



FRANCE: JUDICIAL CONDEMNATIONS, CONTINUING OPACITY AND MEDIA STIGMATIZATION

The Record of the MIVILUDES One Year After the OSCE Country Visit

*Follow up contribution to the report of the Personal Representatives of the OSCE Chair in Office
on their country visit to France, 10 to 13 June 2025*

Warsaw Human Dimension Conference 2026

Coordination des Associations et des Particuliers pour la Liberté de Conscience (CAP LC)

October 2026

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report follows up on the country visit that the Personal Representatives of the OSCE Chair in Office carried out in France from 10 to 13 June 2025, whose report was finalized in March 2026. That visit found that the methodology of the MIVILUDES lacks clarity and a definition of sectarian deviations, and it recommended dialogue with faith communities and access to redacted accounts of the anonymous reports on which public accusations rest. The evidence documented here shows that, instead of reforming, the MIVILUDES has continued the same working methods, in complete opacity, and has been sanctioned by the French courts seven times in less than two years. Its partner associations face criminal and financial investigations over the use of several million euros of public funds. Because the MIVILUDES refuses dialogue and transparency, religious minorities are left with a single avenue to be heard: litigation against the State. The report also documents the role of the media, which reproduce the Mission's designations without independent verification, exposing targeted communities to stigmatizing and discriminatory press campaigns.

1. INTRODUCTION: CAP LC AND THE OSCE

CAP LC is an independent, non denominational association founded in France in 1995, holding consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council. For more than thirty

years it has defended freedom of conscience, religion and belief, documenting violations committed in authoritarian regimes as well as discrimination mechanisms that can appear in established democracies. CAP LC has contributed to successive Warsaw Human Dimension Conferences. At the 2024 conference it addressed the systematic discrimination of Scientologists in Germany and warned, in a statement on the independence of the judiciary, that the critique of the MIVILUDES by a Swiss academic report casts a troubling light on opaque methodologies and imprecise data employed in the name of vigilance against sectarian aberrations, producing the marginalization of religious and spiritual communities. This report continues that engagement. CAP LC is not, and has never been, opposed to the sanction of abuses and crimes, within a majority or a minority religion or in any other group. Its concern is the method: in a State governed by the rule of law, even measures of the name and shame type must be surrounded by procedural guarantees, and the fight against real abuses must not become a system of generalized suspicion based on belonging.

2. WHAT THE OSCE COUNTRY VISIT FOUND

The findings of the Personal Representatives concerning the MIVILUDES frame everything that follows. The report notes that the methodology of the MIVILUDES lacks clarity and a definition of sectarian deviations, and that the 2025 report devotes a page to Scientology that amounts to treating the group as a cult, which fuels discrimination and stigmatization; it records that an adviser at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs refused to meet Scientology representatives on the argument that they constitute a cult. Concerning Jehovah's Witnesses, it recalls that a predecessor placed them at the top of a list of sects in the mid 1990s and that, although the government retracted the list ten years later, some local rights, such as the right to rent a city hall, are still not respected because of this label. The report further expresses the concerns of several denominations about the law of 24 August 2021. Finally, the Personal Representatives recommended dialogue with faith communities against which concerns raised by anonymous reports are raised, and access to redacted or summary accounts of these reports. The Conseil d'Etat had ruled on 26 March 2025 that the MIVILUDES was not legally required to forward even anonymized reports. The OSCE recommendation was therefore more demanding than French law, and it remains unimplemented.

3. THE JUDICIAL RECORD: SEVEN SANCTIONING DECISIONS IN LESS THAN TWO YEARS

Since the summer of 2024, the Paris Administrative Court has rendered seven decisions sanctioning the MIVILUDES, six of them in 2025. On 14 June 2024, the court found that two passages of the 2018-2020 report concerning Jehovah's Witnesses were false information and ordered their removal. On 21 February 2025, it held that the title of the 2021 report referring to sectarian aberrations observed within the Malrevers kibbutz rested on no substantiated element and declared the use of the word observed illegal. On 16 May 2025, in a case brought by CAP LC, the court identified errors of law in the way the MIVILUDES presented the right of access to

administrative documents, creating the misleading impression that whole categories could be withheld; on the same day it annulled the refusal to communicate the documents allowing verification of how the UNADFI had used its 2021 public subsidies. On 28 May 2025 it annulled the refusal to transmit the table tracing the selection of subsidized projects. On 11 July 2025, it found that further grave accusations against Jehovah's Witnesses in the 2021 report were contradicted by the produced elements and ordered their deletion. On 24 October 2025, it found that associating the proselytism of the Church of Scientology with sectarian aberrations constituted a fault engaging the responsibility of the State, no element establishing such a deviation, and ordered the removal of the passages.

The satellites of the MIVILUDES have their own record. The UNADFI, financed to nearly ninety percent by public funds, refused to publish a right of reply of CAP LC as ordered by the Marseille court; the Court of Appeal of Aix en Provence reminded it on 9 January 2025 that even a publication insupportable to the association must be respected by law, and on 12 March 2026 it confirmed that the right of reply is general and absolute, ordering the publication of the reply of the association Non a la Drogue, Oui a la Vie under a daily penalty. On 11 June 2025, the Impact Christian Centre, one of the largest evangelical churches in France, filed a complaint with the investigating judge of Paris after being named in the 2024 annual report as the perpetrator of sectarian aberrations: yet another religious group must go to court to be heard. In 2023, the MIVILUDES republished its annual report with a four page right of reply by the Church of Scientology only when faced with a lawsuit.

4. NOT A REFORM AGENDA: AUDITS AND CRIMINAL INVESTIGATIONS

On 4 March 2024, the Cour des comptes published a severe report on the management of the interministerial structure to which the MIVILUDES is attached, concerning calls for projects endowed with one million euros each. The Court identified incomplete files, missing supporting documents, insufficient controls, absent recovery of sums when projects were not carried out, renewal of funding despite the absence of financial reports, and projects alien to the statutory purpose of the beneficiaries. It described a global absence of rigor, with recurrent and manifest anomalies, seized its public prosecutor, and its First President described the matter as a serious case.

The national financial prosecutor investigates several components of this system. Concerning the UNADFI, which received 264,038 euros in 2021 for eleven determined actions, the investigation examines facts susceptible to constitute misappropriation of public funds, illegal taking of interest, breach of trust and false attestations: several announced actions were not realized, two announced recruitments apparently never took place, the personnel costs claimed exceeded the entire payroll, and the exploitation result swung from minus 158,748 to plus 119,540 euros; the then president of the UNADFI sat on the orientation council of the MIVILUDES when she solicited these subsidies. Concerning the CCMM, which obtained 131,779 euros, the investigation examines the transformation of an announced new brochure into a reprint of a 2011 document, double funding of certain actions also presented to the services of the Prime Minister, and false

figures in the accounts. Concerning the FECRIS, it examines the use of 20,000 euros granted for a colloquium in Marbella that was cancelled and replaced by a webinar, whose reported expenses include 5,000 euros of legal fees devoted to a German litigation against Jehovah's Witnesses, in which the FECRIS had been condemned for eighteen mendacious allegations. The investigation further covers 112,540 euros paid to two commercial entities from an envelope officially reserved for associations, in circumstances raising a suspicion of favoritism. At the local level, the CAFFES, which received 965,605 euros between 2020 and 2024, nearly eighty seven percent of its resources, faces a procedure before the Lille court examining abuse of trust, false declarations to obtain subsidies and fraud. Finally, an investigating judge in Paris opened a judicial information concerning an ADFI referenced by the MIVILUDES as a regional contact, for publications susceptible to constitute provocation to hatred and violence on religious, racial and ethnic grounds.

5. REPEATED VIOLATIONS DESPITE JUDICIAL WARNINGS

The central finding is not the existence of condemnations. It is that the condemnations change nothing. The Paris Administrative Court had already condemned the MIVILUDES in 2018 for presenting anthroposophic medicine as presenting a risk of sectarian deviation; the Swiss expert report of 2024, by the director of the Intercantonal Centre for Information on Beliefs and a professor of psychiatry, notes that the MIVILUDES repeated the same comments in its 2021 report. The Jehovah's Witnesses asked the MIVILUDES in November 2021 to delete defamatory passages; the Mission complied with none of these requests, and the passages were suppressed only after two judgments. The same pattern repeats: false statements are published, correction requires a lawsuit, the media amplification is never repaired, and the next report reproduces the method. The semantic drift documented by the Swiss experts aggravates the problem: the MIVILUDES has moved from denouncing established deviances to denouncing risks of deviance, and since a risk is by definition never null, any religious, spiritual, political, sporting or even scientific organization can be designated as at risk. Reform moved in the opposite direction. By the law of 21 May 2024, the French legislator created a criminal offence of psychological subjection, punishable by up to three years of imprisonment and a fine of 375,000 euros, a notion close to the concepts of mental manipulation that scholars have long criticized as unscientific, and granted the MIVILUDES a legislative status, consolidating an institution whose methods were already under judicial sanction. When, in 2023, university medical specialists requested an independent scientific expertise on the data of the MIVILUDES and then access to the data themselves, they obtained no answer, despite a favorable opinion of the Commission for Access to Administrative Documents; and CAP LC had to sue three times to obtain the basic documents on the allocation of subsidies. When a public body produces its own data, classifies them, interprets them and draws the conclusions, while making their verification impossible, the authority of the State replaces proof, and the absence of method becomes a danger for fundamental freedoms.

6. NO DIALOGUE: THE COURTS AS THE ONLY CHANNEL

The OSCE recommendation called for dialogue between the MIVILUDES and the communities it designates, and for access to redacted accounts of the anonymous reports concerning them. The practice is the opposite. In June 2021, the Minister of the Interior organized a meeting between Jehovah's Witnesses and the president of the MIVILUDES; the Mission offered a working meeting to explain its methodology, that meeting was never held, and the president of the MIVILUDES stated in an interview that he would never again meet with the movement. Dialogue with the Scientologists is refused on the argument that they constitute a cult. The targeted groups do not know what they are accused of: the reports on which designations rest are anonymous, non contradictory and inaccessible, and the Conseil d'Etat has confirmed that the Mission is not required to communicate them even in anonymized form. Under these conditions, litigation is not one channel among others. It is the only remaining avenue by which a stigmatized community can learn the content of the accusations against it, obtain their judicial review and secure their removal. The result is paradoxical for a State that presents its model as preventive: by closing every non judicial channel, the French system reserves the possibility of correction to those communities that have the means to sue the State, and leaves the stigmatization of the others intact.

7. THE MEDIA DIMENSION: AN ECHO CHAMBER WITHOUT FACTUAL VERIFICATION

This report must also address the relationship between the MIVILUDES and the media, because it is structural. There exists no factual verification between the Mission and the press: when French media cover questions of cults, they rely almost exclusively on the MIVILUDES as their authoritative source, without questioning its methodology or cross referencing its claims with independent academic work. The relationship is bidirectional and self reinforcing: the Mission classifies groups on the basis of unverified anonymous reports; the media reproduce these classifications and amplify them; this coverage legitimizes the institutional discourse; political leaders then rely on this dual authority to adopt restrictive measures. A press investigation of January 2025 described the same feedback loop and quoted a written question by a senator to the Minister of the Interior denouncing the refusal of the MIVILUDES to disclose its data and methodologies.

The consequences are concrete. CAP LC has shown that the sources elevated by the Mission and the UNADFI can be persons whose credibility was itself sanctioned by the courts, such as a professional witness cited fourteen times in the 2021 report to attack Steiner schools, whose characterization as a sexual aggressor was confirmed on appeal in January 2026, or a subsidized expert presented by the media as a whistleblower despite a harassment conviction confirmed in 2013. CAP LC documented a televised debate on Scientology on the public service channel from which every representative of the movement was excluded, in violation of pluralism, the right of reply and the presumption of innocence, and the media coverage of the November 2023 police raids against a yoga organization, conducted with a presumption of guilt toward ordinary practitioners. The same mechanism now operates at industrial scale through global streaming

platforms, whose cult documentaries maintain a systematic confusion between proven criminal conduct and membership in a legal religious minority and expose ordinary members to employment refusals, family breakdowns and online harassment, in a cascade disinformation phenomenon where press coverage, social networks and search engines lock the stigma in place. When the media relay institutional designations without verification, stigmatizing press campaigns become the normal condition of religious minorities in France.

8. WHAT INDEPENDENT EXPERTS AND INTERNATIONAL BODIES HAVE SAID

These concerns are not those of CAP LC alone. The Special Rapporteur Asma Jahangir concluded after her 2005 mission to France that the measures of the French authorities had led to undue restrictions of freedom of religion or belief and to discrimination. Her successor Heiner Bielefeldt reported in 2013 that members of religious minorities are often victims of systematic discrimination in education, employment, housing and health, citing the restrictions imposed on the Plymouth Brethren after their inclusion on a French list. The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom concluded in 2020 that the French government provides the largest part of the funding of the FECRIS and that the anti cult movement conducts an effective information war against religious minorities. Eighty Ukrainian academics asked in 2023 that France cease financing an organization that has worked with the Russian authorities against Ukraine. Within France, sociologists have described the MIVILUDES as a police of minds lacking definition, methodology and evaluation; and the lawyers Ragot and Bensimhon concluded in 2026 that the policy carried by the MIVILUDES entails grave and repeated violations by the French State of its engagements concerning freedom of conscience. The Swiss experts Farahmand and Berna have documented imprecise data, opaque methods and the absence of any religious studies scholar within the Mission. As Special Rapporteur Nazila Ghanea has stated, hatred based on religion or belief is often mediated, facilitated and exacerbated by online platforms and social media.

9. ASSESSMENT IN LIGHT OF OSCE COMMITMENTS

France has committed, within the OSCE framework and under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to respect freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief for all without distinction. An administrative court has recalled that, in its mission of information, the MIVILUDES is bound by the obligations of balance, impartiality and neutrality imposed on every administrative authority. The documented record shows a persistent departure from these standards: publication of false or unsupported statements concerning named religious movements, refusal of dialogue, refusal of transparency, designation of groups as at risk without defined criteria, and the use of public funds to finance an ecosystem of associations that amplify the same designations. The conclusion of this follow up is precise: one year after the OSCE visit and despite seven judicial sanctions, the MIVILUDES has not reformed. It continues the same working methods, in the most complete opacity, in its methodology as in its communication with the movements it designates, and it is the accumulation of judicial proceedings, not any internal change, that now performs the verification the institution refuses to exercise itself.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

In a spirit of constructive dialogue, CAP LC respectfully invites the French authorities to consider submitting the MIVILUDES and its methods to an independent external review based on international human rights standards, in particular Articles 18 and 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; to publish a complete, reproducible and verifiable methodology, including the rules for treating anonymous reports and the criteria for classifying a group as at risk; to implement the recommendation of the OSCE Personal Representatives by opening a structured dialogue with designated communities and giving them access to redacted or summary accounts of the reports concerning them; to review, in light of the ongoing controls, the conditions of public funding of associations whose use of subsidies is under criminal investigation, and to ensure that public funds are not used for media content stigmatizing religious minorities without an established judicial basis; and to consider integrating into journalism training a 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.

CAP LC encourages the OSCE, its Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and the participating States to continue their follow up of the recommendations addressed to France and to seek a written account of their implementation before the next Human Dimension Implementation Meeting; to consider, within ODIHR's hate crime reporting, attention to crimes and discrimination whose motivation derives from stigmatizing institutional and media designations of religious minorities; and to invite France to present the safeguards it intends to adopt so that the fight against genuine abuses remains distinct from the designation of communities, and so that the warning function remains where the rule of law places it: the judicial channels, with the guarantees they entail.

11. CONCLUSION

Those who accuse, advise the State and receive public funds must themselves answer for their practices before the law and before public opinion. The French courts have begun to say so, seven times in less than two years. But judicial correction arrives late, and the stigma anchored by media amplification survives the judgments. France now has the opportunity, which the OSCE visit has opened, to reform an institution that produces suspicion instead of protection, and to restore simple principles: prosecute offences, protect victims and prevent real abuses, without designating acceptable beliefs and without placing categories of citizens under suspicion. CAP LC remains at the disposal of the participating States and of ODIHR to contribute to that reform.

SOURCES

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