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## **BELGIUM: Media fabrication of religious hostility: the case of Jehovah's Witnesses**

### **BELGIUM: Media fabrication of religious hostility: the case of Jehovah's Witnesses**

HRWF (21.08.2023) – A Jehovah's Witness has telephoned someone to talk about the Bible and the Apocalypse, according to a journalist from a well-known French-language daily, who artificially turned it into a sensational article dated 15 August 2023. Headline: *"How Jehovah's Witnesses try to recruit*

*by telephone“.*

We all receive unsolicited phone calls for commercial purposes, but they don't make the headlines. We simply get rid of them by hanging up the phone.

Clearly, the journalist wanted to stigmatize Jehovah's Witnesses (JW). Indeed, she added and developed the idea that *“they use the telephone, especially in cases of the death of a family member, according to a specialist.”*

What specialist? Not a person, but a French anti-JW organisation (UNADFI) well known for having lost several libel cases.

Other 'proof' dating back several years, according to the same journalist: *“Bereaved people are among the preferred targets of these telephone calls. They use the telephone especially when a family member dies. They get their information from obituaries and their message is to tell their loved ones that they shouldn't despair because the end of the world is coming soon”, explains Sandrine Mathen, former director of CIAOSN (Information and Advice Centre on harmful cult-like organizations).”*

Concerning this source closely linked to the Ministry of Justice, it should be pointed out that in 2022 the CIAOSN lost a case brought to court by the Jehovah's Witnesses for defamation about their alleged concealing of sexual abuse in their midst. According to the court decision, the CIAOSN was

to post the judgement on its website, but it did so in a very curious way. Moreover, strange though it may be, the link of the journalist did not lead to the CIAOSN website but to another of her own articles protected by a paywall that we managed to go through and in which there is no mention of the declaration of the CIAOSN former director...

If the journalist had not been ill-intentioned, she would have contacted the central office of the Association of Jehovah's Witnesses in Belgium to find out their position on the possible use of the telephone for their missionary activities and whether targeting bereaved persons were part of their policy.

If she had done it, there would not have been any reason to write an article about a phone call from a private person to another private person, but she didn't.

We did and here's the answer:

*"Regarding the article in the DH 'Comment les Témoins de Jéhovah tentent de recruter par téléphone', we can confirm that this is not a method recommended by us. It is possible that some individual Witnesses use this method because each Witness considers it a personal assignment and will carry it out in the way that suits him or her personally."*

At the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) in Warsaw, there is a specific unit dealing with hate speech, the Tolerance and Non-Discrimination

Department. They collect cases of hate speech in the OSCE Participating States for their annual report. The next OSCE/ODIHR two-week international conference with all the country delegations (57) and hundreds of NGOs will take place in Warsaw in early October and hate speech is on the agenda.

Photo: Jehovah's Witnesses' Bethel (headquarters) in Belgium

**Further reading about FORB in Belgium on HRWF website**

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**Notice:** Undefined index: et\_template in /home/hrwfe90/domains/hrwf.eu/public\_html/wp-content/plugins/pdf-print/pdf-print.php on line 1269