



pour la Liberté de Conscience

Madame Asma Jahangir  
Rapporteuse Spéciale pour  
la liberté de religion et de croyance  
OHCHR  
Palais Wilson  
52, rue des Paquis  
CH 1201 Geneva

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To the Prime Minister

Object: The Miviludes

Mister Prime Minister,

*« In the letter addressed to François Fillon, the Minister of the Interior expresses her “astonishment” and strong disapproval on the MIVILUDES’ sudden change of course without any previous consultation within the government: Violation of freedom of conscience, retracing one’s steps, weakening France’s image on the international scene and in Europe, and having it pinpointed because of its religious intolerance, particularly on the yearly report of the US State Department and by the OSCE (Organisation for cooperation and security in Europe)” This is what the February 13th 2009 article of Le Parisien said.*

Is it true that the MIVILUDES has greatly contributed since its creation to smear France’s image vis-à-vis of our European and American friends. After the Vivian report, the 1995 report of the House of Representatives with its infamous black list, the creation of the MILS and now the MIVILUDES, for other countries France has become as the land of witch hunts.

Mr Fenech, Chairman of the MIVILUDES was quoted by the journalists of the Parisien as having said:

*“Rather than a list as such, I try to figure out actually a “referencial” of movements and practices showing sectarian abuses” This is the sort of statement that will tarnish even further the reputation of our country abroad.*

Before trying to solve any problem, one must set the problem, its ends and outlines. In any worthwhile document, one is expected to use clearly defined terms. This step was overlooked in the “anti-sect” fight.

Coordination des  
Associations &  
Particuliers  
pour la  
**Liberté  
de Conscience**

How did we get into such a painful situation?

These are the main reasons from our standpoint:

First of all, **there is no definition of the terms employed.**

This is the case with “sects, sectarian groups and sectarian abuses”. This disrespect of reason and of common sense has opened the road to utter arbitrariness. Anyone could label a religious group as a sect in total impunity without having to justify it. There have been plenty of abuses against defenceless victims who have no means to replay.

Hence we have chosen the term *minorités de conscience* to depict all minority movements who hold beliefs and religious, spiritual, philosophical or therapeutic practices which are different from commonly accepted ones.

Also, we must admit that all the supporters of the anti-sect fight, who pretend to be “sect experts”, have entirely usurped this qualification. They have no training in sociology nor religion and their only qualification stems from their partisan will and their sectarianism against any new way of thinking.

On the other hand, the actual scholars on religious minorities; the sociologists and researchers trained in scientific methods, who have studied these new groups impartially, are kept out of the debate. They are “politically improper” for they have come to the conclusion that there is no “sect” problem in France, or at least within an alarming range.

This is a second reason why France is discredited abroad.

Authorities and the media welcome the usurpers and fake specialists to preach their false science while the actual experts are ignored and left out of the debate.

The third reason is of the same importance: It is the systematic lynching by the media of targeted groups, without defence rights or a debate in the presence of the parties concerned.

Article 16 of the Code of Civil Procedure provides that: *“The judge must enforce and observe in all circumstances the principle of a trial in the presence of the parties concerned.” He cannot retain in his decision, the means, arguments and evidence put forward by the parties unless they have been opposed in the debate.*

These are the rights bestowed upon all law offenders. Even the worst criminals, those who have committed utmost atrocities, have the elementary right to defend themselves, to bring forth exhibits in their defence and of being heard by an impartial judge.

But the sectarian offence, of thinking, believing, praying, eating or healing themselves otherwise is not a crime under the law. And those who are indicted in such guise do not enjoy the protection of the law. Public rumour might then accuse and sentence them without any risk: Their punishment is public defamation without any possibility to defend themselves.

That’s the way it works with the annual MIVILUDES report which quotes names and spreads vague slanderous rumours.

That is the way it is with TV shows on “sects” where biased journalists set themselves lightly as the righter of wrongs.

The result is the manipulation of public opinion and cheating of the French people. They have been flooded with partisan views by fake specialists when the actual experts were absent of the debates and the accused didn’t have the right to utter a word. As a result, many conviction minorities have been marginalised from public opinion and within their own families;

I hope you’ll agree Mr. Prime Minister that this is an intolerable situation which dishonours France and it is thus natural for the Minister of the Interior to feel concerned about “the weakening of France in Europe and on the International scene” You are also aware that our planet because of emigration

flows and new means of communication becomes more and more a global village. Therefore pillorying minority convictions widely accepted by our neighbours stands out as a quarrel of a bygone past. How can one know if any one being spoken abroad is not a member of one of these minorities unfairly discredited in France? Moreover, the groups unfairly hounded by “sect hunters” have never been a menace to French society, on the contrary, for, if there is a menace, it comes from elsewhere: The news proves it.

In fact, members of minority convictions, are before anything else citizens as all the others. They participate with awareness and often with skill and energy to the economical, political and social life of the country. They can do a lot for the social cohesion and the influence of France. Their members are far from sectarian. Most of them are open-minded and curious of other cultures. Hence, they may help creating links with people coming from other horizons. Freed from traditional frames of thinking, they are the more suited to propose innovating solutions to the problems that assail us.

After decades of barren stigmatisation that have put aside French law abiding citizens and tarnished France’s image abroad, we would like to see this dark page turned at last. In order to achieve this, we suggest the observance of two elementary democratic principles. France has all to win.

The first one is to bring to an end the cacophony of words. As we have explained, such terms as ‘sects, sectarian groups and sectarian abuses’ lack a clear unanimously agreed upon definition. This prevents any understanding between upholders of different views. Moreover, these terms bear a strong emotional charge, which contributes to tangle up the debates.

In addition the May 14<sup>th</sup> circular letter issued by Prime Minister Raffarin, requested “Readiness to spot and punish any undertaking susceptible of penal qualification or more generally appearing as being against the law”. This implies clarity and rigour in the meaning of the words employed. And this is the least to be expected in a state under the rule of law.

We wish then the terms “sects, sectarian groups and sectarian abuses” if they are to be used, to be at last defined clearly and with out any possible ambiguity. This is the task that the MIVILUDES should have undertaken from the start.

The second principle to be implemented according to our views stems from article 16 of the Code of Civil Procedure. It enforces the debate in the presence of all parties concerned in trials. We suggest that conviction minorities also benefit from the spirit of this article. We thus request an impartial approach in presence of all the parties concerned on all information on them and the “right to replay” for the ones being questioned and for sociologists and researchers on these topics. This right to replay could be used following the annual reports of the MIVILUDES which stigmatise groups and their behaviour without ever giving the floor to the people questioned in such guise.

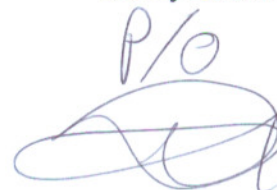
Such a right to replay would give all necessary elements to French citizens and would allow them to have a personal well grounded opinion on the different groups being questioned.

We are at your disposal to start a positive dialogue if you wish. Thank you very much for the attention and the answer that you may give to our letter

Yours respectfully

The Chairman

Thierry Bécourt

P/O  


PS.: Copies of this letter were sent to President Sarkozy and the Minister of the Interior