million Euros to the Jehovah's Witnesses

Le Monde.fr with AFP (05.07.2012) - On Thursday, the European Court of Human Rights (CEDH) decided that France must reimburse the French branch of the Jehovah Witnesses nearly 4.6 million Euros. This amount had been seized at the end of a reassessment of taxes owed on gifts made by faithful members of the Jehovah's Witnesses.

The court did not, however, award compensation for suffering to the Jehovah's Witnesses, who claimed one Euro in damages for each member, a total of 250,000 euros, nor did it cancel the claim for the payment of back taxes initiated in 1998. Nevertheless, the CEDH estimates that "the renunciation of the recovery would constitute an appropriate form of reparation."

In June 2011, the CEDH, headquartered at Strasbourg, had ruled that this payment of back taxes undermined freedom of religion. The repayment of taxes on the gifts made by adherents of the faith was for the period between 1993 and 1996 when such taxes went as high as 60%. The total amount under question was 45 million Euros. According to the court, article 757 of the general tax code, which the tax administration relied on to order this repayment, as well as the administration's implementation of this article, had not been expressed "with sufficient precision as to be predictable."

The lawyer for the Jehovah's Witnesses, Mr. Philippe Goni, commended this decision for recognizing that the Jehovah's Witnesses have "suffered genuine persecution" on the part of the French authorities. He issued a statement in which he declared: "It is a new victory for the Jehovah Witnesses who have been denigrated and stigmatized since 1995, the year of the first parliamentary investigative report on sects in France. The European

Court condemns this "Franco-Française" distinction between traditional religions and the so-called sects."

Reacting to the Court's decision, the Inter-ministerial Mission for Monitoring and Combating Cultic Deviances (Miviludes) served notice in a statement that it would continue "to exercise vigilance regarding the Jehovah's Witnesses because of denouncements of "sectarian deviations" that it regularly receives from former members or from relatives of members of this religious community."

Translation French-English by Human Rights Without Frontiers

MIVILUDES insists and persists in stigmatizing Jehovah's Witnesses

HRWF (09.07.2012) - On 6 July 2012, MIVILUDES issued a press release which said: "The Inter-ministerial Mission for Monitoring and Combating Cultic Deviances takes note of the court decision taken by the European Court of Human Rights on 5 July 2012 but makes clear it was a decision about a purely fiscal dispute. It will go on exercising vigilance regarding the Jehovah's Witnesses because of denouncements of "sectarian deviations" that it regularly receives from former members or from relatives of members of this religious community."

This position is rather surprising. Complaints against a group addressed to MIVILUDES, but not lodged with the police or going through judicial proceedings, are sufficient for the state agency to put the said group under scrutiny without it being informed and able to defend itself case by case before MIVILUDES, a specific arbitration commission or a court. Is the use by a state agency of denouncements the contents and the authors of which remain unknown to the accused religious group compatible with democratic principles when they are utilized to justify the implementation of a policy targeting the said group?

UN Special Rapport on Freedom of Religion or Belief Warned France in 2005

After her visit to France on 18 to 29 September 2005, the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Asma Jahangir, said in her Report dated 6 March 2006:

"112. The Special Rapporteur urges the Government to ensure that its mechanisms for dealing with these religious groups or communities of belief deliver a message based on tolerance, freedom of religion or belief and on the principle that no one can be judged for his actions other than through the appropriate judicial channels."

Collateral damage of France's anti-sect policies: societal hostility to the construction of a Mormon temple

Human Rights Without Frontiers condemns the stigmatization of the Mormons by some French media and calls upon the international community to protest as loudly as it did against the ban on the construction of a mosque with a minaret in Switzerland

HRWF (02.07.2012) - The fight of French public powers against alleged "sectarian drifts" amplified by some media leads to the public stigmatization of religious minorities as it

can be seen in the article hereafter translated by Human Rights Without Frontiers. Remember the ban on the construction of a mosque with a minaret in Switzerland and the outraged reaction of the international community.

The Shadow of the group called Anonymous hovers over the Mormon temple project

Les Nouvelles des Yvelines (20.06.2012) - As they attempt to build a temple at Chesnay, the Mormons have already dealt with the challenge of a petition with 7,000 signatures attached, as well as four appeals filed against their efforts. Now the Mormons face pressure from the members of the group called "Anonymous." Well known by the public for their actions on the internet, these activists also fight against deviant sects. They are looking into the case of 46, Boulevard Sainte-Antoine. And they are determined to succeed.

A Mormon publicity campaign. On March 17 and 18, 2012, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints at Versailles opened its doors to the public. The campaign's objective: convince the citizens of Versailles and Chesnay, who look with suspicion on the construction of a Mormon temple at 46 Boulevard Saint-Antoine at the border of their two cities. The campaign was a success. However, in the constant stream of visitors who filed through to learn more there were two individuals who came with an agenda. They are members of the now famous Anonymous movement, and they have the Mormons in their line of sight.

Two months before the incognito visit of these two individuals, the national press began to publish accounts on the Mormon temple project after a general outcry about the construction was raised among some of the population. Inevitably, the information came to the attention of one of the members of the Anonymous group and a first alert was posted on whyweprotest.net, the public forum used by some of the members of the movement.

Officially, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is not considered a sect. The Anonymous group knows that, but this is of little importance to them. For them, the Mormons pose problems. "Our apprehension with the Mormons concerns money, since the members of the Church must pay a tithe of up to 10% of their income. One should not have to pay money in order to belong to a church. There are also the racist teachings of Joseph Smith, the founder of the church, for whom the blackness of a person's soul is measured by the blackness of the skin. There is polygamy, which Mormons call plural marriage, and say officially that they no longer practice it. And finally, there is their clannishness. These are people who keep to themselves, in closed off groups, cloistering themselves from the outside world to the best of their ability. They force their members to not challenge their doctrine. All of this leads to deviance and is contrary to what we defend. We fight for individual liberties and the rights of the person," explains the author of the alert on whyweprotest.net. He pointed out that his movement is not the only group to investigate the Mormons. Without ever using the designation of the term sect, UNADFI (National Union of Associations for the Defense of Families and of the Individual) dedicated a whole page to the Mormons on its internet site. Anonymous commented, "And they are presently doing work on deviant sects."

Since the first message was posted on January 10, 2012, it has been looked at more than 5,000 times by members of the movement and a strategy has been initiated with one sole alternative in mind: "the solution would be to not build the temple." A small group of Anonymous members, about fifteen, live in the Versailles area. They are searching by every means possible to find irregularities in the case. "Were there under-the-table payments? This is what we are looking for. And for that, we have methods that other groups do not allow themselves to use. These methods are sometimes full of intrigue, sometimes debatable, but we stay within the law," warns Anonymous. The inquiry looks like it will take a while to complete. "It will last several months. Several

weeks at best," whispered the activist. But he and the other members of the cell are determined. They firmly believe that in the end they will find something. "We believe that there are shady issues. This project is estimated to cost 80 million euros. One wonders where such a sum was found for this project and why there were no consultations with the local inhabitants."

If they succeed in finding what they are looking for, the members of Anonymous will put the information at the disposal of other groups, such as Avenir 46, who oppose the building of the temple. The Anonymous member declared, "Our work is to become informed and then to notify and warn. We are not in contact with the others, but we follow their activities. What they are doing is very good. By showing that they disagree with the policies of the mayor they will succeed in stopping the temple construction. And I invite all persons who do not want the temple to be built to come forward and make their wishes known."

If they fail to prevent the temple's construction, the members of Anonymous intend to continue their fight in other ways. They have not ruled out organizing "raids," the peaceful and humorous demonstrations which they regularly hold in front of the Church of Scientology headquarters in Paris. The inhabitants of Versailles and Chesnay, both Mormon and non-Mormon, could soon see the arrival of groups of demonstrators, their faces covered by their well-known masks.

A short description of Anonymous:

"We are Anonymous. We are Legion. We do not forgive. We do not forget. Fear us." Such is the slogan of Anonymous. The movement gathers non-identified activists who fight for freedom of expression and individual freedoms. Anonymous has promoted itself in the public eye by cyber-attacks but its activities do not stop there. In France, members of Anonymous regularly organize "raids," peaceful demonstrations against deviant sects and, in particular, the Church of Scientology. In order to preserve their anonymity, members of the movement wear a Guy Fawkes mask. Guy Fawkes was an English Catholic of the 16th century who was executed for attempting to assassinate the Protestant king, James I, whom he denounced for being intolerant in his religious policies.

What the Mormons and the Mayor of Chesnay think

The Surprise. Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints assert that they "know little about the initiative but will not take it lightly." Françoise Calmels, the media representative, responded, "It is necessary to look into all of this. Our rule is to dialogue with all people. We will see if we can discuss with these individuals. But if they do not want to listen, we cannot force them to do so. We live in a democracy. Regardless, the project is still in progress."

As for the mayor, he sees no reason to worry. He confided, "They can search the permit in every way possible! Let them have at it! There is no cause for concern."

Four appeals concerning the administrative tribunal are still being considered.

Translation French-English by Human Rights Without Frontiers

Sectarian deviations of Muslim groups: MIVILUDES & FECRIS keep silent

HRWF (02.04.2012) - Once more, MIVILUDES and FECRIS' affiliates in France have failed to pursue the objective they claim to pursue: the fight against so-called "sectarian deviations" in Muslim groups.

In their eyes, rejecting the laïcité philosophy and conspiring against the Republic and training for armed struggle and aiming to establish a caliphate and to implement the sharia law are not sectarian deviations as they turn a blind eye to these practices and a deaf ear to their interior minister's warnings about Forsane Alizza and other similar Muslim groups.

Would they have been silent and inactive if just one of these charges had been brought against the non-Muslim groups they usually demonize?

These double standards clearly show that MIVILUDES and FECRIS' affiliates in France are umbrella organizations for several groups of interest having each their own agenda. See below the warnings and actions of Claude Guéant, interior minister, in an article of Le Monde that was published on 29 February (Translation by HRWF).

Claude Guéant bans a radical Islamist group

The French interior minister, Claude Guéant, had warned in the past that his fight against radical Islam would at some point lead to the banning of an Islamist group and the deportation of an extremist imam. As predicted, the decree outlawing a group known as Forsane Alizza (Knights of Pride) was to be signed at the Council of Ministers on Wednesday, February 29. The deportation of the imam, on the other hand, was postponed indefinitely.

The decision to ban the group is the first time that such a ruling has been handed down against an Islamist movement. The targeted group, "made up of about a hundred persons," according to the interior minister, is most notably accused of "training for an armed struggle and conspiring to overthrow the republican form of government". The minister specified that "Forsane Alizza is a paramilitary group," adding that, "by its call for the establishment of a caliphate and the implementation of sharia law (Islamic law) in France, the group undermines the democratic regime." Forsane Alizza, which, according to the declarations of its leading official, Mohamed Achamlane, "rejects secularism", became famous for its demonstrations against the law which forbid the wearing of the full veil and, more recently, in support of fundamentalist Catholics who protested theater pieces that they felt were blasphemous. On February 10, Mr. Achamlane was sentenced on appeal to four months suspended sentence for trying to incite others to racial discrimination; he was prosecuted for calling for a boycott against a McDonald's restaurant, accusing the restaurant chain of serving Israel, and for having destroyed and called for the burning of a penal code, in which, according to Mr. Achamlane, "there was not one line which protects Muslims."

The group, which advertises itself through video on its own website, acknowledges that the transition "to armed combat is possible if Islamophobia intensifies." By this proposition, it tries to recruit "soldiers": "If you enjoy combat sports, then you are the type of person we are looking for, inshallah." According to the group's website, Forsane Alizza's leader promises that banning the group will lead to "Muslims separating themselves from the rest of society."

"Old man"

As for Imam Mohammed Hammami, the deportation commission, which was supposed to gather on February 7 to rule on the fate of the 76-year-old Tunisian, will not meet again until May 15, a delay granted due to his request for legal aid. The possible return to Tunisia of this Muslim cleric, accused by public officials of having advocated "death by flogging" for adulterous women and for having given vent to violently anti-Semitic and discriminatory hate-speech, cannot occur during the presidential election campaign, as the interior minister had hoped.

As one of the leading officials of the Faith and Practice Association, a branch of the ultra-orthodox Tabligh movement, Mr. Hammami participated in the creation of the French Council of Muslim Faith (CFCM) in 2003. One of his sons currently holds a post within the CFCM. The CFCM has taken notice of the deportation request, emphasizing that the words attributed to this imam "are in total contradiction to the commitments of the Faith and Practice Association". Some leading Muslims are surprised that such an attack on this "old man" is taking place now, given that his ultra-orthodox approach to Islam has been well known for many years.

The interior minister, it seems, wanted to show that Place Beauveau (the Ministry of the Interior) has, "since the Islamist victory in the Tunisian elections", been monitoring the more radical opinions of certain imams. Experts on Islam have generally noted a cautious tone in the public expressions of religious radicals and stress that many among them are French citizens and cannot therefore be deported. For them, the interior minister pointed out in *Le Monde* on January 3, "it is the penal code that would apply". In the last ten years, 34 imams have been deported.

The President of MIVILUDES, Georges Fenech, convicted

The reputation of both MIVILUDES and of Georges Fenech, its president, is tarnished. The defamatory text was published in an annual report of MIVILUDES.

Paris Tribune (08.06.2012) – Georges Fenech is the president of an interministerial mission established by the Prime Minister, MIVILUDES, an acronym for Mission interministérielle de vigilance et de lutte contre les dérives sectaires (Interministerial Mission for Monitoring and Combatting Cultic Deviances). He was appointed to this position by François Fillon in 2008. His appointment was renewed in 2011.

A former deputy in the National Assembly, he is also the UMP (Union for a Popular Movement) candidate in the 11th legislative district of the Rhône (Townships Givors Mornant, Saint-Symphorien d'Ozon, Condrieu). He is running against the candidate from the Nouveau Centre (New Center) Party, the incumbent, Raymond Durand.

Fenech, the president of Miviludes, was convicted by the Paris criminal court on June 1, 2012 for public defamation.

The defamation case originated because of a defamatory accusation published in the 2009 annual report of Miviludes, describing activities for the year 2008, implicating an association of lay Catholics—the French Society for the Defense of Tradition, Family and Property (TFP).

Fenech was found guilty. The period of appeal has not expired.

The 17th Chamber of the Criminal Court of Paris, specializing in cases concerning the press, has withheld the defamatory character of the incriminating words in the report.

The report was submitted to the Prime Minister. The 17th chamber stressed the lack of accuracy in the report's verifications as well as the lack of restraint in its expressions. The court also emphasized that a state agency such as MIVILUDES should not use vague approximations in its work.

It is fair to say that the credibility of MIVILUDES and of Georges Fenech has been tainted and diminished.

Translation French-English by HRWF Int'l

MIVILUDES' raids in Catholic communities

HRWF (07.06.2012) - Since the presidency of MIVILUDES (Interministerial Mission of Vigilance and Fight against Sectarian Drifts) by Georges Fenech, several small Catholic communities have increasingly been targeted, the last one being "Amour and Miséricorde" (Love and Mercy). On 11 April 2012, investigators of the research section of the gendarmerie in Dijon have stopped several members of that group. One of them was put under examination.

In 2010, the Institute for Religion and Public Policy (Washington) made a statement at the OSCE/ODIHR Human Dimension Implementation Meeting entitled "Repression of Christian Communities in France". See below a large excerpt of it (the titles in the text are from HRWF).

Raid at the Catholic community "Amour and Miséricorde"

In December 2008, Mr. Fenech adopted a new mode of intervention on the ground: he organized unannounced "visits" of a delegation of MIVILUDES in religious communities, as was explained in the 2008 and 2009 Annual Reports of MIVILUDES.¹

But what is not mentioned in the Reports is that these visits were done by Mr. Fenech with journalists who were never introduced as such to the concerned communities who opened their doors in good faith and felt betrayed. All the visits were followed by media blitz conveying serious accusations against the concerned groups stigmatized as "sectarian movements".

The usual scenario of these "visits" – or rather raids – is the following: Mr. Fenech arrives with a group of around 10-15 persons, including a journalist from a newspaper so the story gets published with pictures, or the Television. The delegation goes to the religious community without being announced and requests to get in to ask some questions. Most of the approached movements accepted but after regretted.²

A small Catholic community in the East of France, Amour et Miséricorde (Love and Mercy), which used to gather around its founder who had visions of the Virgin Mary every month, announced its dissolution after a "visit" of MIVILUDES. Newspaper Le Progrès reported on 18 December 2008:

Dominique Balestrat, owner of the land on which the community was living, who has been himself a member of the group for ten years, feels incomprehension and sadness. He says: "We welcomed Georges Fenech, he said he was not coming for

¹ See p. 171: http://www.miviludes.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/Miviludes_Rapport_2008.pdf and page 296 : http://www.miviludes.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/rapport2009_mise_en_ligne.pdf

² For specific testimonies, see the video through the link posted on the web site of the Centre d'Information et de Conseil des Nouvelles Spiritualités (CICNS): http://www.sectes-infos.net/Moulin_des_Vallees.htm

an investigation but only to meet with us. And we are now bombarded with slander. He did not come as an enemy. He came as a traitor. He used the media to crush us when there is nothing to crush. We were a dozen people here. We are not a sect. We are Catholics who wanted to live in community”.

Authorities of the Catholic Church put under pressure

Although – or because – the group had good relations with the local Archbishop, Mr. Fenech met with him to try to convince him to withdraw his support to the members of the community. Newspaper La Gazette de Côte d’Or published the following interview of Mr. Fenech on 11 December 2008:

Did you meet with his Grace Minnerath?

Yes, at my request. Actually because the members of this community claim that they have support in their faith from the Archbishop of Dijon. We had a long talk on this issue. He did not have all the elements in hands to have a complete picture of this movement which, in our opinion, poses some problems.

What was his reaction?

He seemed to be surprised. We told him in particular that in this community Juliano Verbard did some initiation and then became Le Petit Lys d’Amour (Little Lily of Love) in the Island of La Réunion. There, he replicated the practices, as concerns the songs, the liturgy, the visions... Later on, all this ended with the kidnapping of a child. I am not saying that there is a link between Amour et Miséricorde and Le Petit Lys d’Amour, but I say that the inspiration of Petit Lys d’Amour has come from Amour et Miséricorde.

Following this visit of MIVILUDES, the authorities of the Catholic Church were attacked in the media and summoned to justify their non intervention by some relatives of members of the community who refused their choice of life.³ MIVILUDES justified the role it awarded to itself saying it had received complaints from relatives of (consenting) “victims” under subjection by the community, complaining about the beliefs of the group in the visions of the Virgin Mary and family break-ups due to their choice of life in the community.

The visit was reported in the following terms in the conclusion of the 2008 Annual Report of MIVILUDES:

In addition, according to the elements in the hands of MIVILUDES, the Ecclesiastical authorities, although alerted by families who sought their support to convince persons under subjection to free themselves up, did not seem either to have understood the degree of sufferings involved and the dangers implied, or to be in a position to intervene.

It is in this context that the President of MIVILUDES went there, asked to go in the community and met with several members as well as public and Ecclesiastical authorities. Following this visit, which was widely covered by the press, the association Amour et Miséricorde self dissolved.⁴

A well orchestrated campaign to re-launch judiciary proceedings

³ See article in Le Bien Public, 22 December 2008:
<http://www.bienpublic.com/fr/permalien/article/1590341/L-archeveche-de-Dijon-embarrasse.html>

⁴ Report 2008 pp. 171-172:
http://www.miviludes.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/Miviludes_Rapport_2008.pdf

Hence MIVILUDES sets itself up as righter of wrongs for internal conflicts of the Catholic Church. To this end it uses the same means as with other communities it considers as "sectarian movements". Under the pretext that it has received one or several "denouncements" by persons unhappy of the choice of life of their relatives, members of a religious community, it organizes a "raid" in order to nail down the said community.

This policy of intrusion of a State body in the business of Churches is all the more alarming that it is developing: arguably in a near future, relatives or friends of nuns and monks might call on MIVILUDES to settle conflicts and complain of family break-ups due to their choice of life.

It is in total opposition to the approach of tolerance and dialog recommended by the UN Special Rapporteur that MIVILUDES goes on the ground as an anti-sect fighter: like it did with "Amour et Miséricorde", MIVILUDES creates a media blitz, visits the local ADFI (anti-sect association) in order to collect some accusing elements and then meets with the local government representatives in order to incite them to take repressive measures against the targeted religious community.

The media coverage is also designed at re-launching pending judiciary proceedings. In the case of "Amour et Miséricorde", a retired colonel, Mr. Pierre Boucher-Doigneau, whose wife and daughters had left to join this group, had filed a complaint in 2004 for abuse of weakness. An investigating judge (Judge of Instruction, JOI) from Dijon dismissed the charges against the community in July 2008 and Mr. Doigneau filed an appeal. The General Prosecutor pleaded for the reopening of the investigation and the Chamber of Instruction of the Appeal Court was to render its decision on 18 March 2009.

Therefore at the time of the largely mediatised visit of MIVILUDES to the community, the judiciary decision was pending. This type of intervention of MIVILUDES is designed once more to put pressure on the judges and prosecutors so they prosecute and convict religious communities considered as "sectarian movements".

Raid at the Catholic community "Les Béatitudes"

The same scenario took place in February 2009 in the Catholic community "Les Béatitudes". Created in France in 1973, this religious community is today established on the five continents, in 65 dioceses. Being an international association of believers governed by pontifical law (directly and exclusively under the authority of the Holy See) since 2002, the community reports to the Pontifical Council for the Laity and not anymore to its diocese of origin. This explains that in case of problem, the French Bishops refer it to Rome.⁵ It was given this status in order to recognize its international dimension and take into account its presence in numerous countries around the world. But the status was given only on a trial basis by the Vatican in 2002 for a period of five years. Its final recognition has not been achieved yet and the temporary status has been extended for two years.

A delegation of MIVILUDES visited the national and international headquarters of "Les Béatitudes" in Blagnac in the South of France, and conducted a « hearing » of the members of the community in Bonnetcombe in February 2009. This term "hearing" used by the media to report on the event⁶ is really telling on the confusion which is maintained by Mr. Fenech between his mission at the MIVILUDES and his former functions of Judge of Instruction; the substantial difference being that the present "raids" of MIVILUDES are done without any mandate and outside any judicial proceedings.

⁵ <http://www.la-croix.com/article/index.jsp?docId=2341567&rubId=4079>

⁶ <http://www.ladepeche.fr/article/2009/02/20/562105-Beatitudes-enquete-sur-de-possibles-derives-sectaires.html>



The residents of Bonnacombe with the journalists of TV Channel 13e rue⁷

Like with "Amour et Miséricorde", MIVILUDES' delegation met with families of (consenting) "victims" who complained of family break-ups, during an "important meeting which took place at the ADFI of Toulouse" according to the 2009 Report of MIVILUDES. Then the delegation met with elected representatives and the Archbishop of Toulouse. The 2009 Report indicates that "the national and local press widely covered the visit".⁸

Media campaign to trigger judicial proceedings

Georges Fenech stated to the press that he requested the Prefect (local government representative) to verify the functioning of the community and the lawfulness of the volunteering done by its members, suggesting that they were financially exploited, and concluded that "surveillance" by MIVILUDES was needed. He was on one hand implicitly accusing the community to exert mental subjection on its members and on the other hand he was blaming a confusion between religious practice of congregation and of consecrated life – community of life of lay persons, consecrated ones, friars and families – when an application for the status of congregation was being examined by the Office of Cults at the Ministry of Interior.

After some talk with MIVILUDES' delegation, two town councillors decided to request to the town council of Blagnac to cancel its (majority) decision of May 2008 to give to the Prefect a favourable opinion to the community's application for congregation status and to adopt an unfavourable one.

MIVILUDES' intervention resulted, as in the case of "Amour et Miséricorde", in accusations against the authorities of the Catholic Church for their alleged non intervention. A witness commented in an article published in newspaper La Dépêche of 20 February 2009: "I had hoped that there would be the same interest from the Church but I remain disappointed that a certain number of doors remained closed when the Ecclesiastical institution should feel the first concerned. It is about time that the Church authorities take the means to work with Public authorities, so that the victims and the informers [*those who denounce*] on sectarian drifts do not have to do the work themselves. It is highly regrettable that the Church authorities leave it up to the French government to deal with their insufficiencies; they should come out of their meetings and come on the ground like Mr. Fenech has done who not only showed some interest for the sufferings of the people, but who also acted".

Reaction of the Catholic Church

⁷ <http://www.ladepeche.fr/article/2009/02/20/562105-Beatitudes-enquete-sur-de-possibles-derives-sectaires.html>

⁸ Pp. 296-297: http://www.miviludes.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/rapport2009_mise_en_ligne.pdf

However, the French Bishops' Conference had not remained inactive and several meetings had taken place in Rome in 2008 with the Pontifical Council for the Laity attended by Cardinal Bernard Panafieu, former Archbishop of Marseille who accompanied the community, as well as His Lordship Pierre-Marie Carré, Bishop of Albi. At the end of these meetings, it was announced that the Holy See expected each state of life to be well "defined" inside the community: lay persons, consecrated men and women, friars, families... and that it was heading towards the creation of a feminine religious institute, a masculine institute and an association of families. The community had also taken into account a certain number of recommendations, like the non mixing of spiritual and therapeutical care in order to respond to another accusation of "psycho-spiritual practices".

Emeritus Archbishop of Marseille considered in December 2008 - two months before MIVILUDES' "raid" in February 2009 - that this "crisis of growth" had allowed "Les Béatitudes" (1,100 members around the world and a hundred priests) to "evaluate the situation and to readjust (their) orientations", in order to implant their "dynamism" in the life of the Church.⁹

Therefore the accusations put forward by Mr. Fenech in February 2009 to justify an "investigation" on the ground with wide media coverage in response to the alleged faults of the Church were inappropriate and of total bad faith.¹⁰

MIVILUDES' undue interference in religious communities

The intrusion of MIVILUDES in matters of organization of religious communities represents a violation of the duty of neutrality of the French State. As concerns the official recognition of congregations, MIVILUDES is not the Central Office for Cults and is not entitled to decide on communities' applications; Mr. Fenech should not intervene with elected representatives or media in order to influence the answer given to the pending applications for congregation status. MIVILUDES is not the judicial institution either and Mr. Fenech should not force his way into communities without any mandate and proceed to "hearings". As concerns actual judiciary proceedings which might be pending, the extremely mediatised actions of MIVILUDES can only harm the impartiality and independence of justice.

Mr. Fenech uses his title of President of an interministerial body to give himself prerogatives which are not provided by official texts. Members of a community in Brittany he "visited" addressed a letter to the Prefect summarizing the problem in the following terms:¹¹

Mr. Prefect, we solicit your help, in order to understand how Mr. Fenech can legally intrude into a Monastery, under the cover of a ministerial investigation, in order to actually help journalists make a report we did not authorize?

In these conditions, one wonders about the real missions which should be entrusted to MIVILUDES and the very necessity of such an official body.

Beyond the « cow-boy » behaving of its President, MIVILUDES poses a true problem of religious freedom.

Deep concerns about MIVILUDES

⁹ <http://www.la-croix.com/article/index.jsp?docId=2358977&rubId=4078>

¹⁰ <http://www.ladepeche.fr/article/2009/02/20/562105-Beatitudes-enquete-sur-de-possibles-derives-sectaires.html>

¹¹ See the letter of protest to the Prefect concerning the "raid" at the Moulin des Vallées : http://www.sectes-infos.net/Moulin_des_Vallees.htm

The fact that the volunteering of friars or consecrated Christians is being challenged is very alarming.

The fact that the Church is attacked for its "psycho-spiritual practices" when it gives assistance as a Church is also very alarming. In France like in Rome, amongst the Catholic Church, people thought that "Les Béatitudes" were doing a good job, in particular with very marginalized or very poor populations.¹² The fact that certain people have complained that their relatives have estranged and chosen to live in community is not an argument to label it as "sectarian movement". The European Court of Human Rights in its June 2010 *Jehovah's Witnesses of Moscow* decision noted that:

Nevertheless, as long as self-dedication to religious matters is the product of the believer's independent and free decision and however unhappy his or her family members may be about that decision, the ensuing estrangement cannot be taken to mean that the religion caused the break-up in the family. Quite often, the opposite is true: it is the resistance and unwillingness of non-religious family members to accept and to respect their religious relative's freedom to manifest and practice his or her religion that is the source of conflict.

And the Court reaffirmed the right to conduct one's life according to one's own religious choices, whatever the family reaction can be.

Psychological help is inherent to spiritual help; etymologically "psukhê" in Greek means the spirit, the soul. If Churches are accused because of the help of their friars or consecrated on the ground, then society is going to have a lot of trouble, because without the spiritual dimension and the religious moral values psychological help is deprived of a great support and doomed to lots of failures.

The reality is that a certain lobby is actively pushing that psychological help could not be dispensed by religions. Atheists of the CCMM, who sit at the Orientation Council of MIVILUDES, have prepared their new fight in this area by posting the following call for testimonies on their web site:¹³

CCMM Action Group of victims of the psycho-spiritual:

The necessity to be present and visible on the ground of respect of human and child's rights, of individual freedoms and secularism imposes itself today forcefully to the victims of psycho-spiritual drifts.

The gathering of direct and collateral victims of drifts observed in the Christian religions in particular has become a necessity for the CCMM.

This Action Group assigns itself the mission to gather testimonies in order, in particular, to be a proposition force with the Ecclesiastical and political authorities, to provide them with indisputable arguments and to give them the means to act and take their responsibilities.

To this end, CCMM has set up a private support group:

1. telephone number: ---
2. e-mail address through the CCMM web site : ---

An organized attack is being launched against Christian communities with this call for testimonies and the stated intention to call Ecclesiastic authorities to account.

¹² <http://www.la-croix.com/article/index.jsp?docId=2341567&rubId=4079>

¹³ <http://www.ccmm.asso.fr/spip.php?article3130>

The "visit" to "Les Béatitudes" community indicates that MIVILUDES has started to materialize these new orientations of "vigilance and fight against sectarian drifts" with Catholic communities.

Conclusion

The intervention of a State body like MIVILUDES in religious matters is very alarming. This intervention is to be more and more frequent as Mr. Fenech repeated forcefully in media interviews.

The evolution of MIVILUDES over the past two years reveals a widening of the scope of religious communities targeted by the fight against "sectarian movements", by including in particular Christian Churches. The fight against certain beliefs is now openly stated, the followers of religious communities being considered as (consenting) victims of mental manipulation.

The "raids" in Catholic communities based on accusations of family break-ups and mental subjection are very alarming. Arguably in a near future, relatives or friends of nuns and monks might call on MIVILUDES to settle conflicts and complain of family break-ups due to their choice of life.

All the usual accusations against "sectarian movements" have been made during these "raids" and are susceptible to develop further against Catholic communities: exploitation of members through volunteering, abuse of weakness of persons under mental subjection, etc.

The repressive system created by Mr. Fenech is in place: repository of accusatory records on religious communities made available to Judges and Prosecutors, raids in the communities with wide media coverage to put pressure on local elected officials, public and Ecclesiastic authorities, and eventually obtain their dismantling.

Freedom of religion, which pursuant to the European Convention of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights encompasses freedom to practice the religion of one's own choice and to associate in community to this end, is seriously jeopardized by such a policy in France.

A Canada-based religious group shocked by its blacklisting in France

April 23rd, 2012

Registered

To Mr.Fenech,
MIVILUDES
13, rue Vaneau
75007 Paris
France

Sir,

I am a Canadian citizen, President of the Essenia Foundation.

The Essenia Foundation is a Christian-Essene church incorporated under the "Religious Corporation Act" of Quebec (R.S.Q., chapter C-71). It is recognized as a charity since April 13, 2006 by the Canada Revenue Agency (Registration number:859930364RR0001).

I just found your 2010 report to Mr Francois Fillon, Prime Minister of France. On pages 84 and 85 of the report, you refer to the Essenia Foundation.

Among other things, you write: "The movement of the Essenes or Essenia Foundation [...] pursues numerous associative and commercial activities on the basis of a doctrinary message founded on apocalyptic theses. This movement is supported by a doctrine oriented towards a syncretic and eschatological trend with an apocalyptic and esoteric tendency of a New Age type. [...] Vigilance in regard to this group is motivated the use of numerous New Age topics, impregnated with references to end of the world theories and unfological themes. [...] This movement prophesies the end of the world for DECEMBER 12, 2012, DATE OF WINTER SOILSTICE"

As President of the Board of Directors of the Essenia Foundation, I vigorously oppose your assertions and want to bring the following clarifications:

- Contrary to what you forward, the Essenia Foundation does not teach, defend or promote any doctrine founded on "apocalyptic theses" or on "unfological themes." We absolutely do not prophesy "the end of the world for December 21st, 2012" as you pretend (or for any other date for that matter).

- These gratuitous statements are totally devoid of any basis; they are only the mere fruit of the imagination of your services. I wonder how such errors can appear in an official report of your agency to the Prime Minister of France

The Essenia Foundation is a Christian-Essene church, an ancient tradition having among its foundations the words of the Gospels and Jesus Christ. Our church is recognized in Canada, the USA and in Holland. The pastor Olivier Martin (whose author name is Olivier Manitar) is only one representative among others of our tradition.

Concerned by respect for the laws, the fundamental rights of each individual and preservation of human values indispensable to life on earth such as respect, brotherhood and wisdom, the Essenia Foundations condemns without any reservation and ambiguity the practices that are contrary to human dignity, to the integrity of the individuals and ownership of property. It works peacefully whilst prohibiting itself from any manifestation susceptible of interfering with public order or the authority of the State.

The Essenia Foundation is not what call a "Sect". Our members are totally and perfectly free to leave our church or our teachings at any time, without being harassed in any manner whatsoever. We never impose on our members a dogma or a one-way thinking, and we respect the plurality of religious and philosophical beliefs. We never present to our members the thought or the work of any of our representative as the only expression of truth. We do not use any method of persuasion or manipulation that could undermine the free choice or the will of the individual.

The Essenia Foundation does not impose any particular lifestyle on its members, be it in their eating or other, and it does not engage them in any practice or speculation of sexual order. It defends family and in no way induces its member not break with their family or social environment. It respects medicine and encourages its members to use it.

The Essenia Foundation is heir to an ancient tradition and its only aim is to pass on its traditional teachers and promote all the values of authentic Christianity: love of others, respect, tolerance, non-sectarianism, non-violence, family, human rights, and a peaceful

and happy society. We venerate individual freedom, within the limit of the respect for the law and the freedom of others.

We disapprove of suicide and condemn all forms of violence, be they individual or collective. We reprove anti-Semitism and oppression of any minorities (religious, ethnic, racial, political, etc.). We advocate a democratic and pluralistic society, real human progress. We recognize that diversity is enrichment.

We encourage our members to be positive and beneficial actors for their family, those around them, their work and society in general. We induce them to raise children in non-fanaticism, non-sectarianism, openness to others and the world, happiness and joie de vivre. We condemn any breach to the laws on schooling and education.

To conclude, I am deeply astonished and concerned that a governmental agency of a country like France can write, without any verification whatsoever, such lies about organisation. I was never personally interrogated by your services and, to my knowledge; none of our members have been approached in that regard either.

I am a rational and sensible person and I feel profoundly insulted by the gratuitous and silly statements that appear in your report. Along with me, you are insulting and discrimination our members in the whole world. Know that we absolutely do not recognise ourselves in what you are saying about us.

Many of our French members have let us know about a distinctive feature of fighting against religious freedom and against freedom of conciseness. They havetold us about a real climate of "witch hunt," that reeks of inquisition. I am today personally very sad to seeby myself that what they are saying is true and that unfortunately France can no longer say it that is the "country of human rights."

Religious freedom is one of the foundations of Canadian society, and I am proud of that. I hope that through the appropriate communication you will make it so that your errors are rectified in the eyes of the French public. Otherwise, you would only prove to the world that your agency is an odious instrument of defamation, ostracism, and even incitement to hatred. Yet isn't it the face of sectarianism that you are supposed to fight? Today is it prohibited in France to believe in God outside of the "official" religions?

In the absence of a favourable response from you, know that I will refer the case to our international lawyers.

Sincerely,

Pier Antoine Marier

President of the Essenia Foundation and CEO

CC:

The President of the French Republic, Nicolas Sarkozy

The Prime Minister of France, Francois Fillon

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper, Prime Minster of Canada

The Honourable John Baird, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Canada, Office of Religious Freedom

The Honourable Marc Lortie, Ambassador of Canada in France

The Honourable Charles H. Rivkin, Ambassador of the United States of America In France

The Honourable Suzan Johnson Cook, Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, U.S. State Department

The Honourable Heath Shuler, House of Representatives, Congress of the United States, Co-chair of the House International Religious Freedom Caucus

The Honourable Trent Franks, House of Representatives, Congress of the United States, Co-chair of the House of International Religious Freedom Caucus

Mrs. Navanethem Pillay, High Commission for Human Rights, United Nations

Mr. William P. Mumma, President, The Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, USA

Mr. Jeffrey J. Teagle, International Association for Religious Freedom, United Kingdom

Rev Orlanda Brugnola IARF New York

MIVILUDES and the Ministry of National Education take new initiatives against "sectarian drifts"

HRWF (23.04.2012) – France has taken new initiatives to prevent "sectarian drifts" in the health and school education sectors.

New MIVILUDES manual on "Health and Sectarian Drifts"

MIVILUDES has just published a new manual entitled "Health and sectarian drifts".

It is designed for health professionals to warn them against so-called sectarian drifts. The Preface explains that promises and recipes of healing, well-being and personal development are at the heart of sectarian drifts.

It includes a list of the most widespread "pseudo therapies" as Annex 1. It contains such names as Ayurvedic (traditional Indian medicine), biomagnetism, energetic medicine, nature cures, relaxation therapy...

However, the criteria given in the chapter "How does one fall under the undue influence of a therapeutic guru?" show that the concept of "sectarian drifts" is applied much more broadly and could concern religious minorities since it mentions as approaches by "pseudo" therapists "a seducing approach through an offer of personal enhancement, of spirituality or therapy".

Pursuant to another chapter "How to recognize a charlatan or a sectarian pseudo therapist?", a person should be suspected of sectarian drifts when he/she:

- criticizes conventional medicine or the treatments that your qualified health team has proposed,
- incites you to stop your treatment,
- promises you miraculous healing where conventional medicine failed,
- puts forward beneficial effects impossible to be assessed, such as "improvement of your karma" or "circulation of internal energies",
- asks you to commit yourself by paying in advance a number of sessions,
- offers free sessions for you to try such or such method,
- recommends you to buy devices supposed to detect negative energies or products presented as miraculous, often at exorbitant prices, not reimbursed by Social Security,

- promises you a global care which is supposed to act through the same technique on your mind, your body and even all sorts of disorders,
- presents you a new vision of the world using terms such as: cosmic waves, lunar cycles, vibratory dimension, purification, energies, cosmos, conscience....,
- uses a very complex pseudo-scientific language or on the contrary pretends having discovered an extremely simple means of action,
- incites you to break up with your family, your doctor, your relations, to help your healing.

Health professionals (doctors, nurses, etc.) are asked to use the above list to interrogate their patients in case of doubt on the existence of a sectarian therapeutic drift.

If they suspect such drift, they have to report it to MIVILUDES and to their national health professional associations, the details of which are given in the manual: associations of medical doctors, pharmacists, midwives, dentists, masseuses, physical therapists, nurses, podiatrists, chiropractors.

They should also refer their patients to MIVILUDES and to anti-sect groups such as UNADFI, CCMM and the Association Alert to Induced False Memories, and they should advise them that they can file criminal suits.

New Circular of the Ministry of National Education

A new Circular has been published on 5 April 2012 by the Ministry and addressed to education authorities of primary and high schools entitled "Prevention and Fight against Sectarian Risks".

It states that the national education agents in charge of this subject are coordinated at national level by a Mission, the National Mission of Prevention of Sectarian Phenomena in Education (MPPS), which is under the legal affairs direction at the Ministry of Education and which coordinates with other Ministries through MIVILUDES.

For the full efficiency of this Mission, the concept of sectarian drift has to be clarified to the national education agents.

Then the Circular provides the following explanation:

"A situation of sectarian risk, for a child, is therefore the one in which some views and practices are imposed on him with the exception of any other views or practice. This situation is likely to harm his intellectual development, his social integration and finally his attainment of autonomy. The risk concerns not only the content of the knowledge passed on, the possibility of access to the values and pluralism of democratic societies, but also the possibility for the child to develop and exert a critical mind, an independent judgment. The context can be family, or even community: the child is then likely to be under the undue influence of views and practices threatening his education; or extra-family: the child is then likely to be subjected to views and practices which can be harmful to him either: - at school (through the teacher, his friends, an association delivering services at school or distributed literature), or at tutoring associations or during a stay with a family abroad".

Pursuant to such a definition, catechism given to children by Catholic parents should be prohibited. This constitutes a direct violation of the right of parents to raise their children according to their own beliefs protected by the European Convention on Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

The Circular also mentions that "units for the collection, processing and assessment of worrying situations" ("cellules de recueil, de traitement et d'évaluation des informations préoccupantes" (CRIP)) have been created in each of the French Departments (regions). Pursuant to a law of 5 March 2007, the Presidents of the General Councils (at the head of the Departments) are now in charge of "the collect, processing and assessment, at any time and from whatever source, of worrying information on minors who are in danger or liable to be" instead of previously being in charge of the collection of information on mistreated minors. (Article L226-3 of the Code of Social Action and Families)

This has been done at MIVILUDES' instigation.

In the 2009 MIVILUDES annual report, its President explained that a law of 5 March 2007 modified Article 375 of the Civil Code, making it possible for the judicial authorities to order a special educational assistance not only when a child's health, security, morality or conditions of education are in danger like the Article used to provide, but also when the conditions of a child's "physical, affective, intellectual and social development are seriously endangered". These new criteria are designed to cover "situations of sectarian subjection" where the child "has blossomed, works well at school and does not complain about anything" but has a "univocal vision of the world" referred to by Mr. Fenech.

Pursuant to the same law of 5 March 2007 (Article L226-4 of the Code of Social Action and Families), the President of a General Council who gets information from the units above mentioned should report without delay to the Public Prosecutor if a minor is in danger pursuant to Article 375 of the Civil Code when the family refuses the intervention of the services of social aid to minors or when it appears impossible to assess the danger situation.

France detains 19 suspected Islamic extremists

The Associated Press (30.03.12) - French police detained 19 people Friday as they launched a crackdown on suspected Islamist extremists in cities around the country, the French president said, promising more raids to come.

Tensions are high following a spate of killings in southern France by a radical Islamist that left seven people dead and two wounded and ended up with police killing the gunman last week after a 32-hour standoff.

President Nicolas Sarkozy gave no details about the reasons for Friday's arrests or what the detainees were suspected of.

"It's in connection with a form of Islamist radicalism," Sarkozy said on Europe-1 radio. "There will be other operations that will continue and that will allow us to expel from our national territory a certain number of people who have no reason to be here."

Sarkozy said he didn't know whether the 19 detainees were part of any network.

A police investigator told The Associated Press that the anti-terrorist section of the Criminal Brigade detained five men before dawn in Paris who had suspected links to an Islamist movement. Weapons were also seized, said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity in line with the department's rules.

The other arrests took place in Toulouse, Marseille, Nantes and Lyon, the official said, adding that these raids were not linked to the inquiry into the slayings in Toulouse and Montauban.

In Nantes, the head of Forsane Alizza, a radical Muslim group that formed two years ago, was among the detained. In October 2011, a preliminary inquiry was opened into the Forsane Alizza organization, and the French Interior Ministry broke up the group in February.

Mohamed Merah, a 23-year-old Frenchman, claimed responsibility for the shootings that left seven dead. Merah, who espoused radical Islamist views and said he had links to al-Qaida, was buried near Toulouse on Thursday.

Three Jewish schoolchildren, three paratroopers and a rabbi were killed in the worst terrorist attacks in France since the 1990s. The slayings revived concerns about homegrown Islamist radicals carrying out violence.

French Muslims have worried about a backlash after Merah's attacks, and French leaders have urged the public not to equate Islam with terrorism.

But concerns about radical Islam are high, and the government on Thursday banned a string of international Muslim clerics from entering France for a conference of a fundamentalist Islamic group.

Sarkozy is locked into a tough battle for re-election ahead of the first round April 22 presidential vote. For years he has made law and order one of his signature themes. "It's our duty to guarantee the security of the French people. We have no choice. It's absolutely indispensable," he said.

In France, halal meat drama enters election campaign

Washington Post (06.03 2012) - In a bitterly divisive presidential election campaign, France is once again torn by an uncomfortable struggle over the place of Muslims in a society pledged to secularism but deeply rooted in Christianity.

After a disputed law to ban full-face Muslim veils, the latest chapter in the long-running drama has flared over non-Muslims who might unknowingly eat halal meat, or meat from animals slaughtered according to Islamic tradition. As with the veil debate, the concern over slaughtering practices reflects a widely shared irritation against the growing number of Muslims who defy France's traditional majority by insisting on their own customs and dress codes.

The confrontation between traditional Muslim ways and Europe's Christian heritage has erupted in several European countries as the number of Muslims increases across the continent because of continuing immigration and the customary large families of Muslim immigrants.

But it is particularly raw in France. This is true in part because it has emerged as an issue in the election campaign. But it is also because, with Europe's largest Muslim population, France has a number of urban and suburban areas where Muslims are a majority and find it easy to live according to their traditions without seeking to integrate into French society.

The number of Muslims in France has never been established scientifically because it is illegal here to ask people to identify themselves by race or religion. The Interior Ministry, backed by academic researchers, estimates the number of those born into Muslim families at more than 5 million. But some Muslim leaders have suggested that illegal

immigrants are undercounted and the real tally is closer to 6 million, although many of them do not practice their faith.

Tension on the table

The spark for the latest round of invective was a claim by Marine Le Pen, presidential candidate of the far-right National Front, that all the meat consumed by Parisians is halal and that millions of French people are consuming halal meat without knowing it.

President Nicolas Sarkozy at first dismissed the claim as nonsense, and butchers agreed. But sensing a campaign issue worth hammering on, he then called Saturday for labels on all meat describing how the animals were slaughtered. A recent poll said halal meat was the No. 1 worry of the French people, he told reporters while explaining his shift.

Sarkozy's main adversary, Francois Hollande of the Socialist Party, accused the president of banging on Muslims to gain National Front votes and called for "restraint." Hollande said the only real concern should be that animals are slaughtered in humane and sanitary conditions and promised to make sure that is the case "in cooperation with the professionals."

Against that background, Interior Minister Claude Gueant, a key Sarkozy lieutenant, declared that non-French Muslim residents, if they are allowed to vote in local elections as proposed by Hollande, could gain a majority in town councils and impose halal meat in school cafeterias. His warning, repeated several times, was denounced as a scare tactic by Hollande's campaign and repudiated even by some Sarkozy supporters.

"I have already said that the clash of civilizations is not my cup of tea," said Foreign Minister Alain Juppe. "I think the halal meat problem is in reality a false problem."

Mohammed Moussaoui, who heads the French Council of the Muslim Religion, said he was concerned to see the question of halal meat enter the campaign because "it creates tensions in the society." But he avoided confronting the issue head-on, following a long-standing policy of keeping a low profile.

France's Jewish leaders, whose kosher tradition requires similar slaughtering techniques, also expressed concern. Rabbi Bruno Fizon, a specialist in the issue, said labeling meat only by the way it was slaughtered "would lead to stigmatization."

Prime Minister Francois Fillon intensified the storm with a suggestion that Muslims and Jews alike should think about abandoning their slaughtering traditions, which he said "no longer have much to do with today's state of science, with the state of technology, with health problems."

The main difference between modern slaughtering practices and those for meat deemed halal or kosher is that the latter call for the animal to be put to death by having its throat slit in a prescribed manner. Fillon's suggestion was that the Muslim and Jewish traditions responded to sanitary concerns that are no longer imperative.

The head of the Representative Council of French Jewish Institutions, Richard Prasquier, responded that he was "shocked" by Fillon's proposal, leading Fillon to invite Jewish and Muslim community leaders in for a talk to smooth things over.

Echoes of the veil ban

The halal dispute ended nearly a year of relative calm since enactment of the law last spring banning full-face veils in public places. The law, supported by Hollande's Socialists

as well as Sarkozy's conservative majority, was denounced by Muslim groups as stigmatization of their traditions but widely applauded in opinion polls.

More than 280 women were accosted by police for wearing full-face veils in violation of the law between its enactment in April and the end of 2011, according to the Interior Ministry. Of those, 237 were cited with summons similar to tickets handed out for driving violations, producing only six convictions and one fine.

For a Muslim couple in Lyon, however, the law was taken a step too far. They sued the city for \$65,000 for what they called a "humiliation at the so precious moment of celebrating a marriage" and "an attack on the fundamental liberty of religion."

The woman, identified as Nassima, showed up with her groom last June to be married in Lyon's Ninth District. The judge, they alleged in their suit, refused to perform the ceremony until Nassima took off the veil covering her hair, a garment that was not prohibited by the April law and that was not so different from the white veils worn at traditional Christian weddings.

The judge defended her action as "defense of women's liberties." She was identified as Fatiha Benahmed.

The 2010 report of MIVILUDES translated in English

By Prof. Regis Dericquebourg

The report of MIVILUDES has been translated in English on:
<http://cassiopaea.org/forum/index.php/topic,26706.0.html>

The translation of this report is a positive step because many people outside France and French-speaking countries will have access to first-hand material showing how social panic can be artificially created in a European democracy. The latest attempt is to instrumentalize a prediction based on the Maya calendar that the end of the world would take place in December 2012.

Some people have been waiting for « a new heaven and a new earth » for thousands of years. Many religions are rooted in such an expectation (Jehovah's Witnesses or Seventh-Day Adventists). They have kept and are still keeping alive the hope in a world where justice, wealth, sharing, love and health will prevail. The Catholic Church has also experienced the intense expectation of the coming back of Christ and its perfect Kingdom but has given it up. There was such a hope in the year 1000 and also in 2000. Now, some have another year in mind: 2012.

It is a good opportunity for the opponents of sects to revive their arguments on the risks of such an expectation. They recall that before the year 2000 "suicides" or "mass suicides" of some groups took place in the past, their aim being to increase the social panic. Why? For them, it is vital to survive financially and in the media. The social panic allows them to justify the grants they have received and to ask for more on the ground that this imminent danger threatens everybody, including children. For example, they announced that 60,000 children are under threat of mistreatment while a wide survey carried out by the Ministry of Social Affairs says "maybe two". What is more dramatic is the fact that 100,000 children in France do not get enough to eat and that people die from the cold on the street when it freezes, and "sects" have nothing to do with that.

Social panic also targets healers and alternative therapists although the death toll to be attributed to these healers is unknown. What is known however is the number of medical errors in France: 100,000 per year 4,000 of which are lethal.

Noteworthy is the fact that MIVILUDES and anti-sect activists keep silent about Muslim sects in France and violent Islamic sects abroad. It is easier and safer to accuse an isolated yoga teacher and to submit him to fiscal control. It is also easier to denounce the gas attempt by Aum Shinrikyo in the metro of Tokyo than the one perpetrated in the metro station "Luxembourg" in Paris by the GIA (Armed Islamic Group) some years ago. At their trial, opponents to sects failed to support the victims by instituting a civil action and left them helpless.

French court upholds Scientology fraud conviction

AP (03.02.12) - A French appeals court on Thursday upheld the Church of Scientology's 2009 fraud conviction on charges it pressured members into paying large sums for questionable remedies.

The case began with a legal complaint by a young woman who said she took out loans and spent the equivalent of 21,000 euros (\$28,000) on books, courses and "purification packages" after being recruited in 1998. When she sought reimbursement and to leave the group, its leadership refused to allow either. She was among three eventual plaintiffs. "It's a severe defeat for the Church of Scientology, which is hit at the very heart of its organization in France," Olivier Morice, a lawyer for the National Union of Associations Defending Family and Individual Victims of Sects, told reporters after the decision.

Karin Pouw, a spokeswoman for the church in Los Angeles, denounced Thursday's decision, calling it a "miscarriage of justice."

She said the group would appeal the decision to the Court of Cassation and plans to bring a complaint to the European Court of Human Rights. Another complaint is pending with a U.N. special rapporteur.

About 50 Scientologists - holding signs saying "No to a heresy trial" and "No to justice under pressure" - protested outside the Paris court hours after the decision.

During the appeals process, the prosecution had asked for the church to be fined at least 1 million euros (\$1.3 million) and its bookstore 500,000 euros. But the appeals court on Thursday instead ordered the same fines as the trial court, 400,000 euros (\$530,000) for the church and 200,000 euros for its bookstore.

Five members of the church who were convicted in the first trial were ordered to pay fines ranging from 10,000 euros to 30,000 euros. Four of them were also given suspended sentences between 18 months and two years.

In the original trial, prosecutors had tried to get the group disbanded in France, but the court declined even to take the lesser step of shutting down its operations, saying that French Scientologists would have continued their activities anyway.

Pouw said Thursday that the church was continuing its missions without any restrictions. "The environment in the court was so prejudicial that defense attorneys walked out of the proceedings in protest, refusing as a matter of conscience to participate in proceedings that had degenerated into a charade," she said by phone.

While Scientology is recognized as a religion in the U.S., Sweden and Spain, it is not considered one under French law.

Founded in 1954 by science fiction writer L. Ron Hubbard, the church teaches that technology can expand the mind and help solve problems. It claims 10 million members around the world, including celebrity devotees Tom Cruise and John Travolta.

Belgium and Germany have been criticized by the U.S. State Department for labeling Scientology as a cult or sect and enacting laws to restrict its operations. France also considers Scientology a sect.

Advocating the killing of homosexuals, stoning and armed struggle on religious grounds is not a sectarian deviation according to MIVILUDES

By Willy Fautre, Human Rights Without Frontiers

HRWF (02.02.2012) - www.hrwf.net - At the end of January, the minister of the interior, Claude Guéant, announced that the Islamic group Forsane Alizza (Riders of Pride) would be dissolved on the ground that it was training people for armed fighting.

Forsane Alizza was created in August 2010. The French Ministry of the Interior considers it a pro-jihadist islamist group. According to the French intelligence services, the group promotes armed struggle on religious grounds. They have also posted anti-Semitic statements on their website. On 14 November 2010, Forsane Alizza advocated stoning in the Western world. On 26 April 2011, it called upon the killing of homosexuals: "When you find two men, committing Loth's sin, put them to death," they said.

French Miviludes and anti-sect organizations are keeping silent about the ban on Forsane Alizza. It means that in their eyes the religiously motivated killing of homosexuals, stoning and armed struggle are not sectarian deviations...

According to collaborators of Claude Guéant, the national emir of Forsane, Mohamed Achamlane, alias Abou Hamza, who lives in Loire- Atlantique, insulted police officers who had stopped veiled women, calling them "dogs" and warned them that " the daily violence against Muslims will one day turn into a blood bath." In August 2011, he publicly burnt a criminal code.

The Ministry of the Interior also stressed that Forsane Alizza offers its most active members training to martial arts, paint-ball shooting with simulated hostage-taking and religious indoctrination. The movement is also suspected to have relations with Islamist movements abroad or people involved in terrorist actions, including the banned British organization Al Mouhajiroun, which had hailed the 9/11 attempt and named Tony Blair "a legitimate target for any Muslim." During some demonstrations, members of Forsane Alizza display flags and banderoles of Al Mouhajiroun.

The burqa challenged at the European Court

S.A.S. v. France (no. 43835/11) (01.02.2012) - The applicant is a French national, a practicing Muslim, who declares that she wears the burqa in order to comply with her faith, her culture, and her personal convictions. For her it is a matter of covering her entire body, including a fine veil covering her face as well the niqab, a veil covering the

face with the exception of the eyes. She emphasizes that neither her husband nor any other member of her family puts any pressure upon her to dress in this fashion.

The applicant wears the niqab in private as well as in public, but in a systematic way. For example, she does not wear it when consulting a doctor, or when she meets friends in a public place, or seeks to make acquaintances. She therefore agrees not to wear the niqab in public all the time, but she wishes to be able to make the choice, under certain appropriate spiritual conditions, as, for example, for religious events during Ramadan. Her goal is not to create a nuisance for others, but to be able to be in accord with her own religious feelings and beliefs.

The applicant agrees that she should remove the face covering for security checks, at a bank, or when taking a plane. However, under French law she is forbidden to cover her face in public at all.

The applicant therefore complains that when she wears the veil in public she could be subject, under law, to penalties as well as to harassment and discrimination, constituting degrading treatment in violation of ECHR Article 3. She furthermore invokes Article 8 of the Convention, violation of her right to respect for her private life. Invoking Articles 9, 10, and 11 she complains of violation of freedom of religion, freedom of expression, and freedom of association or assembly. Finally, invoking Article 14, she complains that the legal prohibition of wearing a face covering in public generates discrimination on the basis of sex, religion, and ethnic origin, to the detriment of women, such as herself, who wear the total veil.

34 imams or Muslim preachers deported since 2001

By Willy Fautre, Human Rights Without Frontiers

HRWF (31.01.2012) – Since September 11, 2001, 34 imams or Muslim preachers have been deported on the basis of article L 521-3 of the Code of entry and stay of foreigners and asylum. The text makes reference to “acts of explicit and deliberate provocation to discrimination, hatred or violence against a specific person or group of persons.”[i][i]

Tabligh Imam Mohammed Hammami faces deportation

Mohammed Hammami, a radical imam of a mosque in Paris XI, was informed at mid-January that the deportation commission in Paris would examine his case on 7 February. He is accused of anti-Semitism and of advocating beating to death of adulteresses in his preaching activities.

Some time ago, he got a suspended sentence of 4 months in prison for mauling journalists who had tried to get into the castle of Grisy-Suisnes en Seine-et-Marne in order to enquire about a training center for imams that was being held there.

Mohammed Hammami was born in Tunisia in 1935 and arrived in France in the 1960s. He opened a mosque in Paris XI. For several years, he was the leader of TablighJamaat (Society for spreading faith).

Tabligh Jamaat

Tabligh Jamaat (Society for spreading faith) is a religious movement which was founded in 1926 by Muhammad Ilyas al-Kandhlawi in India. The movement primarily aims at

Tablighi spiritual reformation by working at the grass roots level, reaching out to Muslims across all social and economic spectra to bring them closer to Islam.

Tabligh Jamaat came forth as an offshoot of the Sufist Deobandi movement. Its inception is believed to be a response to Hindu reform movements, which were considered a threat to vulnerable and non-practicing Muslims. It gradually expanded from local to national to a transnational movement and now has followers in over 150 countries.

Tabligh Jamaat has largely avoided electronic media and has emphasized a personal communication for proselytizing.

Despite its pacifist and apolitical stance, Tabligh Jamaat has appeared on the fringes of numerous terrorism investigations. Tablighi Jamaat's role as a springboard to terrorist organizations has been questioned several times but there is no evidence that the Tabligh Jamaat deliberately act as a recruiting arm for Islamic militant organizations.

The group began to expand its activities in 1946, and within two decades the group reached Southwest Asia and Southeast Asia, Africa, Europe, and North America. Introduced in France in the 1960s, it grew prominently during the 1970-80s. Tabligh Jamaat declined around 1989, although some members still represent it in the French Council of the Muslim Faith. In the few years before 2006, Tabligh Jamaat's influence has exponentially grown in France, which now has around 100,000 followers. Their main mosque in France is Al-Rahma in Saint-Denis.

Tabligh Jamaat described as a cult-like movement

In its Africa Report Nr 92 (31 March 2005) entitled "Islamist Terrorism in the Sahel: Fact or Fiction?", the International Crisis Group describes the movement as follows:

"Several sources pointed to the cult-like aspects of the Jama'at al-Tabligh. One Malian compared it to

brainwashing: 'They take them off to some retreat, and they keep them awake, praying and chanting until they are completely brainwashed. That is the first, short retreat. Then they get longer and longer -- a week, a month, six months, even a year'. An American specialist on the region noted, 'they do not try to convert just any Muslims. They are like cults in that they look for those who are socially and psychologically at sea, those who do not know their religion well, and who might thus be susceptible to a dramatic conversion.

In an article published by Le Figaro on 22 January 2012, Samir Amghar, a researcher and author of a recent book on Salafism, was quoted as saying "When you enter it, you are cut off from society."

Comment

Strangely enough, neither MIVILUDES nor anti-sect movements have denounced the anti-Semitic statements of imam Mohammed Hammami and his call to beat to death adulteresses as well as Tabligh Jamaat. Georges Fenech, head of MIVILUDES, who was born in Tunisia, should have paid a visit with the media to the suspicious training center for imams castle of Grisy-Suisnes en Seine-et-Marne. In 2011, MIVILUDES orchestrated police raids in the premises of a Catholic prayer group and some peaceful movements such as: "Le Moulin des Vallées" (an ecumenical monastery in Ile-et-Vilaine), "Terre du Ciel" in Saône-et-Loire and the "Centre d'enseignement de bio-dynamisme" in Drome.

France says only 6 women fined for wearing forbidden veil in 8 months since law passed

Worldwide Religious News (02.01.12) - France's interior minister says that since a ban on face-covering Islamic veils took effect in April only six women have been convicted and fined.

Claude Gueant said in an interview with the daily Le Monde published Monday that no woman has been sent to a citizenship class — another potential punishment.

Controversy surrounded the law. Muslim leaders, most of them opposed to burqa-style veils, say the it stigmatizes all followers of Islam.

Gueant says police cited a total of 237 women but only six were convicted. He expressed surprise that nearly a quarter of the women police questioned had converted to Islam.

Backers say the law is aimed at ensuring France's secular values and gender equality and nipping radical Islam in the bud.

The New Heretics of France

Minority Religions, la République, and the Government-Sponsored "War on Sects"

By Susan J. Palmer

Part I: The Rise of the Government-sponsored Antisecte Movement

Part II: Groups on the Guyard List

The Holy City of Mandarom: A Case of Médiabolization
The Church of Scientology: Legal and Active Responses
The Raelian Movement: A Challenge to Sexual Mores and Scientific Orthodoxy
Tabitha's Place: The Role of Children and the Rights of Parents
Korus: Alternative Healing or the Illegal Practice of Medicine
Néo-Phare: First Application of the About-Picard Law

Part III: Reflections on the Meaning of the French Sect Wars

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Oxford University Press, 251 pages, USD 74.00

Since the Age of Enlightenment, France has upheld clear constitutional guidelines that protect human rights and religious freedom. Today, however, intolerant attitudes and discriminatory practices toward unconventional faiths have become acceptable and even institutionalized in public life. Susan Palmer offers an insightful examination of France's most stigmatized new religions, or "sectes," and the public management of religious and philosophical minorities by the state.

The New Heretics of France tracks the mounting government-sponsored anti-cult movement in the wake of the shocking mass suicides of the Solar Temple in 1994, an event that ushered France's most visible religious minorities onto a blacklist of 172 "sectes" commissioned by the National Assembly. Drawing on extensive interviews and field research, Palmer describes the controversial histories of well-known international New Religious Movements including the Church of Scientology, Raelian Movement, and Unificationism, as well as esoteric local groups. Palmer also reveals the partisanship of Catholic priests, journalists, village mayors, and the passive public who support la République's efforts to control minority faiths - all in the name of "Liberty, Equality and Fraternity."

Through historical and sociological theory, Palmer analyzes France's war on "sects" as a strategic response to social pressures arising from globalization and immigration. Her study addresses the impact of these social pressures on traditional cultures and national character, as well as important issues of religious freedom and public tolerance.

Susan Palmer is a researcher, sociologist, and writer in the area of New Religious Movements (NRMs). She is the author or co-editor of eleven books on NRMs including:

Moon Sisters

Rajneesh Lovers

Krishna Mothers: Women's Roles in New Religions

Aliens Adored: Rael's New Religion

The Nuwaubian Nation: Black Spirituality and State Control.

She lives in Montreal, Quebec, with her family and teaches in the Religious Studies departments of Dawson College and Concordia University.

Sikhs win turban case against France at the UN

"The UN Human Rights Committee has asked France to submit a report by March 15th on measures it is taking to remedy the violation of the religious freedom of 76 year old Ranjit Singh, who was asked to remove his turban for his ID photo" said Mejjindarpal Kaur, UNITED SIKHS Legal Director, who is in the fore-front of a legal campaign for French Sikhs' right to wear their turban.

ICHR (12.01.2012) - The UN Human Rights Committee (UNHRC) has concluded that France had violated the religious freedom of 76 year old Ranjit Singh when he was asked to remove his turban for his ID photograph. This was disclosed today at a media conference, in Bobigny (near Paris), by the UNITED SIKHS legal team, who had filed a communication on behalf of Ranjit Singh to the UNHRC in December 2008.

The media conference was told that the UNHRC observed that "even if the obligation to remove the turban for the identity photograph might be described as a one-time requirement, it would potentially interfere with the author's (Ranjit Singh's) freedom of religion on a continuing basis because he would always appear without his religious head covering in the identity photograph and could therefore be compelled to remove his turban during identity checks."

The Committee said that France had failed to explain how the Sikh turban hindered identification since the wearer's face would be visible and he would be wearing the turban it at all times, therefore, the regulation constituted a violation of article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which was entered into force

for France on 4 February 1981. You may read the Committee's views in full here. The views were adopted at the 102nd session of the Committee's sitting.

"I had faith that truth and justice would prevail and I patiently waited for this day. I pray that France will now fulfil its obligation and grant me a residence card bearing my photo without baring my head," said Ranjit Singh, who despite his ill-health has had no access to the public health-care system or to social benefits since 2005 because his residence card was refused due to his refusal to remove his turban.

"UNITED SIKHS is heartened by the Committee's observations that France is under an obligation to provide Ranjit Singh with an effective remedy, including a reconsideration of his application for a renewal of his residence permit and a review of the relevant legislative framework and its application in practice. France, the Committee noted, is also under an obligation to take steps to prevent similar violations in the future," said Mejindarpal Kaur, UNITED SIKHS Legal Director, who addressed the media conference.

"We now look to France to fulfil its treaty obligations under International law and its moral duty to ensure that the freedom of religion and belief is upheld for everyone who lives within its territory," she added.

"We are very pleased with the views that the Committee adopted and we welcome France's compliance with these findings. We also look forward to a similar resolution for Shingara Singh, whose case is still pending before the Committee," O'Melveny & Myers, a New York law firm engaged by UNITED SIKHS, said in a statement through their attorneys who spoke during a telephone interview. A decision is still awaited for Shingara Singh, whose passport has not been renewed by France because he refused to remove his turban for his ID photograph.
