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## Congress of the United States

Washington, DC

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OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS

May 20, 2009

His Excellency Pierre Vimont  
The Ambassador of France  
4101 Reservoir Road, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20007

Dear Ambassador Vimont,

We write as Members of Congress to express our deep concern over the recent report entitled *La justice face aux dérives sectaires (Justice Facing Sectarian Abuses)* by Mr. Georges Fenech, president of MIVILUDES, an Inter-Ministerial Mission of Vigilance established to fight against sectarian drifts under the office of the Prime Minister. Mr. Fenech's report to the Prime Minister, coupled with news reports of pending government policies to designate certain religious communities as "sects" or "cults", raises serious concerns regarding protection for an individual's right to freedom of religion in France.

Earlier this year, *Le Parisien* reported that Mr. Fenech is openly promoting the idea of putting in place an official list of sects in order to create a "system of reference of the movements and practices showing cultish behaviors." In Mr. Fenech's report to the Prime Minister, he recommends specific policies targeting these sects, including protecting children from their parents' beliefs and protecting individuals MIVILUDES deems vulnerable from "psychological subjection."

Designating specific religious beliefs and communities as sects and restricting an individual's freedom to choose and change his or her belief is inconsistent with international standards on religious freedom. Such recommendations appear to evidence a clear bias against a large number of religious communities and their adherents and impose arbitrary restrictions on an individual's human rights.


We recall that a parliamentary commission on cults established a similar "black list" of sects in 1995, which was officially rejected by then-Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin in a 2005 circular letter. Not only would the establishment of a new "black list" represent a major step backwards for religious freedom in France, but it would contravene fundamental human rights.

As an ally of the United States, committed to our common concern for fundamental human freedoms, we sincerely urge the Government of France to ensure that any new policy affecting an individual's freedom of religion is consistent with France's international obligations.

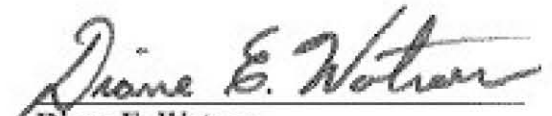
Thank you for taking the time to consider these concerns and we genuinely look forward to speaking with you at your convenience about this matter in more detail.

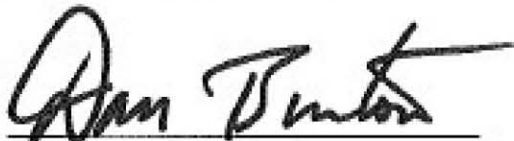
Most sincerely,

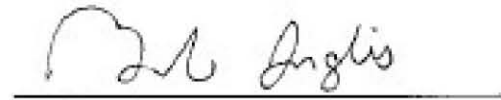
  
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Frank R. Wolf

  
Diane E. Watson

  
Dan Burton

  
Bob Inglis

Cc:

The Honorable Mark A. Pekala, Charge D'Affairs, U.S. Embassy Paris, France  
The Honorable Karen B. Stewart, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Democracy,  
Human Rights and Labor, U.S. State Department