

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

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FRANCE: Jehovah's Witnesses take MIVILUDES to court

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Press release

Les Témoins de Jéhovah/ France (16.03.2022) – Following the publication of the 2018-2020 MIVILUDES activity report, Jehovah's Witnesses filed a formal complaint on 16 March 2022 with the Administrative Tribunal of Paris against the MIVILUDES.

Jehovah's Witnesses allege that the MIVILUDES report used bad

methodology which was calculated to publicly denigrate them and label them as a harmful cult. The MIVILUDES report ignores the work of well-respected scholars and the judgments of courts of justice in France.[1] Instead, the report's findings are based on unsubstantiated allegations from unreliable anonymous sources. This unreliable methodology used by the MIVILUDES ignores and violates the fundamental legal principle of adversarial proceedings and violated the rights of thousands of peaceful believers who are publicly stigmatized without being able to defend themselves or without even knowing what they are accused of.

Jehovah's Witnesses are profoundly concerned by the ensuing climate of religious intolerance and hostility against their religion that the activity of the MIVILUDES has been promoting over the years. This has resulted in countless acts of discrimination, along with instances of hate speech and, inevitably, hate crime. It has been well-documented and established that the poorly-researched reports generated by the MIVILUDES have resulted in insidious and damaging effects on law-abiding citizens.

It is worth mentioning that in 2006, the Council of State granted Jehovah's Witnesses request for disclosure of 'documents of general information concerning them'. These documents, which according to their detractors were conclusive and damning, proved to be no more than a list of their places of worship.

It is especially appalling that the State-funded MIVILUDES uses public money to produce a report with unsupported and unreliable allegations calculated to malign a whole spectrum of the population in the view of public opinion. The *Cour des comptes* has already issued a report regarding the MIVILUDES' operations and has questioned the lack of professionalism of the MIVILUDES and the relevance of such a body. In fact, the MIVILUDES' way of operating violates both the religious neutrality of the State and the first article of the

Constitution which guarantees that France "... shall ensure the equality of all citizens before the law, without distinction of origin, race or religion. It shall respect all beliefs."

Furthermore, the MIVILUDES deliberately ignores that: (1) Jehovah's Witnesses have been present in France for more than 120 years and that the 250,000 or so people who regularly or occasionally practice this religion in France are law-abiding citizens who are well integrated into society; (2) for more than twenty years, the highest administrative court in France, the Council of State, granted Jehovah's Witnesses the status of a religion (Judgment of 23 June 2000); (3) Jehovah's Witness religious ministers benefit from the fund for worship (CAVIMAC); (4) Jehovah's Witnesses are among the seven religions which are allowed to send chaplains into prisons; (5) the European Court of Human Rights has recognized Jehovah's Witnesses as a "well-known" Christian religion and protected their religious activities through numerous decisions.

On 8 November 2021, Jehovah's Witnesses asked the MIVILUDES to delete defamatory passages from the 2018–2020 activity report and to rectify serious omissions and misleading information contained therein. They also asked the MIVILUDES to end its stigmatization of Jehovah's Witnesses as a so-called cult (secte) and to remove their name from the 24 February 2021 report "Lutte contre les dérives sectaires." MIVILUDES did not comply with any of these requests. Jehovah's Witnesses are confident that the courts will remedy these serious violations.

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[1] For more information, see The New MIVILUDES Report: Bad Methodology, Unreliable Results (bitterwinter.org)

Further reading about FORB in France on HRWF website

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