

THE MITCHELL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

FRANCE: RISING GOVERNMENT RESTRICTIONS ON RELIGION

October 17, 2011

The French Republic's basic principles guarantee freedom of conscience and religion, and equality of all citizens before the law. These guarantees can be found in the 1789 *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*, the revolutionary triad (Liberty, Equality, Fraternity), the 1905 law on "laïcité" (secularism), the Preamble to the Constitution of 1946 and the current Constitution.

France has also entered into several international agreements that further commit the government to ensure individual freedom of conscience and religion, including the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948), the *European Convention on Human Rights* (1950), the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (1966), the *Helsinki Final Act* (1975) of the Participating States of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and most recently, the *Treaty of Lisbon*, which made the *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union* legally binding.

But France's principles, much less these international commitments, ring hollow when one confronts the fact of rising government restrictions on religion in France. The French concept of religious freedom is supposed to be neutral on religion, to show equality and respect of religion. But the French government is using laïcité and basic French principles to impose restrictions on conscience and religion.

According to an August 2011 report produced by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, "Rising Restrictions on Religion," France was one of only 14 countries in the world, and one of only two countries in Europe, that had a substantial increase in government restrictions on religion from mid-2006 to mid-2009. France and Greece had the highest levels of government restrictions in Western Europe, and France and Serbia were the only European countries to have substantial increases in government restrictions.

The report noted that France banned the wearing of conspicuous religious symbols, including head scarves

Countries Where Government Restrictions Rose, Ranked by Total Population

Countries with substantial increase from mid-2006 to mid-2009

	2010 POPULATION IN MILLIONS
Egypt	84.5
France	62.6
Algeria	35.4
Uganda	33.8
Malaysia	27.9
Yemen	24.3
Syria	22.5
Somalia	9.4
Serbia	7.6
Tajikistan	7.1
Hong Kong	7.1
Libya	6.5
Kyrgyzstan	5.6
Qatar	1.5

Substantial Changes in Government Restrictions

RISING ▲	DECLINING ▼
Algeria	Equatorial Guinea
Egypt	Greece
France	Guinea Bissau
Hong Kong	Nauru
Kyrgyzstan	Nicaragua
Libya	Republic of Macedonia
Malaysia	Timor-Leste
Qatar	Togo
Serbia	
Somalia	
Syria	
Tajikistan	
Uganda	
Yemen	

Pew Research Center's
Forum on Religion & Public Life
Rising Restrictions on Religion,
August 2011

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and large crosses, in public schools in 2004; and also put pressure on religious groups it considers to be cults.¹

According to the 2011 book, *God's Century: Resurgent Religion and Global Politics*, France officially separated church and state in 1905 via the doctrine of laïcité that granted its citizens religious freedom but also allowed for government control of religion. And this French doctrine of secularism is not applied equally to all religions.

France's religious minorities are particularly disadvantaged and bear the brunt of secularism's restrictions while receiving few of the benefits of its accommodations of religion. So the rift between the state and a growing population of increasingly alienated minority religious actors will likely deepen, and France may see more religious unrest in its future.²

Worse, France has been and continues to be an exporter of its increasingly restrictive "model." According to a January 12, 2011, Templeton Report (published by the John Templeton Foundation), "Religious Freedom: Behind the Headlines," people living in rich Western democracies face mounting threats to religious liberty, and European nations increasingly follow the French model of formally excluding religious views from public discourse.³

A key part of the increasingly restrictive French model that is being exported throughout Europe and to other parts of the world is the program against "sectarian drifts," starting with the government's Inter-ministerial Mission for Vigilance and Combating Sectarian Drifts, or MIVILUDES. This inter-ministerial mission, which is responsible to the Prime Minister, was created to observe "sectarian movements," to coordinate "preventative and repressive actions by the authorities against such practices," to develop the "exchange of information" between government agencies, to contribute to the "informing and training" of public servants, to inform the public about the "risks" and "dangers" arising from these movements, to "aid the victims" of such practices, and to "participate in activities relating to issues falling within its scope undertaken at the international level."⁴

¹ <http://pewforum.org/Government/Global-Restrictions-on-Religion.aspx>

² Monica Toft, et al., *God's Century: Resurgent Religion and Global Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2011), 133-134.

³ http://www.templeton.org/templeton_report/20110112/

⁴ <http://veille-education.org/2009/04/27/la-miviludes-joue-au-grand-inquisiteur-pour-la-scolarisation-a-domicile/>

Mr. Georges Fenech, the leader of MIVILUDES, brags that France is the only country in the world to have established an "anti-sect" inter-ministerial mission or task force, but its very existence is a violation of French principles and contravenes the Constitution and every international human rights instrument France has signed.⁵

The French "Anti-Sect" Model

- The government established multiple parliamentary commissions to study various aspects of the "sect" phenomenon and to issue reports with recommended "anti-sect" policies. The 1995 parliamentary commission's report contained a "black list" that identified 173 groups as sects. This published list has contributed to an ongoing atmosphere of intolerance and bias against minority religions ever since.⁶ To this day, listed communities and their individual members are routinely discriminated against.
- The government set up a series of observatories or inter-ministerial missions to monitor and handle "sects" and "sectarian drifts." Currently, it is MIVILUDES that targets and monitors "sectarian movements" and maintains a "system of reference" of more than 600 groups and movements that contains inaccurate and misleading information on each one.
- Without employing religious scholars, MIVILUDES uses this system of reference to judge and attack the doctrines and values of targeted movements – including religions that are recognized around the world – and publishes reports and generates media stories that publicly stigmatize them as "sectarian."
- As long as movements are stigmatized as "sectarian" rather than accurately described as "religious" or "spiritual" in nature, society is free to discriminate against them and their individual members.
- MIVILUDES makes this system of reference available to, and facilitates the "education" and "training" of ministries, local governments, officials and professionals, including judges, prosecutors, educators, association leaders, etc., on the "risks," "dangers" and "abuses" of these movements, and on how to handle them.⁷ In fact, MIVILUDES organizes "education" and "training" in the school for new magistrates or for the continued education of

⁵ <http://www.liberation.fr/societe/0101583433-la-france-est-en-pointe-dans-la-lutte-contre-les-sectes>

⁶ <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/>

⁷ <http://www.liberation.fr/societe/0101583433-la-france-est-en-pointe-dans-la-lutte-contre-les-sectes>

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magistrates. And during recent years, these trainings have been extended to police officers and social workers. Now, a brand new curriculum has started on “sectarian movements” at the University of Paris for medical doctors and psychologists. Apostates also testify as part of the study of cases. Biased information on specific religious communities is provided in all of these trainings, without giving the targeted groups a chance to refute the accusations.

- MIVILUDES acts as a judge of investigation. But judicial demand is needed before a movement can be investigated. Which means a prosecutor or judge must request an investigation. This explains the utility of the system of reference, and of all the education and training of public servants – the magistrates that are educated and trained produce the judicial demand that results in investigations of movements with the assistance of specialized police officers that are also educated and trained, etc.
- To ensure targeted movements are subject to criminal prosecution and dissolution, a law was passed to protect against “abuse of weakness” and to tighten restrictions on sectarian movements. The French About-Picard law established “techniques capable of altering one’s judgment” and “psychological subjection” as criminal activities. Further, the law gives standing to anti-sect associations to initiate criminal actions and testify against these movements on behalf of alleged victims.⁸
- The French government directly funds a network of these anti-sect associations. With public funds, these associations, including the European Federation of Centers of Research and Information on Sectarianism (FECRIS) – which is now officially registered as a non-governmental organization (NGO) with the United Nations and the Council of Europe – the National Union of Associations of Defense of the Family and the Individual (UNADFI), the Center Against Mental Manipulations (CCMM) and the Study Group on Movements of Thought for the Prevention of the Individual (GEMPPPI), attack and defame individuals and communities for their beliefs and practices, both religious and non-religious, often in coordination with MIVILUDES.⁹
- Most recently, a new circular was enacted by the Ministry of Justice which gives directions to the prosecutors and judges of the French Appeals Courts

to consider religious practices such as purification and fasting as means of “psychological subjection.” Moreover, the circular gives directives to magistrates to work “in partnership” with anti-sect associations that are opposed to a targeted movement in a trial, which destroys any change for justice in cases involving these movements. This is a direct intervention of the executive on the magistrates to influence their decisions in criminal cases.¹⁰

The Impact on Individuals and Communities - Specific Cases of Discrimination

From an interview with François Jacquot, an attorney for victims of religious discrimination:

- As far as MIVILUDES is concerned, the current leader, Mr. Fenech, has been acting as a judge of investigation by doing unexpected visits in the targeted communities and forcing his way in. This is an abuse of power. It goes beyond the MIVILUDES’ powers detailed in its founding decree.
- Mr. Fenech is judging and attacking the doctrines and values of movements. This is in violation of the French Constitution. He is judging religions that are recognized in other countries around the world. He is judging them as sects, and this is not acceptable.
- Mr. Fenech and UNADFI organize “education” and “training” on “sectarian drifts” in the school for new magistrates or for the continued education for magistrates. Biased information on specific religious communities such as Jehovah’s Witnesses and others is provided to the magistrates during these training sessions, without giving the targeted groups a chance to refute the accusations. During the last years, the “trainings” have been extended to police officers and social workers, and now a brand new curriculum has started on so-called “sectarian movements” at the University in Paris for medical doctors and psychologists, organized by MIVILUDES. Apostates of various minority religious groups will testify as part of the study of cases.
- Under the influence of MIVILUDES, a new circular has been enacted by the Ministry of Justice which gives directions to the prosecutors and judges of the French Appeals Courts to consider religious practices such as purification and fasting as means of “psychological subjection.” This is direct intervention

⁸ <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/>

⁹ http://religionandpolicy.org/cms/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=5948&Itemid=240

¹⁰ http://www.textes.justice.gouv.fr/art_pix/JUSD1125511C.pdf

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of the executive on the magistrates to influence their decisions in criminal cases. There is no chance for justice here.

From an interview with Richard Valeanu, an attorney for victims of religious discrimination:

- Mr. Valeanu said it is very clear Mr. Georges Fenech, the leader of MIVILUDES, is expanding his target list to include some traditional religions. He is going after Catholics and the therapeutic communities now.
- One of Mr. Valeanu's clients is a small Catholic group, Love and Mercy. Despite the fact this group is in good standing with the Vatican and the local Bishop, Mr. Fenech has been attacking them anyway.
- Regarding magistrates, he said they recognize that religion is protected by law. And they respect freedom of conscience. But, practically, what can they do when members of groups are labeled as "sectarian" and discriminated against? Even if they rule in favor of such members, it doesn't help them. They are stigmatized for life. Their lives are destroyed by this. They really don't have any recourse. The wins in court are symbolic wins, nothing more.
- He said France has lost its understanding of the spiritual dimension of human existence. So the government does not understand members of spiritual movements. They even fear them.
- He said the original laïcité was good – it was put in place to protect freedom of religion and conscience. Now it has been altered and is being used to attack freedom of religion and conscience.
- He said judges are on the side of the original laïcité. But they are afraid to go too far in the defense of religion, because they cannot endorse religion. And they cannot judge between good and bad doctrines.
- He said the law professors know what is happening is wrong. They know it is a violation of the Constitution. But they are not heard by the public.

From an interview with Anastase, an independent journalist:

- Anastase said French journalists accept and promote the MIVILUDES reports despite the fact that they contain no factual information, no statistics, no trends, no comparisons. They only contain "horror stories."
- As an example, Mr. Fenech stated in the media that 80,000 kids are affected by the "sectarian

phenomenon."¹¹ Yet the 2006 parliamentary commission on "the influence of movements of sectarian character and its consequences on the physical and mental health of minors" heard from eleven representatives of various ministries, including the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Youth and Sports, and the Ministry of Interior, who said that after investigation they found no cases of kids endangered by sectarian drifts, or that this phenomenon was marginal.¹²

- He said 99% of all French journalists have a copy of the black list that was published by the 1995 parliamentary commission, and consult it regularly. They know all the groups on it, and this knowledge biases their writing.
- Not only is the old black list still used, but he said the new black list – the system of reference that MIVILUDES uses – has grown to 600 or so groups.

From an interview with Claude Thibeau of the Graal (Grail) Movement of France:

- Graal was listed on the black list published by the 1995 parliamentary commission.
- They have had loads of problems ever since, including with MIVILUDES today.
- A TV station attacked them, and did not give them a chance to reply, under the pretext that it would not allow proselytizing.
- In 2002, the Center Against Mental Manipulations (CCMM) wrote a book with a section on Graal, and put some of it on its website. The section on Graal was negative and false.
- Mr. Thibeau produced specific evidence of recent discrimination, in the form of six letters from public officials, including:
 1. A letter, dated 17 March 2010, from the Deputy Mayor of Boulogne-Sur-Mer, turning down a Graal request to rent a public room for an event. The letter stated the official reason for its denial: the report issued by the 1995 parliamentary commission on sects mentions the Graal Movement is a sectarian movement,

¹¹ <http://v.i.v.free.fr/spip/spip.php?article308>

¹² See the list of eleven representatives with extracts of their testimonies: <http://sectes-info.com/2.html>
See also all the hearings on the official site of the National Assembly: <http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/12/pdf/rap-enq/r3507.pdf>

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and it is the obligation of the mayor to preserve public order and morality.

2. A letter, dated 29 Oct 2007, from the mayor's office in Saintes. Again, Graal was denied a public room. The letter stated the official reason for its denial: the Graal association was listed on the 1995 report of the National Assembly as a sectarian movement of 500 to 2,000 followers.
3. A letter, dated 1 Sept 2005, from Le Credit Lyonnais, a bank. After having their accounts closed by their previous bank, Graal went in search of a new bank. This letter informed Graal its application was denied. The reason: the follow up of such an entity listed in the reports of the 1995 and 1999 commissions of the National Assembly will be very difficult considering the constraining rules of both money laundering enforcement and of the bank commission, and the public order nature of these rules.

- One of their members, a doctor, was attacked by ADFI and then arrested and imprisoned.
- Another member, a doctor, was arrested and interrogated after he successfully rehabilitated an old woman.
- He said this is the result of the MIVILUDES training of professionals, and banks have copies of the 1995 black list and still refer to it today.
- He said he could produce stacks of examples, but stopped there. This is just the tip of the iceberg.

From an interview with Gerard Gertroux, Jehovah's Witness:

- Mr. Gertroux is an academic who has completed his work towards a PhD. At la Maison de l'Orient, he had a research director and a jury of six ready to review his dissertation. Just before he completed his work, however, his research director and all six jurors received a letter informing them Mr. Gertroux was a Jehovah's Witness. After they received the letter, they refused to grant him the PhD.
- So Mr. Gertroux tried to transfer to another university, L'INALCO. Even though he got the agreement of the research director, and two of his original jurors agreed to serve on his jury, he was not accepted as a transfer.
- He said this is an example of the influence of MIVILUDES and the black list. MIVILUDES has indoctrinated everyone against minority movements on the black list, and this is pounded in deep.

- He said the influence of MIVILUDES is spread across the entire government, for MIVILUDES is interministerial. And the Minister of Education sits over all universities.

From an interview with Ody-Marc Duclos of Sukyo Mahikari:

- Mr. Duclos said, back in 1999, he went to the parliamentary commission on finance and sects, found numerous inaccuracies in what it was writing about the movement, submitted corrections, and was led to believe these corrections would be made. But when the commission report was published, none of his corrections were made.
- Since then, MIVILUDES has never given him a chance to be heard, or to correct inaccuracies they write in their reports.
- He said MIVILUDES has no religious scholars in it, and has been writing false, negative things about the movement.
- As a result, Mr. Duclos said the movement was evicted from a building, and it has been charged higher than usual bank fees, has been refused service, and has even had accounts closed.

From an interview with Jean-Pierre Saulnier of the European Raelian Movement:

- Mr. Saulnier said the MIVILUDES report gives the endorsement of government on discrimination actions.
- The Raelian Movement has been labeled a "sect" and since the movement practices massage, massage has been characterized as a "sectarian drift" and thus illegal. Massage parlors are allowed to do this legally, but not the Raelian Movement.
- He also said the movement cannot even hold a conference in a hotel or public building. They book a meeting room, then MIVILUDES or someone will call the hotel to inform them the movement is a sect. The hotel then calls the movement to inform them they cannot use the room. This is the common pattern.
- Mr. Saulnier has a stack of specific examples of such discrimination.

From an interview with Guy Bergeaud, Scientologist:

- Mr. Bergeaud has experienced discrimination in the workplace. He was a successful senior executive in

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the auto industry in France. He worked for Volkswagen, as marketing director for Renault, and then as President of Rover France.

- Mr. Bergeaud became President of Rover France at a time when Rover's business in France was down. Nine months after he became President, Rover was expanding in France again, thanks to his effective management. Yet Rover fired him on the spot, and gave no reason other than his position had become redundant.
- So Mr. Bergeaud started a consulting company. He was in the process of launching his business when *Le Point* published a story in late 1990 or early 1991. The story said Mr. Bergeaud was fired by Rover because he was a Scientologist.
- The decision to fire Mr. Bergeaud was made "at the highest levels," far above his boss, who was upset that he was fired. The highest levels were upset, however, that an active Scientologist was Rover's new President in France. Rover was owned by British Aerospace, a big defense contractor.
- When the *Le Point* article ran, Mr. Bergeaud, in his new consulting business, was beginning a big contract with General Motors (GM) that was to run for five years. Then the story broke, and his contract with GM was ended.
- Since then, it has been a long story of ups and downs, of consulting business interrupted suddenly, of losing staff abruptly, and of losing contracts, including: Michelin, Nestle Waters, Suez, UPM and Accor.
- It is the same pattern every time. An article is published naming him as a Scientologist, and he loses business as a result. All of the articles use the same language, the same accusations, which are all false.
- The National Union of Associations of Defense of the Family and Individual (UNADFI) sent a letter to all big companies in France, naming Mr. Bergeaud as a Scientologist. He has this letter as evidence.
- Mr. Fenech and MIVILUDES officials now characterize personal development programs within companies, and even private personal development programs, as "sectarian drifts." This explains why some big companies have anti-sect specialists in them now.
- Private seminars are seen as "sectarian drifts." So are private life coaching, yoga, etc. All of these are mentioned in the most recent MIVILUDES reports.

From an interview with Maryvonne Legoux, Scientologist:

- Ms. Legoux is a trained librarian who began to experience discrimination in the workplace when the 1995 parliamentary commission on sects was preparing to publish its report that included the sect list.
- In 1995, she had just been hired as head librarian in Decines. A few months later, her deputy librarian began organizing meetings with staff behind her back. Ms. Legoux found posted in the staff meeting room a document from the Association of Defense of the Family and Individual (ADFI) regarding how to recognize sectarian behavior.
- The mayor and general director of the city called a meeting with her, regarding a problem they had with her at the library. They told her she could not keep her job as head librarian or the staff would go on strike. So they removed her from her position.
- In 1998, Ms. Legoux was hired to be head librarian in Beauvais. Everything was okay for six months, then the same thing happened.
- In 2000, she was hired to be head librarian in Levallois, and removed from her position in a matter of months.
- In December 2003, she was recruited by the General Council of Savoie (a department in France in the Alps). She was set to start in February 2004. One week before that, the Council cancelled her recruitment.
- In 2005, she won her first court decision against the city of Levallois, on grounds of a technical, administrative error.
- In January 2008, she won her court case against the General Council of Savoie. So they should have made her head librarian or given her an equal position, but they refused. In October 2008, rather than giving her the job, they eliminated the head librarian position.
- In October 2009, she won her second court case against the General Council of Savoie, and the Council was ordered to put her in the position. Council leaders met with her but said the job was no longer the responsibility of the city. She was not restored to her job.
- In December 2009, she won a second court case against the city of Levallois. Again, the judgment was very precise and ordered the mayor to put her back in the position of head librarian.

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- On February 15, 2010, the city council of Levallois decided to eliminate the head librarian position.

From a February 11, 2006, Washington Times article, "France Resists Evangelicals".¹³

- Hardly known 20 years ago, these fast-growing immigrant churches are slowly carving out a place in France's religious landscape.
- They face hurdles from local officials and complaints from neighbors.
- "There is prejudice against us," said Yvan Castanou, pastor of the Impact Christian Center in Ivry, a suburb south of Paris. "It's against evangelical churches. The second fact is that when you're black," he added, his voice trailing off before launching into complaints about life as an African immigrant in France.
- France, whose policy of separating church and state can turn anti-religious when applied by staunchly secular officials on the local level, has gone through two years of discovering who these evangelical Christians in its midst really are.
- Often not religious themselves, local officials know little about Protestant denominations and sometimes suspect anything much different from Catholicism to be a dangerous sect.
- The Rev. Jean-Arnold de Clermont, head of the French Protestant Federation (FPF), said the evangelicals are "victims of collateral damage" from France's confrontation with its large Muslim minority.
- Ethnic churches complain that local officials often bar pastors from building premises for services in their towns. Congregations that have rented unused warehouses for years suddenly hit snags at town hall when they try to buy the buildings.
- The best-known harassment case occurred last February, when the Communist mayor of Montreuil barged into Sunday morning services at six black churches demanding to conduct safety inspections on the spot. He evacuated four of them.

From a December 18, 2008, Le Progrés article, "'Love and Mercy' surrenders in Chaussin".¹⁴

- After being visited and slandered by MIVILUDES the group "Love and Mercy" has decided to dissolve. The

religious community "Love and Mercy" is no more. At least on paper since the group decided to disband.

- Dominique Balestrat, owner of the land on which the community lived, and himself a member of the group for ten years, expressed incomprehension and sadness.
- Balestrat said, "we welcomed Georges Fenech (leader of MIVILUDES), because he said he was not coming for 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."
- What makes it sad is they made the decision to destroy their cross of Mary. She was there for ten years.

From a December 17, 2009, Human Rights Without Frontiers article, "Raid on an ecumenical monastery by MIVILUDES head Georges Fenech".¹⁵

- On 13 October 2009, the ecumenical and secular monastery "Le Moulin des Vallées" (Valleys' Mill) in Ile-et-Vilaine got the unexpected and unsolicited visit of MIVILUDES accompanied by journalists.
- A real crackdown, as it was said by Anne-Cécile Juillet in her article published in "Aujourd'hui en France" three days later.
- The residents were shocked that Georges Fenech abused his position to enter the monastery under cover of a ministerial enquiry and to bring journalists.
- The residents were outraged by Fenech's methods of interrogation... They also think that the crackdown was part of a broader strategy staged by Georges Fenech as the following sequence of events shows.
- 13 October: Crackdown of Mr. Fenech and his team at the monastery after a failed visit at another supposedly sectarian group.
- 15 October: Debate at the National Assembly about the infiltration of cults in the medical sector with Catherine Picard, president of the anti-sect movement UNADFI (She is also a member of MIVILUDES Orientation Council).
- Visit of a photographer hired by Aujourd'hui en France to take pictures of the monastery.
- 16 October: Publication of the article in Aujourd'hui en France. The monastery was assimilated to a cult. It

¹³<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2006/feb/11/20060211-090823-3680r/?page=1>

¹⁴<http://www.cmm.asso.fr/spip.php?article2321>

¹⁵<http://www.hrwf.net/Joom/images/forbnews/2009/france%20009.pdf>

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was also suggested that the suicide of a person was due to his affiliation to the monastery although this had been denied by the police enquiry.

From a February 3, 2011, Human Rights Without Frontiers article, “Deviations of MIVILUDES: raid of 70 policemen on a biodynamism centre”:¹⁶

- On 22 February 2011, on the initiative of MIVILUDES, 70 policemen assisted by the CAIMADES (department of six persons inside the police specialized in sectarian deviations) invested the “Centre for teaching biodynamism” in Nyons (Drôme region) and interrupted a training program for people lacking self-confidence.
- Four persons were put in custody, including the director of the Centre, a former 53-year old physiotherapist. The Centre had been created in 2007. They were suspected of “potentially sectarian activity” and of “overcharging training sessions”.
- The raid was triggered by a local anti-sect movement.
- While the neighbors considered the people running the Center “quiet and discreet”, the secretary general of MIVILUDES declared that according to information collected in 2009, the founder of the Center seemed to exert mental control on the trainees and to abuse their weakness.
- Similar raids orchestrated by MIVILUDES and anti-sect movements are not new.
- In October 2009, the “Moulin des Vallées”, a peaceful ecumenical monastery in Ile-et-Vilaine, was also targeted and in January 2010, the Centre “Terre du Ciel” (Heaven’s Earth) in Chardenous (Saône-et-Loire) was searched by MIVILUDES’ troops.
- No “victims” of such groups could ever be identified and no evidence of violation of the law on the abuse of weakness could be produced.

Exporting the French “Anti-Sect” Model

The French government has been working to export this “anti-sect” model. One of the more recent recommendations in this direction can be found in the late 2006 report of another parliamentary commission.

From the U.S. Department of State Annual Reports on International Religious Freedom, France, from 1999-2010:¹⁷

- On December 19, 2006, the Commission of Enquiry Regarding the Influence of Sects on Minors, presented its report entitled “Stolen Childhood--Minors Victimized by Cults.”
- The report concluded with 50 recommendations aimed at establishing better protection for children involved with sectarian religious groups.
- Recommended actions included enhancing oversight of homeschooling and strengthening MIVILUDES activities at an international level.
- Specifically, the report recommended working through the Council of Europe to create a European observatory of religious groups dedicated to facilitating intellectual exchanges among member countries to share experience and insight on how these groups are treated by member state governments.

Further, before his appointment as leader of MIVILUDES, Mr. Georges Fenech was tasked by the Prime Minister in April 2008 to research sectarian abuses. Fenech's report outlined 12 recommendations for strengthening judicial efforts to combat sectarian excesses, the last one being to harmonize European Union rules in this area.

Finally, the most recent quarterly information letters of MIVILUDES provide just a few examples of their exporting activities. From the 2009-2011 quarterly reports:¹⁸

- On April 27, 2009, a MIVILUDES delegation traveled to Brussels to meet the Center of Information and Advice on Harmful Sectarian Organizations (CIAOSN) and members of the permanent French delegation at the European Commission, to talk about the possibility of a European program for sectarian drifts.
- On May 13, 2009, the MIVILUDES leader received Mikhail Chakhov, Professor at the Russian Academy of the public service (fonction publique), to teach him how MIVILUDES works.
- On July 10, 2009, MIVILUDES officials met with Morten Kjaerum, Director of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), to present

¹⁶<http://www.hrwf.net/Joom/images/forbnews/2011/france%202011.pdf>

¹⁷<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/>

¹⁸<http://www.miviludes.gouv.fr/>

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him a European study program about sectarian drifts and their danger for fundamental rights.

- In September 2009, MIVILUDES officials received Docteur Mutch, an Australian Scholar at the Macquarie University. They introduced him to the French program against sects.
- Announcement that on March 2, 2010, the MIVILUDES leader will go to Brussels to meet with the Justice Commission of the Chamber of Representatives of Belgium, in order to prepare a new "About-Picard" law there.
- From March 19-26, 2010, a MIVILUDES delegation traveled to New Caledonia to set up a new structure against sectarian drifts there.
- On May 21, 2010, MIVILUDES received Mrs. Ilze Brands-Kheris, president of the executive office and of the board of the FRA. Per the letter, Mrs. Brands-Kheris said she was personally supporting the project of setting up a European study program about sectarian drifts, but that it would be difficult to set up.
- On September 17, 2010, the MIVILUDES leader traveled to Brussels, at the invitation of the CIAOSN, for a "European meeting." He lobbied for better coordination at the European level, regarding national politics against sectarian drifts.
- On November 25-26, 2010, the MIVILUDES leader traveled to Croatia to participate in a conference. He gave a speech on, "The Necessary Mobilization of the European Union Against Sect Excesses." FECRIS was an organizer of the conference, and its leader also gave a speech. The leader of UNADFI attended and gave a speech on, "The 'About-Picard' Law." Conference attendees included officials from Belgium. In fact, André Frédéric, Federal Deputy of the Chamber of Representatives of Belgium, gave a speech on, "Evolution of the Sect Phenomenon in Belgium and Legislation Against the Abuse of the Weak." And the leader of the Belgian Federal Centre of Information and Advice on Harmful Sectarian Organizations (CIAOSN) gave a speech on, "Criminalizing the Abuse of Weakness: the Stakes of a Political-Legal Debate." Finally, the team leader of the Anti-Terrorism Division of the Belgian Federal Police gave a speech on, "Cult Excesses, the Approach to the Phenomenon by the Police."
- In December 2010, the MIVILUDES leader met with Jean-Claude Mignon, president of the French delegation at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, to promote a European program on sectarian drifts against minors. He also met with Mr. Christos Pourgourides, President of the Legal Affairs

and Human Rights Commission at the Council of Europe, to promote the same program.

- On April 8, 2011, the Kazakhstan Embassy in France, met with MIVILUDES to learn more about the French anti-sect system.
- On May 6-7, 2011, in Warsaw, the MIVILUDES leader participated in the annual conference of FECRIS. He promoted MIVILUDES and his project for a European program against sectarian drifts. In the audience were a Polish member of parliament and André Frédéric, the Federal Deputy from the Belgian Chamber of Representatives who spoke at the conference in Croatia.
- On November 2, 2011, the MIVILUDES leader is scheduled to speak at an anti-cult conference in Australia. The leader of FECRIS will also travel to Australia and give a speech at the same conference.¹⁹

The Impact on Other Countries

Unfortunately, France's exporting activities are having an impact, and elements of this French model are spreading. Belgium and Kazakhstan are two of the most recent examples of countries that have consulted with MIVILUDES and are now moving forward with increasing government restrictions on religion.

- In Belgium, legislation to "extend the protection of vulnerable persons against mistreatment" is on the verge of passing into law. André Frédéric, the Federal Deputy in the Belgian Chamber who has met with MIVILUDES and participated in the same anti-sect conferences, is the sponsor of the repressive provisions that reference "sectarian drifts" as the target of the legislation, allow "anti-sect" associations to appear as private civil parties in court proceedings against these targeted religions and movements, and criminalize the manifestation of the beliefs and practices of targeted religions and movements. Should this become law, Belgian authorities will assess the practices and doctrines to determine if they qualify as "psychological subjection" or "techniques susceptible to alter one's capacity of discernment." If so, adherence to such beliefs or participation in such activities will be deemed to represent an "aggravated abuse." Fines and jail terms will be the penalties.²⁰

¹⁹ <http://www.cifs.org.au/ConfPHC.php>

²⁰ http://religionandpolicy.org/cms/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=6971&Itemid=249

- In Kazakhstan, legislation entitled "The Law on Religious Activity and Religious Associations" has just been adopted by Parliament for review and passage. Forum 18 reports that the Prime Minister endorsed the legislation, asserting that changes were needed "in view of the contemporary religious situation with the aims of firm regulation of the sphere of activity of religious associations and the establishment of legal responsibility for violating the norms of legislation in the sphere of religious relations, as well as for the organization of systematic work of state organs in the sphere of perfecting state-confessional relations." As of this date, the legislation has been sent to the President but he has not yet signed it.²¹

Conclusion

The time has come for the international community to put pressure on the French government to dismantle this program against "sectarian drifts," disband MIVILUDES and withdraw all public funding from the anti-sect associations, including FECRIS, UNADFI, CCMM and GEMPPPI.

²¹ http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1614