

Notice: Undefined index: et_header_layout in /home/hrwfe90/domains/hrwf.eu/public_html/wp-content/plugins/pdf-print/pdf-print.php on line 1214

Notice: Trying to access array offset on value of type null in /home/hrwfe90/domains/hrwf.eu/public_html/wp-content/plugins/pdf-print/pdf-print.php on line 1214

Notice: Undefined index: et_header_layout in /home/hrwfe90/domains/hrwf.eu/public_html/wp-content/plugins/pdf-print/pdf-print.php on line 1215

Notice: Trying to access array offset on value of type null in /home/hrwfe90/domains/hrwf.eu/public_html/wp-content/plugins/pdf-print/pdf-print.php on line 1215

Notice: Undefined index: et_template in /home/hrwfe90/domains/hrwf.eu/public_html/wp-content/plugins/pdf-print/pdf-print.php on line 1216

BELGIUM: Unfounded accusations against Jehovah's Witnesses of silencing sexual abuse

Unfounded accusations against Jehovah's Witnesses of silencing sexual abuse: The CIAOSN knew their suspicions were unfounded

HRWF (30.10.2021) – An important decision was rendered in Belgium on October 5, 2021, in favor of the Jehovah's

Witnesses. The French-speaking Tribunal of First Instance of Brussels has dismissed accusations against the Belgian organization of the Jehovah's Witnesses and individual members of the organization, who had been accused of not reporting to the police allegations of child sexual abuse in their congregations they had become aware of, thus violating Articles 422 bis and 442 quarter of the Criminal Code of Belgium, which make reporting mandatory. See a summary of the case in Bitter Winter and the court decision here.

While HRWF was not aware of the said case until its disclosure in October, it had published the following article in its newsletter and on its website in March 2021 which was showing that the CIAOSN's suspicions were unfounded and had been explicitly told by its alleged source:

Jehovah's Witnesses and sexual abuse: Former Minister of Justice Koen Geens misinformed

HRWF (09.03.2021) – At an online conference on “Limitations of Religious Freedom in Europe” organized on 4-6 March by two European universities[1], the Belgian panelist representing *Human Rights Without Frontiers* (HRWF) declared that former Minister of Justice Koen Geens had been misinformed about the CIAOSN's report on sexual abuse and Jehovah's Witnesses.

On 30 November 2018, the CIAOSN closed a 28-page report[2] about the management of sexual abuse on minors inside the organization of Jehovah's Witnesses and transmitted it to the Federal Parliament with a recommendation to set up a parliamentary inquiry commission on this issue.

In its report[3], the CIAOSN justified the rationale of its

decision as follows:

“In June 2018, the CIAOSN received the notification according to which three of the 286 testimonies received by the Foundation *“Reclaimed Voices”* in the Netherlands concern facts which have allegedly taken place in Belgium. From June 2018 on, the CIAOSN received several direct and indirect testimonies from individuals claiming to have suffered from sexual violence in the midst of the organization of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Belgium when they were children. These testimonies suggest that the management of sexual abuse in Belgium is similar to other countries.”

A Dutch-speaking member of the board *Human Rights Without Frontiers* (HRWF) contacted *Reclaimed Voices* in The Netherlands to check the credibility of this information and get more details about the three alleged cases of sexual abuse in Belgium.

In his answer, the head of *Reclaimed Voices* in The Netherlands denied such a news made public in Belgium, saying in an email dated 10 February 2021:

“The information in the report of the CIAOSN is not correct. On 29 March 2019, we sent an email to Ms Kerstine Vanderput about this inaccuracy. At that time, it came to our attention that Koen Geens, Minister of Justice (CD&V) had said on Radio 1 in Belgium: ‘It is the CIAOSN itself which has gone to the Netherlands to find this information and has stated that among the 286 Dutch complaints there were three Belgian ones’. Something similar was said on television at ‘Van Gils &

Guests'. In the Dutch media, we have only testified about the situation in the Netherlands. The figures that were mentioned are only alleged victims of abuse in the Netherlands.”[4]

The second argument of the CIAOSN for setting up a parliamentary inquiry commission was that they had received other testimonies 'directly or indirectly'.

No further details are available in their report, such as the number of direct and indirect testimonies received by the CIAOSN, the methodological and statistical treatment of the data, the type of sources, the nature of sexual abuse, the context of the alleged facts (abuse in families or in an institutional setting), the time period of the allegedly committed offences (the last five years, ten years, twenty years or more).

The members of the federal parliament need to get such details before taking a decision and public opinion also needs to be informed with full transparency.

HRWF Footnotes

1. Sigmund Neumann Institute for the Research on Freedom, Liberty and Democracy (Germany) in cooperation with the Center for Regional and Borderlands Studies/Institute of Sociology of the University of Wrocław (Poland).

2. Official title: “Signalement sur le traitement des abus

sexuels sur mineurs au sein de l'organisation des témoins de Jehovah" du 30 novembre 2018. As of the end of February, the report was still not available on the website of the CIAOSN. HRWF got it from another researcher working on this issue. It is said by the Belgian Federal Parliament to be an intermediary report (See <https://www.ciaosn.be/54K3713001.pdf>).

3. This report comprises of four parts:

Part 1: The organization of Jehovah's Witnesses (pp 1-4)

Part 2: State of play in 13 countries about initiatives denouncing internal procedures of Jehovah's Witnesses in cases of sexual abuse on minors (pp 6-10)

Part 3: State of play in Belgium (pp 12-14)

Part 4: Conclusions (pp 15-17)

Annexes (pp 18-28)

The section on Belgium only covers two pages of short descriptions of seven alleged cases or reports published in the Belgian media in 20 years' time, between 1996 and 2017.

4. Excerpt from the email of Reclaimed Voices: "De informatie in het rapport van het IACSSO is incorrect. Wij hebben op 29 maart 2019 mevrouw Kerstine VanderPutte over deze onjuistheid gemaild. Het viel ons destijds op dat Koen Geerts, minister van Justitie (CD&V) daags ervoor in België bij radio 1 het volgende meldde: 'Het is het IACSSO zelf die in Nederland informatie is gaan halen en heeft vastgesteld dat van die 286 Nederlandse klachten er drie Belgische waren'. Iets soortgelijks werd op tv gezegd, bij Van Gils & gasten. Wij hebben in de Nederlandse media steeds alleen gecommuniceerd over de Nederlandse situatie. Aantallen die genoemd zijn betreffen alleen (vermeende) slachtoffers van misbruik in

Nederland.

Photo: Palais de Justice in Brussels. Credits.

[1] *Sigmund Neumann Institute for the Research on Freedom, Liberty and Democracy* (Germany) in cooperation with the *Center for Regional and Borderlands Studies/Institute of Sociology of the University of Wrocław* (Poland).

[2] Official title: “Signalement sur le traitement des abus sexuels sur mineurs au sein de l’organisation des témoins de Jehovah” du 30 novembre 2018. As of the end of February, the report was still not available on the website of the CIAOSN. HRWF got it from another researcher working on this issue. It is said by the Belgian Federal Parliament to be an intermediary report (See <https://www.ciaosn.be/54K3713001.pdf>).

[3] This report comprises of four parts:

Part 1: The organization of Jehovah’s Witnesses (pp 1-4)

Part 2: State of play in 13 countries about initiatives denouncing internal procedures of Jehovah’s Witnesses in cases of sexual abuse on minors (pp 6-10)

Part 3: State of play in Belgium (pp 12-14)

Part 4: Conclusions (pp 15-17)

Annexes (pp 18-28)

The section on Belgium only covers two pages of short

descriptions of seven alleged cases or reports published in the Belgian media in 20 years' time, between 1996 and 2017.

[4] Excerpt from the email of Reclaimed Voices: "De informatie in het rapport van het IACSSO is incorrect. Wij hebben op 29 maart 2019 mevrouw Kerstine VanderPutte over deze onjuistheid gemaïld. Het viel ons destijds op dat Koen Geerts, minister van Justitie (CD&V) daags ervoor in België bij radio 1 het volgende meldde: 'Het is het IACSSO zelf die in Nederland informatie is gaan halen en heeft vastgesteld dat van die 286 Nederlandse klachten er drie Belgische waren'. Iets soortgelijks werd op tv gezegd, bij Van Gils & gasten. Wij hebben in de Nederlandse media steeds alleen gecommuniceerd over de Nederlandse situatie. Aantallen die genoemd zijn betreffen alleen (vermeende) slachtoffers van misbruik in Nederland.

HRWF note: Kerstine Vanderput is the director of the CIAOSN. Van Gils & Gasten is a Flemish TV program.

[Further reading about FORB in Belgium on HRWF website](#)

Notice: Undefined index: et_footer_layout in /home/hrwfe90/domains/hrwf.eu/public_html/wp-content/plugins/pdf-print/pdf-print.php on line 1266

Notice: Trying to access array offset on value of type null in /home/hrwfe90/domains/hrwf.eu/public_html/wp-content/plugins/pdf-print/pdf-print.php on line 1266

Notice: Undefined index: et_footer_layout in /home/hrwfe90/domains/hrwf.eu/public_html/wp-content/plugins/pdf-print/pdf-print.php on line 1267

Notice: Trying to access array offset on value of type null in /home/hrwfe90/domains/hrwf.eu/public_html/wp-content/plugins/pdf-print/pdf-print.php on line 1267

Notice: Undefined index: et_template in

/home/hrwfe90/domains/hrwf.eu/public_html/wp-content/plugins/pdf-print/pdf-print.php on line 1268