

To:

**Mr. Ahmed Shaheed**

UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of religion or Belief

**Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein**

United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

**Mr Nils Muižnieks**

Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe

**Mr Ján Figel**

EU Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the EU

**Federica Mogherini**

High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

**Floriane Hohenberg**

Head of ODIHR's Tolerance and Non-Discrimination Department – OSCE

**Brussels, the 14 November 2017**

Dear Madam, Dear Sir,

We write as an informal group of individuals who are scholars, religious and secular leaders, and human rights advocates to express our deep concern about the deteriorating religious freedom situation in Russia.

The Russian Constitution guarantees every citizen the right to practice the religion of their choice. Further, as a member of the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the United Nations, Russia has international obligations to uphold this right. Russia is a signatory to the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR) and the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, and has ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

But this fundamental right is in serious peril as the Russian authorities continue to foster an atmosphere of intolerance, discrimination and persecution against religious minorities throughout the entire country.

Most recently, the Scientology religion, its parishioners and its religious and social organizations have become a primary target of this Russian national campaign of religious repression. The campaign has already been wide-ranging. Russia's Supreme Court has declared Jehovah's Witnesses, a Christian denomination that rejects violence, as "extremist," confirming an order by the Justice Ministry that the group be "liquidated" and thereby banning them from operating on Russian territory. Further, Muslims, Evangelicals, Lutherans, Baptists, Pentecostals, Methodists, Presbyterians, Hindus, Buddhists and others have been targeted.

On June 6, 2017, over sixty St. Petersburg Federal Security Bureau (FSB) officials and SWAT police raided the premises of the St. Petersburg Scientology religious group as well as the homes of four leaders of the group.

The FSB arrested and interrogated five leaders of the Scientology religious group, who were then sentenced to pretrial imprisonment in deprivation of their rights to freedom of movement, religion, expression and association. Over four months have passed, yet one of the religious leaders remain imprisoned while two with medical and family issues and two others remain subject to house arrest. These individuals have been falsely charged with engaging in illegal commercial activity without registration and with violating the Extremism Law. In reality, these individuals are being held for simply engaging in peaceful religious beliefs and activities.

If convicted, these individuals face a six to ten-year prison term simply for practicing their religion. Numerous human rights and interfaith groups have expressed concern that the actions of the St. Petersburg FSB constitute an egregious violation of the right to freedom of religion.

The Russian authorities have seized upon the Extremism Law to arbitrarily and improperly target Scientology and other peaceful religious minorities. Over fifty cases regarding Russia's misuse of the Extremism Law against numerous religious groups are before the European Human Rights Court. Scientology operates as a peaceful religion around the world. One of Scientology Founder L. Ron Hubbard's directives is to abide by the law.

The charge of performing illegal commercial activity without proper registration of a legal entity is equally fallacious. The St. Petersburg Scientology religious group cannot form a legal entity because the Russian authorities refuses to register it as a religious organization. Yet, the European Human Rights Court has ruled that failure to register the St. Petersburg religious group as a religious organization violates its right to freedom of religion and association. Illegally stripped of this fundamental human right to form a religious entity, the religious group has been forced to rely on its religious leaders to act on its behalf and spend monies to rent a place of worship and further its religious mission.

The imprisoned Scientologists include individuals who won the religious registration case in the European Court of Human Rights. Their imprisonment constitutes a direct reprisal for standing up for religious freedom, making these five religious leaders prisoners of conscience. They should be set free.

We are asking you, as a part of the international community to join in sending a message to the Russian authorities to immediately release the Scientology Five, to close this case because it is meritless, and to finally execute the Human Rights Court's Order to register the St. Petersburg religious group.

As well, as today many religious minorities are experiencing strong religious discrimination and persecution in the Russian Federation, we ask you to increase your work in favor of Freedom of Religion and Belief in Russia, and meet with Russian authorities so they put an end to the egregious violations of the right to freedom of religion or belief that occurred in the Russian Federations these last years.

Respectfully yours,

#### **Individuals signatories**

- **Shahid Naseer Ahmed**

Missionnaire principal

Association Musulmane Ahmadiyya de France

- **Ivan Arjona**

Director General  
European Office of the Church of Scientology for Public Affairs and Human Rights

• **Simon Barrow**

Director  
Ekklesia

• **Pasteur Jean-Claude Basset**

Eglise Nationale Protestante de Genève  
Fondateur de la Plateforme Interreligieuse de Genève  
Membre du CLIMS (Centre de liaison et d'information concernant les mouvements spirituels)

• **Minister David Bruton DMS MBA**

President  
Spiritualists' National Union UK

• **Gush Bhumbra**

President  
Leicester Secular Society

• **Silvio Calzolari**

Professore di Storia delle Religioni Orientali e Islamologia all'Istituto Superiore di Scienze Religiose (Firenze) - Facoltà Teologica dell'Italia Centrale

• **Germana Carobene**

Università di Napoli Federico II  
Department of Law and Political Science, Faculty Member

• **Monica Cornejo-Valle**

Directora  
Prof. Contratado Doctor  
Universidad Complutense Madrid

• **Regis Dericquebourg**

PhD - Permanent member of the Group for the Study of Religions and Secularity (laïcité) at the National Center for the Scientific Studies in Paris (CNRS).

• **Jon Dal Din**

Director  
Westminster Interfaith

• **Jacques Dubreuil**

Président de l'Omniium des Libertés – France

• **Willy Fautre**

Executive Director  
Human Rights Without Frontiers

- **Sean Finlay**

Wisbech Interfaith Forum

- **Eric Gozlan**

Responsable associatif pour le dialogue interreligieux - France

- **Reverend Martin Henwood DL**

Vicar of Holy Trinity, Dartford, Diocese of Rochester - UK

- **Avetik Ishkhanyan**

Chairman

Helsinki Committee of Armenia

- **Jean-Claude Kolly**

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CLIMS - Centre de liaison et d'information concernant les mouvements spirituels

- **Jean-Luc Martin Lagardette**

Journaliste

Président de l'Association de promotion de l'information citoyenne (Apic) - France

- **Camelia Marin**

Vice-president

Soteria International

- **Dr Hans Noot**

Director

The Gerard Noodt Fondation for Freedom of Religion

- **Christian Paturel**

Secrétaire CAPLC - France

- **Dr. paedagogic Gudrun Elke Preusser-Franke**

Founding Chairperson of the "Jüdischer FrauenVerein Dresden e.V." (Jewish Women Association Dresden)

- **Revd Alan Race**

Chair of the Executive Committee

World Congress of Faiths

- **Chain Singh Khalsa**

Sikh Chaplain

Conseil représentatif des Sikhs de France

- **Dr Rabinder S Sohil**

Chairman

Sikh International Council

- **Bill Walsh**

Human Rights Lawyer

Bisceglie & Walsh

**Organizations**

- **The All Faiths Network** (<http://www.allfaithsnetwork.org.uk/> )
- **CAPLC Europe** (<http://www.freedomofconscience.eu/> )
- **CLIMS** (<http://www.clims.ch/> )
- **EIFRF – European Interreligious Forum for Religious Freedom** ([http://www.eifrf-articles.org/About-EIFRF\\_a88.html](http://www.eifrf-articles.org/About-EIFRF_a88.html) )
- **European Office of the Church of Scientology for Public Affairs and Human Rights**
- **The Gerard Noodt Fondation** for Freedom of Religion (<http://www.noodtforb.eu/> )
- **Holy Trinity, Dartford, Diocese of Rochester** (Anglican Church)
- **IIRF - International Institute for Religious Freedom** (<http://www.iirf.eu/> )
- **Leicester Secular Society** (<http://www.leicestersecularsociety.org.uk/> )
- **Sikh International Council**
- **Soteria International** (<http://www.soteriainternational.org/> )
- **Spiritualists' National Union UK** (<https://www.snu.org.uk/> )
- **Westminster Interfaith** - The agency of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Westminster for Interreligious Dialogue (<http://westminsterinterfaith.org.uk/> )
- **Wisbech Interfaith Forum** (<http://www.wisbechinterfaith.btck.co.uk/> )
- **World Congress of Faiths** (<http://www.worldfaiths.org/> )