



FROM STIGMATIZATION TO VIOLENCE: THE ROLE OF MEDIA IN THE PERSECUTION OF RELIGIOUS MINORITIES

Contribution

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"Hatred based on religion or belief is often mediated, facilitated and exacerbated by online platforms and social media, which can quickly inflame tensions. Myths, conspiracy theories and calls to violence now spread with unprecedented speed and reach."

— Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Nazila Ghanea, A/HRC/55/47, 2024

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Presentation of CAP Liberté de Conscience

CAP Liberté de Conscience (CAP LC) is a European non-governmental organization with United Nations Consultative Status, dedicated to the defense of freedom of conscience, religion and belief, as guaranteed by international human rights instruments, foremost among which are Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief.

CAP LC operates primarily in Europe, with a particular focus on France, while monitoring and documenting situations of religious discrimination worldwide. It contributes regularly to the work of UN human rights mechanisms, including the Human Rights Council, as well as to regional mechanisms such as the OSCE/ODIHR. CAP LC submitted several written statements during the 61st session of the Human Rights Council on themes directly related to the subject of this report.

Object and Scope of This Contribution

Resolution A/RES/80/200, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 18 December 2025, invites States, national human rights institutions, and civil society organizations to contribute to the Secretary-General's report on steps taken to combat intolerance, negative stereotyping, stigmatization, discrimination, incitement to violence, and violence against persons based on religion or belief.

CAP Liberté de Conscience responds to this call by submitting a contribution organized around one central thread: **the role of media — traditional and digital — as vectors of stigmatization, discrimination and violence against religious minorities**. This thread, anchored in the provisions of paragraphs 7(a) and 7(g) of resolution 80/200, is directly supported by the conclusions of Special Rapporteur Nazila Ghanea, who underlines in her report A/HRC/55/47 (2024) that hatred based on religion or belief

"is often mediated, facilitated and exacerbated by online platforms and social media" and that "myths, conspiracy theories and calls to violence now spread with unprecedented speed and reach" (A/HRC/55/47, §16).

This contribution examines three distinct situations — geographically and culturally different, yet unified by this media thread:

1. **France:** the symbiotic relationship between the MIVILUDES and the media as an institutional mechanism for stigmatizing religious minorities;
2. **Pakistan:** State and religious media as instruments of the systematic persecution of the Ahmadiyya community;
3. **The global level:** streaming platforms (Netflix, HBO) as vectors of religious intolerance worldwide, and the threat posed by the complete absence of any international regulation.

This contribution draws upon the reports of Special Rapporteur Ahmed Shaheed (A/76/380, 2021) and Special Rapporteur Nazila Ghanea (A/HRC/55/47, 2024), OSCE reports, independent expert studies, and documentation produced by CAP LC, Bitter Winter, and Human Rights Without Frontiers (HRWF).

PART 1 — FRANCE: WHEN ANTI-CULT POLICY BECOMES A VECTOR OF MEDIA STIGMATIZATION OF RELIGIOUS MINORITIES

1.1 Context: French Secularism and its Applicative Drifts

France enshrines freedom of conscience and religion at the highest level of its normative hierarchy. The Law of 9 December 1905 on the Separation of Churches and the State guarantees the free exercise of religion while imposing strict State neutrality. This principle of *laïcité*, foundational to the French Republic, postulates equal treatment of all beliefs and convictions before the law.

Yet representatives of numerous religious minority communities describe a gradual shift: from a framework that protects religious freedom toward an institutional apparatus of surveillance, stigmatization, and restriction that disproportionately affects minority belief communities. This shift was documented in June 2025 by the Personal Representatives of the OSCE Chair-in-Office during their country visit to France, who noted that **"the original approach to laïcité of the 1905 law is based on a good, liberal framework of separation of the church and state. However, it has since drifted into an anti-religious approach to laïcité that tends to remove all religious expression from the public square and restrict the religious space."** (*OSCE France Country Visit Report, finalized March 2, 2026*)

The Law of 24 August 2021 — officially titled the law "reinforcing respect for the principles of the Republic" — strengthened control mechanisms over religious associations, notably by requiring their re-registration every five years, restricting foreign funding, and imposing the signing of a "republican engagement contract." As the OSCE report noted, **"the Law of 2021 was seen to undermine [religious freedoms] and use the values of laïcité for the purpose of control."**

This context finds direct resonance in the concerns of Special Rapporteur Nazila Ghanea, who emphasizes in her report A/HRC/55/47 that **"the marginalization and dehumanization of**

members of religious minorities and minorities of belief are often found in the Constitution and legislation, as well as in the functioning of State and societal institutions", and that **"anti-terrorism laws can expose members of religious minorities to an increased risk of stigmatization and victimization"** (A/HRC/55/47, §15) — two dynamics observable in France in the institutional convergence between the anti-cult mission and counter-radicalization frameworks.

1.2 MIVILUDES: A Mission Without Definition, Powers Without Accountability

At the core of the French institutional apparatus lies the **Interministerial Mission for Vigilance and Action Against Sectarian Aberrations (MIVILUDES)**, created in 2002. Attached since 2020 to the Secretariat General of the Interministerial Committee for the Prevention of Delinquency and Radicalization (SG-CIPDR) — under the aegis of the Ministry of the Interior — the MIVILUDES operates within an institutional framework that **places the monitoring of religious minorities under the umbrella of the fight against delinquency and radicalization.**

This positioning raises a fundamental difficulty: **the MIVILUDES has no clear, operational definition of what it means by "sectarian aberration."** The OSCE 2025 report notes that **"the methodology of Miviludes lacks clarity and a definition of 'sectarian deviations'."** This gap grants the institution considerable discretionary power to designate religious behaviors or groups as "sectarian" without any verifiable legal or scientific basis.

The comparative analysis conducted by experts Farahmand and Berna in the academic journal *Hegel* (2024) — a key expert document for this report — reveals that **"MIVILUDES publishes analyses based on imprecise data, drafted by advisors whose level of expertise is difficult to assess and whose academic oversight is not guaranteed."** By contrast, the Swiss Intercantonal Information Centre on Beliefs (CIC) — operating in a closely comparable cultural and legal context — privileges **prevention, awareness-raising and education, based on thorough investigations combining independent scientific expertise and strict ideological neutrality.** (*Farahmand & Berna, Hegel, 2024*)

A particularly revealing fact regarding MIVILUDES opacity: in November 2023, the University Medical Committee on Practices and Beliefs (CUMIC) requested access to MIVILUDES raw data pursuant to the Code governing relations between the public and the administration. MIVILUDES refused to communicate these data, even after a favorable opinion from the Commission for Access to Administrative Documents (CADA). This opacity contrasts starkly with the institution's media activism: its annual reports receive extensive media coverage, making it **"a non-negligible socio-political influence vector,"** in the words of the Swiss expert report itself. The CIC/Hegel report notes that the reports systematically use expressions such as "increase," "surge," or "explosion" of sectarian aberrations **"and have done so since 2005"** — without the raw data to substantiate these alarmist claims. This rhetoric corresponds precisely to what Special Rapporteur Ghanea identifies as a form of hatred: **"public figures making biased or discriminatory statements in widely attended or broadcast public forums"** (A/HRC/55/47, §14).

1.3 MIVILUDES and the Media: A Symbiotic Relationship at the Expense of Religious Minorities

1.3.1 Media as an Echo Chamber for Anti-Cult Discourse

One of the most concerning aspects of MIVILUDES operations is its structural relationship with French media. CAP Liberté de Conscience has documented this in detail, notably in its article "**Les sectes, la MIVILUDES et le problème des sources**" (freedomofconscience.eu): when French media cover questions of "cults," they rely almost exclusively on MIVILUDES as their authoritative source, without ever questioning its methodology or cross-referencing its claims with independent academic sources.

The relationship is **bidirectional and self-reinforcing**:

- MIVILUDES produces reports classifying certain groups as "sectarian" based on unverified anonymous complaints (*saisines*);
- Media reproduce these classifications uncritically and amplify them at scale;
- This media coverage retroactively legitimizes the institutional discourse;
- Political leaders rely on this dual authority to enact restrictive legislation.

The Swiss expert report describes this dynamic precisely: "**the publication of MIVILUDES annual reports, widely covered by the media, marks the starting point of a new political agenda**" — a dynamic that, as Special Rapporteur Ghanea notes, illustrates how "**hate conduct based on religion or belief and its promotion in society often serves concrete political and economic objectives**" (A/HRC/55/47, §18).

1.3.2 The Paradigmatic Case: Anti-Scientology Debate on France Télévisions

CAP LC documented an emblematic example of media abuse: **a television debate about Scientology broadcast on France Télévisions from which representatives of the movement were entirely excluded**. According to the analysis published on the CAP LC website (freedomofconscience.eu/debat-anti-scientologie-sur-france-tv-les-des-etaient-pipes), the panel was composed exclusively of critics of Scientology, violating the fundamental principles of the right of reply and the presumption of innocence, and transforming the public broadcasting service into an instrument of stigmatization of a religious minority.

The OSCE report (2025) confirms that "**the 2025 MIVILUDES report includes a page on Scientology that amounts to treating the group as a cult. This feeds discrimination and stigmatization of Scientologists. The difficulty of building dialogue with State representatives is real: the Adviser on Religious Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs refused to meet with representatives of Scientology on the grounds that they constitute a cult.**" (*OSCE France Country Report, 2026*)

This situation illustrates the chain of responsibility described by Special Rapporteur Ghanea: one should not only seek "**to prevent speech from being made in the first place, but [note] its spread on social media**" and examine "**each link in the chain of responsibility**" (A/HRC/55/47, §27).

1.3.3 The MISA/Bivolaru Affair: Media Presumption of Guilt and the Role of MIVILUDES

In November 2023, French authorities conducted simultaneous raids on eight sites associated with the Movement for Spiritual Integration into the Absolute (MISA), a yoga organization

founded by Romanian spiritual leader Gregorian Bivolaru. CAP Liberté de Conscience documented these events in a series of published articles.

These investigations reveal several deeply concerning elements. First, **MIVILUDES played an active role in triggering the raids**, providing police services with reports based on uncorroborated testimonies (bitterwinter.org/the-police-raids-against-misa-in-france-november-28-2023-4-the-miviludes-behind-the-raids). Second, French media covered the raids adopting a **presumption of guilt** toward ordinary practitioners, without awaiting judicial conclusions (freedomofconscience.eu/laffaire-stoian-quand-les-medias-et-les-journalistes-privilegient-la-presomption-de-culpabilite). Third, CAP LC collected testimonies from practitioners who underwent abusive 48-hour police custody in conditions contrary to human dignity (freedomofconscience.eu/jai-ete-victime-dune-descente-de-police).

The OSCE report (2025) explicitly mentions these raids and recommends that **"religious groups accused should have access to redacted or summary accounts in order to properly address them in their respective communities."** (*OSCE France Country Report, 2026, p. 20*)

1.3.4 UNADFI and CAFFES: Publicly Funded Partners as Non-Transparent Media Vectors

CAP Liberté de Conscience has highlighted the public funding of anti-cult associations that in turn fuel the media discourse. In its article **"Subvention MIVILUDES: le grand détournement numérique de l'UNADFI"** (freedomofconscience.eu), CAP LC documents how public funds were used to finance digital content of an anti-religious character, without the targeted groups having any opportunity to respond. The article **"Subventions MIVILUDES 2023-2024: le CAFFES pris la main dans le sac"** reveals irregularities in the use of public subsidies.

The article **"Quand le partenaire de la MIVILUDES ressemble furieusement à une dérive sectaire"** (freedomofconscience.eu) pushes the analysis further, documenting how one of MIVILUDES' partner associations itself exhibits characteristics of a closed and intolerant organization — the very criteria it is supposed to denounce. CAP LC further signals in **"Quand les dérives anti-sectaires entrent en collision avec les droits humains"** that certain practices of MIVILUDES partner associations directly violate international standards of religious freedom, notably regarding incitement to family rupture for religious reasons.

1.4 A Judiciary That Condemns MIVILUDES: Five Times in 2025

One of the most objective indicators of MIVILUDES abuses is its **devastating judicial record**. In 2025 alone, MIVILUDES was condemned **five times** by French administrative courts for defamatory statements or infringements of the rights of religious groups:

- The Paris Administrative Court found MIVILUDES statements about **Jehovah's Witnesses** to be **defamatory** (bitterwinter.org/france-administrative-court-finds-miviludess-statements-about-jehovahs-witnesses-defamatory);
- MIVILUDES **lost a second case** against Jehovah's Witnesses (bitterwinter.org/france-miviludes-loses-again-against-the-jehovahs-witnesses-in-court);

- It was condemned in the **Shri Ram Chandra Mission** case (bitterwinter.org/shri-ram-chandra-mission-the-miviludes-loses-a-court-case/);
- CAP LC reports a **fifth condemnation**, with damages awarded to unjustly stigmatized victims (freedomofconscience.eu/la-miviludes-condamnee-pour-la-5eme-fois-en-2025/).

These repeated condemnations establish an incontestable legal finding: MIVILUDES has regularly acted beyond its legal mandate. Yet each defamatory communication by MIVILUDES was first amplified by the media before being overturned by the courts — following a timeline that leaves the social stigma firmly in place long after the judicial sanction has been pronounced.

Furthermore, the Council of State ruled in March 2025 that MIVILUDES is not required to communicate to the targeted movements the anonymous reports (*saisines*) it receives concerning them, even in redacted form. The OSCE representatives nonetheless explicitly recommend that "**religious groups accused should have access to redacted or summary accounts in order to properly address them**" (*OSCE France Country Report, 2026, p. 20*) — thus acknowledging a structural deficit in the right of reply and the adversarial principle.

1.5 The Fonds Marianne Scandal: Conflicts of Interest at the Top of MIVILUDES

The institutional credibility of MIVILUDES was severely compromised by the **Fonds Marianne scandal**, which led to the resignation of its president in 2023. This fund, created after the assassination of teacher Samuel Paty, was subject to opaque financial allocations to MIVILUDES partner associations (bitterwinter.org/the-fish-stinks-from-the-head-miviludes-president-resigns-over-fonds-marianne-scandal/). HRWF documented the continuation of this institutional crisis (hrwf.eu/france-the-situation-is-back-in-flux-at-miviludes-its-head-has-packed-his-bags/).

These conflicts of interest between MIVILUDES, its partner associations, and certain media outlets constitute **an influence ecosystem** that warrants examination against international standards of religious freedom.

1.6 Impact on Religious Minorities: Systemic Discrimination

Jehovah's Witnesses must systematically resort to the courts to have their basic rights recognized. The OSCE report (2025) notes that "**at the local level, certain rights of Jehovah's Witnesses (such as the right to rent a municipal community hall) are not respected due to the 'cult' label.**"

The **Impact Christian Centre evangelical church** filed a complaint against MIVILUDES (hrwf.eu/france-the-evangelical-church-impact-christian-centre-has-filed-a-complaint-against-the-miviludes/), illustrating that institutional stigmatization extends beyond groups generally classified as "new religions."

The **Muslim community** — approximately 7 million faithful, France's second largest — faces a particularly hostile media climate. The OSCE report (2025) notes that "**CNews is now the most-watched channel and broadcasts content that civil society members estimate to be**

80% anti-Muslim, frequently amplifying the 'great replacement' theory." (OSCE France Country Report, 2026)

The **Sikh community** faces the obligation to remove their turban for official identity photographs, in violation of the principle of equal treatment.

These situations illustrate what Special Rapporteur Ghana identifies as "**structural factors that cause and normalize religious discrimination, creating a climate in which members of religious minorities risk directly experiencing acts of hatred, including physical violence**" (A/HRC/55/47, §15).

Recommendations to France

The findings documented in this part reveal the existence in France of an institutional mechanism for stigmatizing religious minorities that operates primarily through the media. MIVILUDES uses the media as an influence vector; the media uses MIVILUDES as an authority source; and the partner associations of both serve as transmission belts in this anti-cult media ecosystem, partly financed by public funds.

CAP Liberté de Conscience calls on France to:

1. **Establish an ethical charter** governing media coverage of religious minorities, guaranteeing a systematic right of reply for groups challenged by institutional sources;
2. **Prohibit public funding** of associations that produce media content of a discriminatory character against religious minority groups without an established judicial basis;
3. **Require MIVILUDES** to submit its publications to external, independent scientific review prior to any public dissemination;
4. **Institute an effective right of reply** for religious groups targeted by *saisines*, in line with the OSCE recommendations (2025);
5. **Reform the institutional attachment** of MIVILUDES to the Ministry of the Interior, clearly separating matters of freedom of conscience from those of public security;
6. **End religious profiling practices** in investigative procedures, requiring all *saisines* to be based on established facts rather than unverified anonymous reports.

PART 2 — PAKISTAN: MEDIA AND STATE AS INSTRUMENTS OF PERSECUTION OF THE AHMADIYYA COMMUNITY

2.1 The Discriminatory Legal Framework: A Minority Criminalized by the Constitution

The Ahmadiyya community in Pakistan constitutes one of the most documented and gravest cases of institutionalized persecution of a religious minority in a UN member State. This persecution is unique in that it is directly inscribed in the State's Constitution and Penal Code, lending a veneer of legal legitimacy to what constitutes, in international law, a flagrant violation of Article 18 of the ICCPR.

In 1974, the Second Amendment to the Pakistani Constitution declared Ahmadis "non-Muslims," officially excluding them from the Islamic community. In 1984, Sections 298-B and 298-C were introduced into the Penal Code, specifically criminalizing Ahmadi religious practices: Section 298-B prohibits Ahmadis from referring to themselves as Muslims or using Islamic practices and terms, while Section 298-C prohibits Ahmadis from "posing as Muslims" — a formulation so vague it can cover the simple act of praying in the Islamic manner. Violations carry penalties of up to three years' imprisonment plus fines.

Special Rapporteur Ahmed Shaheed notes in his report A/76/380 (2021) that "**blasphemy laws often impede the freedom of thought of religious minorities,**" "**criminalize and censor the free expression of thoughts by creating fear of reprisals,**" and "**limit access to information**" (A/76/380, §59). These findings apply with particular force to Pakistani Ahmadis, for whom the mere practice of their faith constitutes a criminal offense under national law.

2.2 Pakistani Media: Active Actors in Persecution

While the legal structure creates the conditions for persecution, **Pakistani media serve as its amplifiers and instigators.** Several documented dynamics illustrate this role.

First, State media and private Pakistani television channels regularly relay calls for vigilance against Ahmadis, using dehumanizing vocabulary that directly contributes to a climate of violence. Religious scholars (*ulema*) are afforded extensive broadcast platforms to incite the social and religious exclusion of Ahmadis, without any opposition from presenters or editorial staff.

Second, accusations of blasphemy against members of the Ahmadiyya community — which can lead to mob lynchings before any judicial process — are systematically relayed by local media with editorial treatment that presupposes the guilt of the accused. This phenomenon corresponds precisely to what Special Rapporteur Ghanea describes as "**public figures making biased or discriminatory statements in widely attended or broadcast public forums**" (A/HRC/55/47, §14).

Third, Pakistani social media constitute a major vector of hate campaigns against Ahmadis. Lists of names and addresses of community members are regularly published, directly exposing individuals to physical violence. Special Rapporteur Ghanea notes that "**myths, conspiracy theories and calls to violence now spread with unprecedented speed and reach, which means that local events can often have global consequences**" (A/HRC/55/47, §16).

2.3 Documented Violations

The Ahmadiyya community faces a catalogue of systematic violations documented by USCIRF, HRWF, Bitter Winter and CAP LC:

- **Destruction of places of worship:** Ahmadi mosques are regularly demolished, vandalized or sealed by authorities, sometimes following local media campaigns that designate them as targets;
- **Desecration of cemeteries:** Ahmadi graves are systematically vandalized, particularly when local media have reported the presence of a community;

- **Blasphemy arrests:** Hundreds of community members are prosecuted under Sections 298-B and 298-C, often following denunciations relayed through local social media;
- **Physical violence and assassinations:** Community members have been murdered by religious militants, in a context where local media had previously "designated" individuals or communities as blasphemers or apostates;
- **Discrimination in employment and education:** Ahmadis face systematic discrimination in access to public employment and education, normalized by a media discourse that presents them as a threat to society.

The USCIRF has designated Pakistan as a "**Country of Particular Concern**" (CPC) due to these grave, systematic and continuous violations of religious freedom. The Ahmadiyya community is specifically mentioned in successive USCIRF reports as a particularly vulnerable group.

2.4 State Inaction and Institutional Complicity

The Pakistani State's inaction in the face of violence against the Ahmadiyya community is documented convergently by all human rights monitoring bodies. This inaction is not passive: it is structurally determined by the constitutional and penal framework that makes Ahmadis second-class citizens, and by successive governments' dependence on religious parties and organizations that make opposition to Ahmadis a central identity marker.

This dynamic illustrates what Special Rapporteur Ghanea describes as "**political authoritarianism, corruption, lack of transparency and distrust of public institutions [that] create a context in which religious or belief communities can be scapegoated**" (A/HRC/55/47, §15).

Special Rapporteur Ahmed Shaheed notes in his report A/76/380 that "**international human rights law protects persons, not religions**" and that Pakistan should "**repeal blasphemy and apostasy laws,**" recalling that such laws "**impede freedom of religion or conviction and prevent healthy dialogue and debate**" (A/76/380, §59).

The **International Human Rights Committee (IHRC)** has also documented the systematic violations of Ahmadi rights in Pakistan, noting the convergence between media discourse, official religious discourse, and State inaction, which creates an environment where violence against the community is perceived as socially legitimate.

Recommendations to Pakistan

The situation of the Ahmadiyya community in Pakistan illustrates with brutal clarity the trajectory documented by the public health approach to media-driven persecution: from institutional and media stigmatization toward legal discrimination, and then toward systematic physical violence. The media are not passive spectators here: they are constitutive actors in the chain of persecution.

CAP Liberté de Conscience calls on Pakistan to:

1. **Repeal Sections 298-B and 298-C** of the Penal Code and the Second Constitutional Amendment declaring Ahmadis "non-Muslims," in line with the reiterated recommendations of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief;

2. **Repeal blasphemy laws** in their application to religious minorities, in accordance with the recommendations of Special Rapporteur Ahmed Shaheed (A/76/380);
3. **Adopt legislation** specifically criminalizing calls to religious hatred in the media, in conformity with Article 20(2) of the ICCPR and the Rabat Plan of Action;
4. **Guarantee physical protection** of members of the Ahmadiyya community, their places of worship and their cemeteries;
5. **Cooperate fully** with OHCHR monitoring mechanisms, including the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief;
6. **Regulate media content** that incites discrimination or violence against Ahmadis, in conformity with Article 20(2) of the ICCPR.

CAP Liberté de Conscience also calls on the **international community** to exert sustained diplomatic pressure on Pakistan for the protection of the Ahmadiyya community, and to insist that the situation be examined within the framework of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the Human Rights Council.

PART 3 — MEDIA AS SYSTEMIC VECTORS OF RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION: FROM INSTITUTIONAL WITCH HUNTS TO DIGITAL WITCH HUNTS

3.1 A Public Health Model Applied to Media-Driven Persecution

Before analyzing concrete cases, it is necessary to establish a theoretical framework that gives its full force to the documentation that follows. CAP Liberté de Conscience has developed a **Public Health Approach to Media-Driven Persecution**, presented before the Human Rights Council during its 61st session (freedomofconscience.eu/from-stigmatization-to-violence-a-public-health-approach-to-media-driven-persecution).

This approach is directly inspired by the **WHO Violence Prevention Framework** (who.int/teams/social-determinants-of-health/violence-prevention), which defines violence prevention according to an ecological model examining individual, relational, community and societal factors. Applied to religious minorities, this model reveals that **the media constitute the determining societal factor**: they define the normative framework within which individual actors (aggressors), relational actors (families, communities) and institutional actors (police, justice) perceive and treat members of religious minorities.

The predictable and modelizable trajectory this framework identifies is:

Media Stigmatization → Dehumanization → Institutional Discrimination → Physical Violence

This analytical model finds direct grounding in the work of both Special Rapporteurs. Special Rapporteur Ghanea recalls in her report that **"genocide and hate speech correspond to at least three ('symbolization, dehumanization and polarization') of the 'Ten Stages of Genocide'"** (A/HRC/55/47, note 2), and that hate speech **"constitutes a warning sign of prejudice-driven attitudes"** (A/HRC/55/47, §14). She also emphasizes the importance of **"going beyond individual cases of advocacy of hatred and addressing the underlying processes that reproduce prejudice-driven conduct"** (A/HRC/55/47, §42).

Special Rapporteur Ahmed Shaheed, in his report A/76/380, stresses the right to an **"enabling environment for freedom of thought"**, noting that States have positive obligations to create such an environment. He recommends that States **"promote diversity and plurality of media to ensure access to different sources of information and means of communication"** (A/76/380, §97g) — a recommendation directly relevant to the phenomena documented in this part.

3.2 The Digital Witch Hunt: The Case of Mission Providence / Christian Gospel

The written statement submitted by CAP LC to HRC-61 under the title **"Digital Witch Hunt Against Christian Gospel: Mission Providence"** (*freedomofconscience.eu/un-hrc-61-written-statement-digital-witch-hunt-against-christian-gospel-mission-providence*) documents a paradigmatic case of persecution orchestrated by digital media.

Mission Providence is a Christian organization whose founder, Jung Myung-seok, is imprisoned in South Korea. Its members — present in many countries including European countries — have been the subject of an intense international media campaign, amplified by social media, which preceded and influenced legal proceedings in several countries.

CAP LC documents in its statement how this campaign displays all the characteristics of a **"digital witch hunt"**:

- Grave allegations spread on social networks and relayed by traditional media without prior verification;
- The use of anonymous testimonies as primary evidence, without any possibility of contradiction;
- Algorithmic amplification of the most sensationalist content to the detriment of nuanced representations;
- Documented effects on ordinary community members — not responsible for the organization — subjected to severe social, professional and family pressures by reason of their religious affiliation.

This case illustrates a specifically digital phenomenon: **the algorithmic virality of stigmatizing content**, which confers upon it a reach and durability without equivalent in the history of traditional media. Stigmatizing content posted on YouTube or Facebook can reach millions of people within hours, in multiple languages and across multiple countries, making any response or rectification structurally unequal. This dynamic is precisely the one that Special Rapporteur Ghanea identifies as particularly concerning when individuals **"simply perceived as associated with a group"** become targets of aggression by reason of their religious affiliation (A/HRC/55/47, §28).

3.3 Case Study: Japan and the Unification Church — The Lethal Spiral of a Media Frenzy

3.3.1 Abe's Assassination and the Triggering of the Media Blitz

The Unification Church affair in Japan constitutes one of the most documented examples of media persecution of a religious minority in a democratic country. It illustrates with brutal clarity the trajectory described by the public health model.

On 8 July 2022, former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was assassinated by a man whose mother was a member of the Unification Church (Family Federation for World Peace and Unification). The assassin claimed to be acting out of revenge against the organization, which he held responsible for his family's financial ruin.

As Bitter Winter analyzes, **"Abe's assassination triggered a real 'media blitz' against the Unification Church, with around-the-clock reporting on all major Japanese channels, often without the slightest verification of the alleged facts."** (*bitterwinter.org/japan-and-the-unification-church-the-duval-report-2-abes-assassination-and-media-blitz*)

3.3.2 Judicial Dissolution: When Media Precede the Law

In the wake of this massive media coverage, the Japanese government launched judicial dissolution proceedings against the Unification Church. The United Nations Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief expressed concerns, noting that the proceedings risked violating international human rights standards. Bitter Winter documents that **"the dissolution of a religious organization is an exceptional measure which, according to international human rights standards, can only be justified by serious, continuous violations directly attributable to the organization as such."** (*bitterwinter.org/japan-the-dissolution-of-the-unification-church-and-international-law-1-a-warning-by-the-united-nations*)

3.3.3 The Children of Believers: Forgotten Victims of Media Stigmatization

The article **"Second Generation Unification Church Believers Discriminated in Japan"** (*bitterwinter.org/second-generation-unification-church-believers-discriminated-in-japan-3-media-slander*) documents how young adults born into believing families were victims of discrimination in employment, education and social relations, solely by reason of their parents' religious affiliation — a discrimination directly fed by mass media stigmatization.

This situation illustrates Special Rapporteur Shaheed's recommendation that States **"consider the capacity of existing and emerging technologies to violate freedom of thought and adopt legislative or protective measures to prevent possible violations"** (A/76/380, §97d).

3.3.4 The Transnational Diffusion of Repressive Models

As Bitter Winter reports, Japanese anti-cult actors explicitly proposed the creation of an anti-cult agency modeled on the **French MIVILUDES** (*bitterwinter.org/japan-anti-cultists-propose-to-create-a-miviludes-like-anti-cult-agency*) — adopting an institutional model whose methodological flaws have been extensively documented in Part 1 of this report. This phenomenon of **transnational diffusion of repressive models**, facilitated by international media coverage, constitutes a multiplying vector of risks for religious minorities worldwide.

3.4 South Korea and Argentina: Concerning Regional Dynamics

In **South Korea**, the **Shincheonji** movement was subject to massive media campaigns, particularly in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. Legal proceedings were initiated against its founder, Lee Man-hee, for facts that subsequently proved poorly documented. Bitter Winter documents how the media played a determining role in the pressure exerted on judicial

authorities, illustrating the public health model trajectory: *media stigmatization* → *institutional pressure* → *judicial proceedings*.

In **Argentina**, Bitter Winter documents similar dynamics: religious minority organizations face coordinated media campaigns that use **anti-cult vocabulary imported from the European — particularly French — context**, without any comparable institutional framework to control its excesses. This phenomenon illustrates how **the vocabulary of religious persecution globalizes via the media**, creating conditions of stigmatization in very different cultural contexts, but converging toward the same discriminatory effects.

This phenomenon of transnational media contagion is directly addressed by Special Rapporteur Ghanea's recommendation: **"because manifestations of hatred increasingly transcend borders and are transplanted across different situations, it is essential to address this through renewed multilateral cooperation"** (A/HRC/55/47, §36).

3.5 Netflix, HBO, and Streaming Platforms: The New Architects of Religious Intolerance

3.5.1 The Industrial Rise of the "Anti-Cult" Documentary

One of the most concerning developments of the past decade is the **emergence of a genuine industrial genre of documentary content of an anti-religious character** on major global streaming platforms. Netflix, HBO and their competitors have massively invested in productions devoted to what their catalogs designate under the generic term **"cults"** — a term whose imprecision is itself the first problem.

Netflix offers an entire page dedicated to **"cult documentaries"** ([netflix.com/tudum/articles/cult-documentaries-on-netflix](https://www.netflix.com/tudum/articles/cult-documentaries-on-netflix)), including:

- ***Keep Sweet: Pray and Obey*** (2022) — on the FLDS, a polygamous fundamentalist organization;
- ***The Vow*** (2020, HBO) — on NXIVM, an organization convicted of sex trafficking;
- ***Escaping Twin Flames*** (2023) — on the "Twin Flames Universe" movement;
- ***Dancing for the Devil: The 7M TikTok Cult*** (2024) — mixing Church affiliation with allegations of control;
- ***In the Name of God: A Holy Betrayal*** (2023) — on Korean religious leaders;
- And numerous other similar productions.

These contents are recommended to a broad public, including young audiences, by media such as *Marie Claire Australia* ([marieclaire.com.au](https://www.marieclaire.com.au)) and *Teen Vogue* ([teenvogue.com](https://www.teenvogue.com)), without any nuance regarding the effects such representations may have on members of the targeted communities or on legitimate religious minorities. Platforms such as Reddit reveal how ordinary audiences integrate these representations into their general perception of religious minorities, making **"Netflix cult documentaries"** an autonomous cultural category that mixes documented cases of criminal abuse, controversial but legal religious organizations, and sometimes entirely legitimate spiritual movements.

3.5.2 The Deliberate Confusion Between "Cult" and Religious Minority

The central problem with these productions is not their existence as such — some documented abuses legitimately merit media coverage — but the **systematic confusion they maintain between proven criminal conduct and membership in a religious minority**. Several mechanisms contribute to this confusion:

The absence of any definition of the term "cult": like the methodological gap identified for the French MIVILUDES, platforms offer no definition of what they mean by "cult" or "sect," allowing them to include in the same category criminally convicted organizations and perfectly legal religious minority movements.

The exclusive focus on ex-member testimonies: these productions rely almost exclusively on testimonies from people who have left the organization — often in conflictual circumstances — without current members or organizational representatives being afforded equivalent speaking time, violating the elementary principle of pluralism of information.

The thriller aesthetic: the use of *true crime* visual and narrative codes orients the viewer's judgment before they have even had access to the facts, producing a **large-scale presumption of guilt effect**.

The impact on ordinary members: unlike judicial proceedings — which nominally target individuals or organizations — streaming documentaries stigmatize **entire communities**. An ordinary member of a targeted organization has committed no offence, yet finds themselves confronted with the hostility, questions and suspicions of their entourage, colleagues and employers.

Special Rapporteur Shaheed recommends that digital technology companies "**examine whether and how their existing or developing products, services or applications may interfere with freedom of thought**" and "**adopt solutions more in line with international human rights law**" (A/76/380, §100a-b). He also recommends "**regularly publishing transparency reports**" and "**limiting the spread of false or misleading information**" (A/76/380, §100c).

3.5.3 The Double Standard: Vulnerable Minorities versus Dominant Religions

A particularly significant element is the **radical asymmetry** in the treatment of major religions and religious minorities by streaming platforms. When Netflix or HBO produce critical documentaries about abusive conduct within established Churches, these productions generally adopt a nuanced perspective that distinguishes the responsible individuals from the religious institution as a whole. Conversely, documentaries about religious minorities tend to **identify the entire organization with its worst members or practices**, without offering equivalent nuance.

This double standard reflects and reinforces an implicit hierarchy of religious legitimacy — an **institutionalized discrimination** exercised not by a State but by private actors whose influence power is potentially greater than that of many governments.

Special Rapporteur Ghanea emphasizes that States must ensure "**that members of all traditional, non-traditional and 'new' religious or belief communities are included in dialogue and understanding initiatives**" (A/HRC/55/47, §48) — a principle that should apply equally to non-State actors such as streaming platforms.

3.5.4 The Cascade Disinformation Phenomenon

CAP Liberté de Conscience, in its HRC-61 declaration (*freedomofconscience.eu/hrc-61-item-5-media-fueled-persecution-establishing-accountability-for-sensationalist-coverage-of-religious-minorities*), documents a **cascade disinformation** phenomenon that multiplies the impact of stigmatizing content:

1. A documentary is broadcast on Netflix or an equivalent platform;
2. Traditional media cover the documentary, amplifying its reach and conferring additional journalistic legitimacy upon it;
3. Social networks relay press articles, clips and memes;
4. This content is indexed by search engines and becomes the primary source of information about the community for any internet user;
5. Community members face concrete consequences: employment refusals, family breakdowns, online harassment.

This cycle is self-sustaining and practically impossible to interrupt once triggered. Unlike a press article that loses visibility over time, Netflix content remains permanently active and referenced, maintaining the stigma on the targeted community indefinitely.

Special Rapporteur Ghanea stresses the importance of examining "**each link in the chain of responsibility**" (A/HRC/55/47, §27). Streaming platforms constitute an essential — and thus far wholly unregulated — link in this chain.

3.6 Regulatory Gaps: The Global Impunity of Digital Platforms

3.6.1 Existing Instruments and Their Limits

Several international legal instruments are potentially applicable to the media stigmatization of religious minorities:

- **Article 18 of the ICCPR** guarantees freedom of thought, conscience and religion;
- **Article 19 of the ICCPR** guarantees freedom of expression but provides for legitimate restrictions to protect the rights and reputation of others;
- **Article 20 of the ICCPR** requires the prohibition of "**any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence**";
- **Resolution A/RES/80/200** itself, in paragraphs 7(g) and 10, calls for combating negative religious stereotypes.

However, **none of these instruments provides a specific accountability mechanism for commercial broadcasting platforms** that produce and distribute stigmatizing content concerning religious minorities. The European Union's Digital Services Act (DSA), adopted in 2022 (*Regulation (EU) 2022/2065*), imposes obligations of transparency and action against illegal content but provides no specific mechanism to protect religious communities against non-criminal media stigmatization.

3.6.2 The Link Between Media, Freedom of Thought, and Freedom of Religion

Special Rapporteur Ahmed Shaheed highlights in his report A/76/380 that **"freedom of thought protects against the alteration of a person's thoughts"** and that States have a positive obligation to **"create an environment conducive to freedom of thought"** (A/76/380, §40-41). This environment is directly threatened by media productions that create, through repetition and algorithmic amplification, a climate of hostile opinion in which members of religious minorities can no longer freely practice their faith without fearing social and professional repercussions.

Special Rapporteur Ghanea notes in this regard that **"States are encouraged to collaborate with and support initiatives"** aimed at **"promoting diversity"** and **"improving the participation and social inclusion of religious minorities"** (A/HRC/55/47, §56). The regulation of digital platforms constitutes an essential lever in this respect.

In the same vein, the OHCHR underlined in its March 2023 press release the importance of **"using human rights frameworks to promote freedoms of religion, belief and expression"** (ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/03/use-human-rights-frameworks-promote-freedoms-religion-belief-and-expression). Streaming platforms must be explicitly included in this normative framework.

Conclusion of Part 3

The elements documented in this third part converge toward a central finding: freedom of religion or belief faces in the twenty-first century a threat of a new kind, which does not take the form of direct State persecution but of a diffuse, decentralized and transnational process of media stigmatization, whose effects on individuals and communities are as real and as grave as those of traditional forms of religious persecution.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of all the findings documented in the three parts of this report, CAP Liberté de Conscience formulates the following general recommendations, organized by addressee.

To the OHCHR and UN Mechanisms

Recommendation G.1 — Thematic Report on Media and Religious Freedom:

Request the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief to develop a specific thematic report on the role of media — traditional and digital — in the stigmatization of religious minorities, with regulatory recommendations adapted to transnational platforms, in continuity with the work initiated by report A/HRC/46/57.

Recommendation G.2 — Application of the Public Health Framework:

Invite the WHO and the OHCHR to jointly develop an analytical framework inspired by the *WHO Violence Prevention Framework* (who.int/teams/social-determinants-of-health/violence-prevention) specifically adapted to the media persecution of religious minorities, including early warning indicators, surveillance protocols and preventive intervention mechanisms, consistent with the public health approach presented by CAP LC to HRC-61.

Recommendation G.3 — International Registry of Media-Related Incidents:

Create an international mechanism for the collection and publication of data on incidents of

discrimination and violence linked to media coverage of religious minorities, enabling the establishment of correlations between media campaigns and spikes in violence or discrimination. This mechanism could draw upon the model proposed by Special Rapporteur Ghanea, who recommends that States **"collect disaggregated data, regularly record and report all hate speech, including that based on religion or belief, in order to alert authorities to patterns and instances of intolerance"** (A/HRC/55/47, §62a).

Recommendation G.4 — Thematic Report on Streaming Platforms and Religious Freedom:

Request the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief to develop, as a follow-up to report A/HRC/46/57 on the role of media, a specific thematic report devoted to global streaming platforms (Netflix, HBO, Amazon Prime, YouTube) and their impact on representations of religious minorities, drawing on Special Rapporteur Shaheed's recommendations to digital technology companies to **"examine whether and how their existing or developing products, services or applications may interfere with freedom of thought"** and **"adopt solutions more in line with international human rights law"** (A/76/380, §100a-b).

Recommendation G.5 — National Focal Point on Religious Freedom and Media:

Encourage States to create, consistent with Special Rapporteur Ghanea's recommendation, **"at the national level, a focal point with competence to ensure freedom of religion or belief and prohibition of discrimination based on religion or belief in State institutions"** (A/HRC/55/47, §49), with this focal point explicitly mandated to monitor media representations of religious minorities and collect early warning data.

To Member States

Recommendation G.6 — Extension of Pluralism Obligations to Digital Platforms:

Adopt national legislation and binding international instruments extending obligations of pluralism, balance and right of reply to global streaming platforms (Netflix, HBO, Amazon Prime, YouTube, etc.) when they produce or distribute content concerning identifiable religious communities. The European Union could serve as a pilot framework through a targeted strengthening of the Digital Services Act (DSA) (*Regulation (EU) 2022/2065*). This would be consistent with Special Rapporteur Shaheed's recommendations to digital platforms to **"limit the spread of false or misleading information,"** to **"explain to users how and why content is edited"** and to **"develop systems to protect privacy"** (A/76/380, §100).

Recommendation G.7 — Review of National Anti-Cult Legislation Against International Standards:

Invite States that have adopted institutional mechanisms for monitoring religious minorities — such as France's MIVILUDES or similar agencies — to submit these mechanisms to independent external review based on international human rights standards, particularly regarding the obligations flowing from Articles 18 and 19 of the ICCPR. This review should include an assessment of the media practices associated with these mechanisms, in line with Special Rapporteur Ghanea's recommendation to States to **"review all their laws and policies to ensure that they do not feed hatred"** and to **"also review complaint mechanisms and procedures to ensure there is no impunity for State actors who engage in hate speech"** (A/HRC/55/47, §62e).

Recommendation G.8 — Prohibition of Public Funding of Media Stigmatization:

Adopt clear rules prohibiting the use of public funds to finance associations or media content that stigmatize religious minorities without an established judicial basis, and establish independent oversight mechanisms for the use of such funds. This recommendation flows directly from documented situations in France (the Fonds Marianne, MIVILUDES subsidies to UNADFI and CAFFES) and is consistent with Special Rapporteur Ghanea's recommendation to States to **"refrain from resorting to messages of intolerance or expressions that weaponize religions and beliefs to incite violence, hostility, discrimination or hatred"** (A/HRC/55/47, §62d).

Recommendation G.9 — Training of Officials and Media Professionals:

Under paragraph 7(a) of resolution 80/200 and in accordance with Special Rapporteur Ghanea's recommendations on **"training government officials in effective communication strategies"** (A/HRC/55/47, §50) and Special Rapporteur Shaheed's recommendations on **"public education that facilitates individuals' access to information"** and **"promoting diversity and plurality of media"** (A/76/380, §97f-g), States should:

- Integrate into journalism and audiovisual and digital content production training programs a mandatory module on the ethics of representing religious minorities, including the right of reply, the distinction between individual conduct and community membership, and the presumption of innocence;
- Train law enforcement and justice officials to distinguish between lawful religious practice and illegal conduct;
- Sensitize public servants to the detection and prevention of religious profiling, consistent with Special Rapporteur Ghanea's recommendation to **"counter religious profiling, which is understood as the discriminatory use of religion by law enforcement as a criterion in conducting questioning, searches and other investigative procedures"** (A/HRC/55/47, §57).

Recommendation G.10 — Application of the Public Health Approach to the Prevention of Media-Driven Religious Persecution:

Encourage States, in cooperation with the WHO and the OHCHR, to adopt prevention strategies inspired by the *WHO Violence Prevention Framework* (who.int/teams/social-determinants-of-health/violence-prevention), applied specifically to the media persecution of religious minorities, as developed by CAP Liberté de Conscience in its HRC-61 declaration (freedomofconscience.eu/from-stigmatization-to-violence-a-public-health-approach-to-media-driven-persecution). These strategies should include:

- **Early warning mechanisms** based on identifiable media risk indicators (frequency of negative representations, absence of right of reply, convergence between media and institutional discourse);
- **Preventive interventions** targeting media content producers before the broadcast of productions likely to stigmatize identifiable religious communities;
- **Effective and rapid recourse** for stigmatized religious communities, enabling them to obtain rectification or right of reply before the stigma has durably anchored itself in public opinion.

Recommendation G.11 — Enhanced Multilateral Cooperation Against the Transnational Diffusion of Repressive Models:

Engage in enhanced multilateral cooperation to prevent the transnational diffusion of repressive institutional and media models targeting religious minorities — such as the documented attempt to replicate the French MIVILUDES model in Japan and other countries. This cooperation should build upon the **Istanbul Process** regarding combating intolerance, discrimination and incitement to hatred, which Special Rapporteur Ghanea recalls "**could provide a solid basis for international efforts to foster a global dialogue to promote at all levels a culture of tolerance and peace**" (A/HRC/55/47, §60).

To Digital Platforms and the Media Industry

Recommendation G.12 — Good Practice Charter for the Representation of Religious Minorities:

Call on major global streaming platforms (Netflix, HBO, Amazon Prime, YouTube, among others) to voluntarily adopt a good practice charter for the representation of religious minorities in their documentary productions, including:

- A clear and documented definition of the terms used to designate religious communities, excluding the undifferentiated use of terms such as "cult" or "sect";
- An obligation of effective right of reply for communities targeted by documentary productions, in the form of balanced participation in production or a dedicated response space;
- An explicit distinction, in productions and their editorial presentation, between individually proven criminal conduct and community membership;
- A transparent procedure of independent editorial review for productions likely to affect identifiable religious communities.

This recommendation is consistent with the obligations of non-State actors identified by Special Rapporteur Shaheed, who recommends that digital platforms "**facilitate independent research on the compliance of their products and processes with international human rights law**" and "**regularly publish transparency reports**" (A/76/380, §100d).

Recommendation G.13 — Responsibility of the Editorial Chain:

Call on traditional media to acknowledge their responsibility in the **cascade disinformation** phenomenon documented by CAP LC in its HRC-61 declaration (*freedomofconscience.eu/hrc-61-item-5-media-fueled-persecution-establishing-accountability-for-sensationalist-coverage-of-religious-minorities*), and to adopt editorial practices guaranteeing the systematic cross-referencing of institutional sources and independent verification of claims regarding religious minority communities, in line with Special Rapporteur Ghanea's call to examine "**each link in the chain of responsibility**" (A/HRC/55/47, §27).

GENERAL CONCLUSION

The three situations documented in this report — France, Pakistan, and the global level of streaming platforms — illustrate, in radically different contexts, one and the same systemic reality: **the media today constitute the primary vector for the construction, dissemination**

and normalization of discourses that expose religious minorities to discrimination, persecution and violence.

In France, it is traditional media that, in symbiotic relationship with MIVILUDES, transform unverified anonymous reports into durable social stigmas, with documented effects on the concrete rights of tens of thousands of people belonging to religious minorities. The repeated condemnation of MIVILUDES by the courts — five times in 2025 — proves that the law eventually corrects these abuses, but always too late, and after the media damage has been irreversibly caused.

In Pakistan, State and religious media form an integral part of an institutionalized persecution apparatus targeting the Ahmadiyya community, whose situation is unique in being directly inscribed in the national Constitution. The media are not passive amplifiers here: they are constitutive actors in the chain of persecution, legitimizing in the eyes of public opinion a legal exclusion that constitutes, in international law, a grave and continuous violation of Article 18 of the ICCPR.

At the global level, streaming platforms produce and distribute to billions of people representations that — by virtue of their industrial scale, sensationalist aesthetic, absence of any right of reply, and complete absence of international regulation — create the cultural conditions for a globalized religious intolerance, with no effective recourse available to the victims of this stigmatization.

The **common thread** that unites these three situations is precisely the one that Special Rapporteur Nazila Ghanea has identified as the central contemporary threat to freedom of religion: **hatred based on religion or belief that is "often mediated, facilitated and exacerbated"**, spreading **"with unprecedented speed and reach"**, with **"global consequences"** (A/HRC/55/47, §16). Special Rapporteur Ahmed Shaheed has, for his part, established the fundamental link between media freedom and freedom of thought itself: without **"diversity and plurality of media"** ensuring access to multiple and balanced sources of information (A/76/380, §97g), the most fundamental right of all — the right to form one's own convictions freely and without constraint — is itself threatened.

CAP Liberté de Conscience calls on the OHCHR to make **the regulation of media with respect to freedom of religion or belief** a priority of its agenda, and to mobilize all available tools — special reporting mechanisms, recommendations to States, structured dialogue with digital platforms, and civil society capacity-building — to respond to a threat which, if left unaddressed, will continue to worsen at the pace of global digital media growth.

"Laws alone are not enough, and States should also adopt policies and programmes to promote diversity and freedom of expression, in increasingly multicultural and interconnected societies."

— Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Nazila Ghanea, A/HRC/55/47, §61

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