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**FRANCE: To avoid judicial proceedings by Scientology, the MIVILUDES republishes its annual report**

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## ***Faced with a lawsuit, the French governmental anti-cult mission republishes its yearly report including a four-page right of answer by the Church of Scientology***

HRWF (05.08.2023) On 5 May, Bitter Winter published an article by Massimo Introvigne titled "Anti-cultism à la mode de Caen: to avoid a court hearing, MIVILUDES humors Scientology" showing how surprisingly the MIVILUDES, the "Inter-ministerial mission for monitoring and combating cultic deviances (dérives sectaires)", a peculiar French governmental institution officially endorsing and propagating the anti-cult ideology, has suddenly decided to avoid a lawsuit in the city of Caen which would have put in the limelight of the media a number of systemic deficiencies of its methodology. Hereafter, we publish large excerpts of the said article; the divisions in sections and the titles thereof are HRWF's and not the author's.

### ***The MIVILUDES in trouble with the right of reply***

"The MIVILUDES publishes yearly reports, which normally include factual mistakes, faulty statistics, and slander against movements it has decided to label as 'cults' ('sectes,' a French word that should be translated in English as 'cults' rather than 'sects').

(...) What happened to the MIVILUDES, thus, was that some of its victims started taking legal actions. One was the Church of Scientology, which asked for its answer to the allegations included in the MIVILUDES document to be published within or at the end of the report on the MIVILUDES's website. The request was based on the French law on the right of reply, or the right to defend oneself against public criticism in the same venue where it was published. Since MIVILUDES did not publish Scientology's answer within a reasonable delay, Scientology filed an emergency case (référé) with the Court of Caen, asking that MIVILUDES be forced to publish the answer. The hearing was scheduled for May 4. (...)

The MIVILUDES' "former chief and now member of its Orientation Council, Georges Fenech, already had a bad experience in Caen, where he was sentenced in 2019 for infringement of the presumption of innocence of the Church of Scientology. Fenech prefers touristic destinations other than Caen, including Crimea, where he went in 2019 to meet with Vladimir Putin and condone the occupation of this Ukrainian region by Russian forces, which the French government and the European Union regard as illegal."

"Trying to avoid the ill-fated Caen trip, the MIVILUDES did something that should be normal in democratic countries but is untypical of its modus operandi. Before the date of the hearing, it did republish its last yearly report by including the answer to it by the Church of Scientology. You may read the answer in the very last pages of this extraordinary 'second edition' of the MIVILUDES report."

### ***About the arguments***

"It is a common sense answer, focusing on the fact that the references to Scientology in the report do not amount to 'cultic deviances,' even if one accepts this notion that is typical of the MIVILUDES and is not endorsed by mainline scholars of new religious movements. The answer notes that, 'The Church [of Scientology] is pejoratively qualified as a multinational of spirituality. It is true that, like many other religions, the Church of Scientology has an international dimension: its followers are present in more than 150 countries throughout the world. But what is the difference with other religions such as Catholicism, Islam or Buddhism, for example? Why is the Church of Scientology treated differently with a commercial designation, when many countries in Europe and around the world recognize it as a religion like any other?"

### ***What are really "the saisines"?***

“The answer then criticizes the system of ‘saisines,’ i.e. MIVILUDES’ method to evaluate the danger of a ‘cult’ based on a number of reports against it anybody can send to the agency via a Web form. ‘

To justify the inclusion of our Church in the activity report, MIVILUDES puts forward on pages 35 and 38 the figure of 33 ‘saisines’ received in 2022 concerning the Church of Scientology, without us knowing anything about the content of these ‘saisines,’ or even about this opaque concept of ‘saisine’ (does a simple request for information concerning our Church constitute a ‘saisine’?) Moreover, everyone can appreciate the special treatment given to the Church of Scientology in the activity report, for no apparent reason: 33 ‘saisines’ are enough for MIVILUDES to devote 4 pages of its report to the Church of Scientology (pages 58 to 61 of the report) and to mention it 51 times.

This is much more than all the cumulative developments devoted to the Christian tradition as a whole (Catholicism, Protestantism and Evangelicalism), which has nevertheless been the subject of... 293 ‘saisines’! The yearly report thus testifies to a very curious conception of the principle of impartiality of the administration and of the neutrality of the State with respect to religions.”

### ***Half of the truth is not the truth***

“After criticizing the report’s lack of understanding of what the theology of Scientology is all about, the answer discusses the case of a new Church of Scientology to be opened in Saint-Denis. “If, on this subject, MIVILUDES mentions the cancellation of the municipal decree which attempted to hinder the work necessary for the opening of the building, it forgets to specify that the State was also condemned by the Administrative Court of Appeal of Paris, at the same time as the city. The report tries to minimize this condemnation by simply indicating that the authorities must base themselves on

strictly legal and objective considerations, without any pejorative a priori displayed towards the movement. This is a modest way of carefully avoiding the fact that the administrative judges condemned the administration for a misuse of power committed to the detriment of the Church, that is to say, the most serious violation tainting administrative action. One can only deplore the fact that MIVILUDES does not frankly disassociate itself from actions which seriously undermine the rule of law, because respect for the law is part of respect for the Republic and the great principles on which it is founded.”

### ***Freedom of expression (verbal and printed) – a ‘cultic deviance’?***

“The answer notes that the report presents proselytism activities and the distribution of flyers and booklets as ‘cultic deviances’ while they are part of the normal exercise of religious liberty by any religion. ‘The allegation that the Church seems to target fragile, suffering people, confronted with personal dramas or existential questions, adds the answer, is once again an allegation which has no reality: Scientology is universal and addresses itself to all, as is reflected in the profile of its devotees throughout the world, who belong to all socio-professional categories.’ The Church of Scientology is accused both of carrying out a massive propaganda by advertising its ideas online and offline and of secretiveness and ‘lack of transparency,’ which seems contradictory.

### ***A controversial book endorsed by the MIVILUDES***

The MIVILUDES report, the answer notes, advertises a comic book called ‘The Bubble Box,’ published in 2005 by a disgruntled ex-member of Scientology, and ‘endorsed by the MIVILUDES because it is one of the winners of its call for projects in 2021.’ The report, according to the answer, ‘tends to give it credibility by presenting it as a true testimony,

whereas there is nothing to verify its authenticity. Whether or not this story really comes from a former faithful, its artificially dramatic tone, like a Hollywood thriller, has the effect of damaging the reputation and image of the Church, as well as the religious feelings of its faithful who do not recognize themselves at all in this story. This is all the more damaging since the report claims that the comic book was widely distributed with the blessing of a state agency.”

Finally, the answer mentions that the MIVILUDES report ‘also claims that the vigilance of some complainants has thwarted potential asset grabs by the Church of Scientology.’ However, ‘this claim is not supported by any source mentioned and... it is therefore impossible to know on what alleged facts it is based.’”

## **Conclusions**

“It is clear, concludes the answer, that the MIVILUDES did not find any ‘cultic deviance’ in the activities of the Church of Scientology, even according to its own controversial definition of the notion. Having decided a priori that Scientology is a ‘cult,’ any activity it carries out, which would be regarded as absolutely normal if practiced by another religion, are automatically labeled as ‘cultic deviances.’ This is a circular and faulty logic, which can only result in discrimination and slander.”

*Photo: The new Palais de Justice of Caen. From Twitter.*

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

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