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Preserving Freedom of Faith

In common with many other countries throughout Europe, the United Kingdom has a small pressure group of self-appointed, fanatical, 'cult watchers' who purport to be able to provide information about new religious movements. Much of that so-called information, however, tends to be disturbing, inaccurate and unreliable and yet its views are sometimes echoed in the media which, perhaps unwittingly, helps keep its cause alive.

Some thirteen years ago such supposed 'sect experts', who actively campaign against most minority religions; joined together to form a European network called the 'Federation of European Centres for Research and Information on Sects' [FECRIS]

Despite the fact that, from its base in France, one of the main aims of FECRIS is to bring about highly discriminatory legislation in as many countries as it can, it was recently granted consultative status to the Council of Europe. That, in itself, is an appalling development insomuch as existing laws are perfectly adequate to deal with any perceived wrong-doing in minority religious groups as they are in dealing with any perceived malpractice in society as a whole and there should be no need whatsoever to apply a different set of rules to adherents of certain selective religious organizations.

Whereas the British Government's position is based on an objective and balanced assessment of new religious movements, that is in stark contrast to the approach of FECRIS and its constituent members who provide only partial and biased information. For example, they neither carry nor distribute the opinions of the world's most reputable academics on the subject, if it goes against their own fixed viewpoint.

Similarly, whilst court cases throughout Europe, over an extended period of time, have exonerated the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification of all the charges commonly made against it, FECRIS and the British-based pressure group, FAIR, simply choose to suppress such inconvenient findings.

It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that representatives of several new religious movements, who have become increasingly fed up with seeing their organisations being unfairly portrayed, have got together to openly challenge the role of FECRIS and to question its funding.

Under the umbrella of the Brussels-based, non-governmental, non-religious organization, 'Human Rights without Frontiers', a new 'European Network for Religious Tolerance and Non-Discrimination' was launched in July of this year. It

will draw on the views of the many impartial academics throughout the world that have researched new religious movements and who are able to give well-informed reports that counter the views of FECRIS.

Recommendations: -

The Universal Peace Federation in the United Kingdom would call on the French Government to withdraw its financial support of FECRIS.

It would similarly ask the Council of Europe to reconsider its position on those who seem so hell-bent on destroying the principle of freedom of religion.