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French court rules in favour of burkini ban

Euronews (21/06/2022) - <https://bit.ly/3QJJWB2> - France's highest administrative court has upheld a nationwide ban on the wearing of "burkini" swimming costumes in public pools.

Authorities in Grenoble had challenged the ban on the full-body swimsuit, which is typically worn by some Muslim women to uphold their faith.

The city's municipal council had sparked nationwide controversy in May when it relaxed its rules on the swimwear allowed in public pools.

But the French Conseil d'Etat said on Tuesday allowing the burkini would "undermine the principle of neutrality of public services".

Grenoble mayor Eric Piolle has argued that people using public services, such as swimming pools, should be allowed to dress as they please.

But opponents said the policy violated France's core secular value that religion cannot be used to inform decisions or policies.

Judges at the Conseil d'Etat ruled in favour of the Isere prefecture and confirmed that the new swimwear regulations in Grenoble had only aimed "to satisfy a religious demand".

"The very specific derogation made ...is likely to affect the proper functioning of the public service and the equal treatment of users," the court said.

French Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin **wrote on Twitter** that the ruling was "a victory for the law of separatism, for secularism and beyond, for the whole Republic."

A local court in Grenoble had previously ruled in favour of the burkini ban, stating that people should be able to "free themselves from this rule for religious purposes".

Since 2016, several local French authorities have attempted to outlaw the wearing of the burkini in public places.

Far-right leader Marine Le Pen has condemned the swimsuit as "clothing of Islamist propaganda" and has called for more regulation.

But in 2019, authorities in the northwestern city of Rennes quietly updated its pool hygiene policies to allow burkinis and other types of swimwear.

Photo: Karima, wearing a full-body burkini swimsuit, swims in Cannes after the call to support the wearing of burkinis by businessman and political activist Rachid Nekkaz. - Copyright ERIC GAILLARD/REUTERS

More reading

[Burkini ban challenged by Grenoble city council in top French court](#)

[French court blocks Grenoble's bid to allow full-body swimsuit](#)

[Controversy as French city Grenoble allows women to wear 'burkinis' in swimming pools](#)

[Women in France fined for wearing 'burkini' swimsuits at pool](#)

La Flotte-en-Ré: The case of the Virgin Mary statue goes on

In a case started in France by secular humanists, the court ordered the removal of the statue. The city appealed.

by PierLuigi Zoccatelli



The Virgin of La Flotte-en-Ré. From Twitter.

Bitter Winter (31.03.2022) - <https://bit.ly/375WOir> - Last month, Bitter Winter reported about the strange case of a statue of the Virgin Mary in the French village of La Flotte-en-Ré, on the Ré Island, that the secular humanist organization National Federation for Free Thought (Fédération nationale de la libre pensée) wanted removed or destroyed.

The case is legally complicated. When it was erected in 1945, to thank the Virgin Mary for the safe return home of local soldiers in World War II, the statue stood on private ground. In the 1980s, the municipality decided to create a new roundabout, and needed the part of the ground where the statue was. An agreement was reached, and the statue was kept and moved just a few meters in what was now public ground.

Theoretically, the French law prohibits to "install on public ground" religious symbols. However, in this case, the municipality had not "installed" or "erected" a statue. It had just slightly moved a statue that already existed on private ground, pursuant to an agreement with the owner.

However, on May 17, 2020, a car hit and destroyed the statue. The municipality reconstructed it, and the National Federation for Free Thought argued this was a new "installation" of the statue, as such forbidden by the 1905 law separating church and state.

On March 3, 2022, the Justice Court of Poitiers sided with the freethinkers. It concluded that what the city did was a "new installation," and ordered the statue removed within six months. It can be a precedent for two similar cases pending about statues at Les-Sables-d'Olonne (Vendée) and Cogolin (Var).

In Cogolin, the case is about two statues, one of St. Maurus and one of the Virgin Mary. The second one has a curious story, as it was already moved in 2013, after some inhabitants complained that it was disrespectful to the Virgin Mary that it stood on Chemin de la Radasse, since "radasse" is a slang term for "prostitute." It was then

moved to the more appropriately named street Chemin Notre-Dame-des-Anges, but it remained on public ground.



The statue of the Virgin Mary in Cogolin. From Twitter.

One element not considered in the Poitiers Court decision is the overwhelming opinion of the citizens of La Flotte-en-Ré to keep the statue of the Virgin Mary where it is. They argue that the statue is not devotional but has become a local landmark and an opportunity to reflect on the anguish of the wars.

On March 22, the city appealed. The mayor, Jean-Paul Héraudeau, expressed the city's willingness to go to the State Council and the European Court of Human Rights if needed. He is supported by the mayors of nearby cities in what they perceive as a case where judges do not really understand local traditions and local sensitivity.

Jehovah's Witnesses take MIVILUDES to court

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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Acts of intolerance against Christians

Observatory of Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians in Europe (OIDCE) - 23.02.2022 - <https://bit.ly/3MK1BqI> - In February, the OIDCE reported a number of incidents against Christians in France and other countries.

Church tagged with insults against a priest

During the night of February 23rd, unknown vandals spray-painted an insult on the side of a church in Curlu, France. The insult was directed towards the parish priest Sylvain Mansart, who commented: "At least I'm not alone in this problem. (...) We comfort each other". Priests in neighbouring churches have received similar abuse. The local police confirmed these claims and are investigating.

The other targeted priest is called Abbé Jean-Louis Brunel and was also targeted in Barleux, according to the news source.

Source: [Courier Picard](#) (23.02.2022)

Tiktok influencers desecrate French Church on viral video

Two TikTok influencers, Benjamin Ledig and "Queen Paul", filmed themselves wearing a crop-top and twerking (dancing sexually) in front of a crucifix at the Parisian church of Saint Paul on February 16th. They later posted this video on social media where it received some 20 million views despite it being repeatedly removed. Ledig claims he did it to protest the "homophobia" of the church while "Queen Paul" apologized for his behaviour.

The two youths entered the church and decided to shoot the film in front of a crucifix "for a laugh." Ledig states "What I wanted to say is that I do not condone what the Church does: its homophobia, the fact that same-sex marriage is not accepted." On the other side, "Queen Paul" has apologized and has taken the video down. After 6 million views, TikTok also removed the video but Ledig continued to post it and it has since got 20 million views.

Many people belonging to different religions have commented on the post saying it is "a scandal to do such a thing in church" and identifying it as a "lack of respect" towards Christians.

The parish priest Pierre Vivarès has condemned the act and says he "will explore all legal possibilities to stop the infringement of his rights constituted by the recording and broadcasting of this video without prior express authorization." This act shows a lack of respect for Christian symbols in a place of worship.

Source: [Life Site](#), [Breaking News](#) 21.02.2022

Hijabs in the French courts

By [Frank Cranmer](#)

Law & Religion UK (03.03.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3vXu9XB> - On 24 June 2019, the council of the Bar Association of Lille amended its rules of procedure by adding the following to the section devoted to "relations with institutions": "An advocate may not wear with the robe any decoration or sign ostensibly manifesting a religious, philosophical, community or political affiliation or opinion". A student advocate who wished to wear the *hijab* in court and her pupil-master each lodged an appeal against the change. (The French text, rather unhelpfully, describes her as wishing to wear "*le voile ou le foulard*", though Reuters [reports](#) that the applicant, Ms Sarah Asmeta, wears the *hijab*.)

The case came before the highest civil court in France, the *Cour de Cassation*. The main questions before the Court were as follows:

- Is the council of a bar association competent to prohibit, in its rules of procedure, the wearing of any sign manifesting a religious, philosophical, community or political affiliation or opinion, with court dress?
- Does this prohibition by the bar association constitute an attack on freedom of religion and freedom of expression?

In its judgment of 2 March 2022, the Court came to the following conclusions. The Bar Council of Lille had been competent to act as it had. In the absence of a specific legislative provision and in the absence of a regulatory provision enacted by the National Bar Council, it fell within the remit of local bar councils to regulate the wearing and use of the costume of their profession. The Bar Council of Lille, therefore, had the power to modify its rules of procedure in order to prohibit the wearing of any distinctive sign with court dress.

The restriction of freedom of religion and expression was proportionate. By requiring its members to wear court dress without any distinctive sign, the Bar Council was contributing to ensuring equality between lawyers and, through that, to equality between litigants. The principle of equality was one of the constituent elements of the right to a fair trial. Prohibiting the wearing of a sign manifesting a religious, philosophical, community or political affiliation or opinion was therefore necessary and appropriate, on the one hand, to preserve the independence of the advocate and, on the other, to guarantee the right to a fair trial. The prohibition did not, therefore, constitute discrimination.

You can read the full text here: [2 mars 2022 Cour de cassation Pourvoi n° 20-20.185](#).

France: 857 acts against Christians in 2021

***A report shows that there were also 589 against Jews, and 213 to Muslims .
"Physical violence is on the increase", said an evangelical leader.***

Evangelical Focus (22.02.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3M05Y0d> - Hate towards people because of their faith is increasing in France, according to the initial findings of the investigation carried out by two MPs, ordered by French Prime Minister Jean Castex.

La République En Marche (the Republic on the Move, LERM) and *MoDem* (democratic movement) MPs, Ludovic Mendes and Isabelle Florennes, presented their report in a press conference on 10 February, after **over thirty interviews with religious representatives, police and judicial authorities**, and four trips to Strasbourg, Sarcelles, Lyon and Nantes.

They counted **1659 anti-religious acts in 2021: 857 acts were against Christians, 589 against Jews, and 213 attacks against Muslims**. The latter have grown by 38% compared to 2019. Those data consolidate the provisional assessment presented in December by the Minister of the Interior, Gérald Darmanin.

"A rise in hatred over the past ten years"

“There has been **a rise in hatred over the past ten years**, which is **getting worse** both face to face and online”, Mendes pointed out.

The two MPs explained that “every denomination that was interviewed described a **society that is becoming more and more hateful and violent**” towards them.

Furthermore, “the **small daily aggressions are more and more frequent**.”

Unfortunately, many seem to be getting used to it, or rather learning to live with it”, added Mendes.

They underlined that this rise in hatred and violence “is **fuelled by political discourse**, with a speech that no longer has any limits”, and advocated for “a better education about religions”.

Romain Choisnet, communications director of the **National Council of Evangelicals in France** (CNEF) commented on the study on twitter, stressing that “for a long time, anti-Christian acts consisted of **damage** to or theft from places of worship, which still account for most of the incidents, but **physical violence is on the increase**”.

“Secularism is not about hiding religion”

Amid a country divided over the **recent and controversial appointment of the Christian philosopher Mark Sherringham as the head of the Higher Council for School Programmes** (CSP), the French MPs “hope that the debate on religions in schools will not be refused, because **secularism is not about hiding religion**”.

Ludovic Mendes and Isabelle Florennes will deliver their final report in early March.

Note: This article has been corrected - the growth of 38% compared to 2019 was not related to general anti-religious attacks but to anti-Muslim attacks.

Photo : The windows of the store were full of anti-Christian offensive graffiti. / @comcnf.

French religious associations must sign a Republican Commitment Contract to access subsidies

Evangelicals say the new contract “contains guarantees for freedom of religion” but also warn about its application, because “certain terms could be misinterpreted”.

Evangelical Focus (01.02.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3uuQjzk> - **French** associations, including “religious associations”, wishing to receive public subsidies or approval as of 1 January have to sign the Republican Commitment Contract (CER).

The CER is **one of the key measures of the “Law to reinforce the respect of republican principles”**, also known as **“anti-separatism law”**, approved last year by the French Assembly after a **controversial discussion**.

It states that **associations must “accept seven commitments**: respect for the laws of the Republic; **freedom of conscience**, freedom of the members of the association; equality and non-discrimination; fraternity and prevention of violence; respect for the dignity of the person; and respect for the symbols of the Republic”.

“CER contains guarantees for freedom of religion”

The **National Council of Evangelicals in France (CNEF)**, along with the **Protestant Evangelical Committee for Human Dignity (CPDH)**, issued a statement on the issue, pointing out that **“in general, the terms of the CER contain guarantees for freedom of association and freedom of conscience, thought and religion”**.

“As it stands, the text thus **allows so-called denominational associations**, which pursue the general or local interest, to enter the scheme, while **affirming a religious identity** and foundations linked to their action”, add the entities.

The evangelical representatives also **“welcome commitments to fraternity and the fight against violence**, as they constitute the basis of any associative contribution to the common good”.

“We call for a society of trust and not of mistrust”

However, the CNEF and the CPDH say they **“must remain vigilant about the conditions of application and interpretation of these new measures** by public authorities or administrations”.

“Certain terms such as abusive proselytism or arbitrary exclusion **could be misinterpreted**. The possibility of administrative appeal is not excluded if the public authorities refuse to provide financial support”, warns the statement.

That is why the evangelical entities **“urge the state to pay particular attention to respecting the freedoms** cherished by associations when applying this new control mechanism”.

“We call for a society of trust and not of mistrust”, the French evangelicals conclude in the statement.

Photo : A view of the French Assembly. / Photo: Chris Waits, CC BY 2.0

France Senate votes to ban wearing of religious symbols at sport events and swimming pools

National LAW u. dehl (20.01.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3ChIuz4> - In the latest move as part of a controversial **decade-long effort** to curb the public expression of religion, the French Senate voted 160-143 Tuesday in favor of a **bill** seeking to amend its national **Sports Code** to ban athletes from wearing religious symbols, such as hijabs and burkinis, at sports competitions, public swimming pools, and bathing areas.

The bill was proposed on December 8, 2021, by over 80 Senators belonging to the center-right opposition party Les Républicains. It prohibits the wear of “conspicuous religious symbols” by participants in sports events organized by “federations and affiliated associations” and states that rules for the use of public swimming pools or artificial bathing areas must respect the neutrality and secularism of public services.

The bill’s statement of reasons refers to a conflict between the “peaceful and neutral” practice of sport on the one hand and the abuse of the secular principles of the French Republic and “Islamic radicalization” on the other. It states freedom of exercise of religion must be accompanied by neutrality, meaning no individual differences or affiliations are put forward by athletes. A **2021 law** to strengthen oversight of sports clubs to prevent radicalization has not been implemented, it states, causing “incidents” of non-neutrality in sport.

One incident the statement mentions is the **2019 protest** against the fine imposed by Grenoble city for wearing burkinis at a public pool. The bill describes this protest, a peaceful demonstration where Muslim women wore burkinis in defiance, as a “provocative militant action” defending an unrecognizable vision of women.” It continues by saying that while local governments like Grenoble can legislate on health and safety matters, including banning religious signs that “pose a safety risk,” they look to the Senate to take a stand with respect to secularism.

Notably, in 2012, the French Football Federation banned the wear of veils in official matches or competitions it organized one day after a similar International Association Football Federation (FIFA) ban was overturned.

The bill is not yet final: a committee comprising members from both houses of parliament will now attempt to find a compromise on its text. While the bill’s statement of reasons cites Article 50 of the Olympic Charter, which seeks to prohibit “political, religious or racial demonstration or propaganda” at Olympic venues, it is unclear whether the changes brought by it will apply to the 2024 Paris Olympics.

500 « sectes », 500 000 « victimes » en France ? La MIVILUDES avoue ne pas disposer de données récentes

La mission gouvernementale française avoue aujourd'hui s'être appuyée sur des chiffres vieux de dix ans (et controversés).

[Lire le texte originel en anglais.](#)

Par Massimo Introvigne

Bitter Winter (05.01.2022) - Si vous suivez la presse française, vous avez probablement lu qu'à cause de COVID-19, les « sectes », une vieille obsession en France, prolifèrent plus que jamais. En fait, il y a maintenant 500 « sectes », avec 500 000 « victimes », dont 50 .000 à 90 000 sont des « enfants ». Ces chiffres invraisemblables ont été repris par les médias français, et même mentionnés au niveau international.

Les vérificateurs de faits (fact-checkers) des médias fiables les ont probablement considérés à première vue comme légèrement étranges. Pourtant, ils ont été certifiés par une institution gouvernementale, la MIVILUDES, la Mission interministérielle de vigilance et de lutte contre les dérives sectaires. Grâce à ce cachet gouvernemental, ceux qui ont repris ces chiffres dans les médias se sont fourvoyés.

Malheureusement pour ces médias et la MIVILUDES, il existe en France des lois similaires au FOIA (Freedom of Information Act) américain permettant aux citoyens d'accéder aux documents du gouvernement sous certaines conditions. L'ONG CAP-LC (Coordination des associations et des particuliers pour la liberté de conscience) dotée d'un statut consultatif spécial auprès de l'ECOSOC (Conseil économique et social) des Nations Unies a utilisé ces lois pour demander à la MIVILUDES d'où provenaient ces statistiques.

Le 19 juillet 2021, la MIVILUDES a répondu, et la lettre a maintenant été publiée par le [magazine français Rebelle\[S\]](#). Il s'agit d'une lettre très surprenante dans laquelle la MIVILUDES admet qu'elle ne dispose pas de statistiques récentes et qu'elle ne s'appuie que sur des documents anciens, datant parfois de 25 ans.

Pour les « 500 sectes », la MIVILUDES affirme que le chiffre est tiré du rapport controversé de 1995 établi par une Commission parlementaire française sur les « sectes ». En réalité, ce rapport recense 173 « sectes » et, comme l'explique la lettre, le chiffre de 500 inclut les « filiales ». Inclure les « filiales » reviendrait à prétendre qu'il existe en France des dizaines de milliers de religions en considérant chaque paroisse catholique comme une religion. Plus important encore, la liste de 1995 a été tellement critiquée et même ridiculisée que la MIVILUDES elle-même a déclaré à plusieurs reprises qu'elle ne s'y référait plus. Mais, elle l'a fait pour créer l'alarme par des statistiques bidon.

Le nombre de 500 000 « victimes » des « sectes », dit la lettre, arrondit le nombre de 460 000, qui proviendrait du [rapport annuel d'activité de la MIVILUDES de 2010](#), c'est-à-dire d'il y a 11 ans. En fait, ce commentaire montre que la MIVILUDES lit mal ses propres documents.

Dans le rapport 2010, page 253, on lit, dans une séance consacrée à la Nouvelle-Calédonie, qu'on y a trouvé « 60 000 adeptes des groupes sectaires », ce qui signifie que la Nouvelle-Calédonie, alors qu'elle représente moins de 4 % de la population nationale française, concentre 20 % du nombre total des membres de sectes en France, évalué entre « 300 000 et 400 000 sur l'ensemble du territoire français ».

Si 60 000 est présenté comme un pourcentage du total, cela signifie que le chiffre est *inclus* dans le total. 60 000, c'est 20% de 300 000, ce qui signifie que le rédacteur de la partie du rapport consacrée à la Nouvelle-Calédonie a considéré le chiffre le plus bas comme moins incroyable que le chiffre le plus élevé, 400 000.

Cherchant un moyen de justifier son chiffre actuel de 500 000, la MIVILUDES en 2021 a pris le chiffre le plus élevé de 2010 (400 000) et a ajouté les 60 000 de Nouvelle-Calédonie (qui en fait étaient déjà comptés comme faisant partie des 300 000 ou 400 000), en prétendant inexactement que le rapport de 2010 parlait de 460 000 « membres des sectes », et a arrondi le chiffre à 500 000. Les médias aiment les chiffres ronds après tout. Comme dans des cas similaires, la section sur la Nouvelle-Calédonie du rapport 2010 ne fournit aucune source ni preuve pour le chiffre de la Nouvelle-Calédonie et pour le chiffre national.

Enfin, la lettre indique que le chiffre de 50 000 à 90 000 mineurs « victimes » de « sectes » ajuste le chiffre de « 35 000 à 100 000 » [d'un rapport publié il y a 15 ans](#), en 2006, sur l'influence des « sectes » sur la santé physique et mentale des mineurs. Aucun

étudiant de premier cycle ne pourrait s'en tirer avec un rapport d'étude « ajustant » de manière créative des statistiques vieilles de dix ans. Le rapport de 2006, en tout cas, présentait ses chiffres comme conjecturaux, déclarant que le nombre réel « reste difficile à évaluer ».

Le document de 2006 précise que « L'évolution même des mouvements à caractère sectaire rend difficile toute appréhension plus précise du nombre de mineurs concernés », pages 21 et 22. Une fourchette « entre 35 000 et 100 000 » montre qu'il ne s'agit même pas d'une véritable statistique, mais qu'elle est fondée sur les déclarations de quelques témoins, qui n'ont pas expliqué leurs sources ni leur méthodologie.

En résumé, nous savons maintenant, non pas grâce aux critiques de la MIVILUDES, mais grâce à la MIVILUDES elle-même, qu'elle ne dispose d'aucune statistique sur les « sectes », et que les chiffres qu'elle mentionne proviennent de documents de 1995, 2006 et 2010, qui ne sont même pas cités correctement et ne peuvent évidemment rien dire de la situation actuelle. Ces documents ont été largement critiqués par les universitaires lors de leur publication, et proposaient des chiffres incroyables basés sur les déclarations d'un petit nombre de témoins et de sources qui n'étaient pas mentionnées ou qui n'existaient peut-être même pas.

Les fausses statistiques, comme nous l'avons appris lors de la crise du COVID, constituent une part particulièrement dangereuse des informations fallacieuses (fake news). Elles sont intolérables lorsqu'elles sont diffusées par les médias, et deviennent un scandale public lorsque des institutions gouvernementales sont impliquées.

500 "Cults", 500,000 "Victims" in France? MIVILUDES admits it has no recent data

The French governmental mission now confesses it relied on decade-old (and controversial) figures.

By Massimo Introvigne

Bitter Winter (05.01.2022) - <https://bit.ly/3HDSkg6> - If you read French, you have probably read that because of COVID-19 "cults," an old obsession in France, are proliferating more than ever. In fact, there are now 500 "cults," with 500,000 "victims," of which from 50,000 to 90,000 are "children." These fantastic figures have been repeated by French media, and even mentioned internationally.

Fact-checkers in reliable media probably at first sight regarded them as slightly strange. However, they were certified by a governmental institution, the MIVILUDES, the Mission interministérielle de vigilance et de lutte contre les dérives sectaires (Interministerial Mission of Vigilance and Combat against Cultic Deviances). Because of this governmental stamp, those who repeated these figures in the media got away with them.

Unfortunately for these media and the MIVILUDES, in France there are laws similar to the American FOIA (Freedom of Information Act) allowing citizens to access documents of the government under certain conditions. An NGO with special consultative status at the United Nations' ECOSOC (Economic and Social Council) called CAP-LC (Coordination des associations et des particuliers pour la liberté de conscience, Coordination of associations

and individuals for freedom of conscience) used these laws to ask the MIVILUDES where these statistics came from.

On July 19, 2021, the MIVILUDES answered, and the letter has now been [published by the French magazine Rebelle\[S\]](#). It is a sensational letter, where the MIVILUDES admits that it does not have any recent statistics and it is only relying on old documents, sometimes dating to 25 years ago.

For the "500 cults," the MIVILUDES states the figure is taken from the controversial 1995 report of a French Parliamentary Commission on "cults." In fact, this report listed 173 "cults," and as the letter explains the number of 500 included the "local units" (filiales). Including the "filiales" would be similar to claiming that in France there are tens of thousands of religions considering each Catholic parish as a religion. More importantly, the 1995 list was so much criticized and even ridiculed that the MIVILUDES itself has repeatedly stated that it no longer relies on it. Only, it does when it comes to create alarm through bogus statistics.

The number of 500,000 "victims" of the "cults," the letter says, adjusts the number of 460,000, which allegedly comes from the yearly report of activity of MIVILUDES of 2010, i.e. of 11 years ago. In fact, this comment shows that the MIVILUDES misreads its own documents.

In [the 2010 report](#), page 253, we read in a session about New Caledonia, that there "60,000 adepts of the cultic groups" (adeptes des groupes sectaires) were found, meaning that New Caledonia, while accounting for less than 4% of the national population of France, was plagued by 20% of the whole number of cultists in France, evaluated at "300,000 to 400,000 on the total territory of France" (3 à 400 000 sur l'ensemble du territoire français).

If 60,000 is presented as a percentage of the total, it means that the figure is *included* in the total. 60,000 is 20% of 300,000, meaning that whoever wrote the section on New Caledonia of the report regarded the lower figure as less unbelievable than the higher one of 400,000.

Looking for a way to justify its current figure of 500,000, the MIVILUDES in 2021 took the higher figure of 2010 (400,000) and added the 60,000 in New Caledonia (which in fact were already counted as part of the 300,000 or 400,000), inaccurately claiming that the 2010 report referred to 460,000 "cultists," and adjusted the figure to 500,000. Media likes round figures after all. As in similar cases, the section on New Caledonia of the 2010 report did not supply any source or evidence for both the New Caledonian and the national figure.

Finally, the letter states that the figure of 50,000 to 90,000 minors who are "victims" of "cults" adjusts the figure of "between 35,000 and 100,000" of [a report published 15 years ago, in 2006](#), on the influence on "cults" on the physical and mental health of minors. No undergraduate student could get away with a term paper creatively "adjusting" decade-old statistics. The 2006 report, at any rate, introduced its figures as conjectural, stating that the real number "remains difficult to evaluate" (reste difficile à évaluer).

The 2006 document stated that "the evolution of the movements characterized as cults makes any more precise estimation of the number of the minors involved difficult"

(L'évolution même des mouvements à caractère sectaire rend difficile toute appréhension plus précise du nombre de mineurs concernés: pages 21 et 22). A range "between 35,000 and 100,000" shows that this was not even a real statistic, and in fact was based on statements by a few witnesses, who did not explain their sources or methodology.

Summing up, we now know not from critics of the MIVILUDES but from the MIVILUDES itself that it has no statistics on "cults," and the figures it mentions comes from documents of 1995, 2006, and 2010, which are not even quoted correctly and of course cannot say anything about the situation today. These documents were widely criticized by scholars when they were published, and offered unbelievable figures based on statements by a small number of witnesses and sources that were left unmentioned or perhaps did not even exist.

False statistics, as we learned during the COVID crisis, are a particularly dangerous part of fake news. They are intolerable when they are spread by media and become a public scandal when governmental institutions are involved.

Photo : *MIVILUDES's letter to CAP-LC.*
