



NGO in Special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations since 2009  
INGO with participatory status with the Council of Europe since 2005

**HUMAN DIMENSION  
IMPLEMENTATION MEETING**  
Warsaw, 28 September to 9 October 2009

Tuesday 29 September 2009

“Fundamental freedoms I, including:

- Freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief;
- Follow-up of the 2009 Supplementary HDM on Freedom of Religion or Belief”

Briefing paper on cults by

Fédération Européenne des Centres de Recherche et d’Information sur le  
Sectarisme

**The Role of FECRIS** We are a grouping of voluntary family support and self-help organizations in 30 countries across and beyond the EU. Our members share a common interest in helping and supporting individuals who have been recruited in to abusive cults, and easing the often dire long term psychological and other effects on them and their families. Such people receive little or no assistance from official sources. All our members face the same difficult and sensitive task of dealing with individuals who live in fear of the senior members of the cults to which they belong or have belonged. Their families meanwhile have been traumatised by the experience of having (in their eyes) lost a loved child or other family member: they are fearful of the consequences for that person of any hostile action against the cult and hesitant to talk to outsiders about a harrowing and painful period of their lives. In its representative role, FECRIS was granted in 2005 participative status as an INGO by the Council of Europe, and more recently awarded NGO Special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, the UN body responsible among other questions, for human rights.

**Definition of “Cult”** Most cults pose as religions or “faith” organizations, and claim to offer their adherents some form of personal or spiritual self improvement. While there are many border line cases, and it is impossible to arrive at absolute definitions of which organisations are cultic in their behaviour, those who FECRIS regard as cults share the following characteristics: they recruit their members using deception, retain them by various forms of manipulation and mental bullying, and exploit them for financial or other benefit to the cult’s leadership. According to a definition associated with ICSA, the US based International Cultic Studies Association, a cult can be defined as

*“A group or movement exhibiting a great or excessive devotion or dedication to some person, idea, or thing, and employing unethically manipulative techniques of persuasion and control designed to advance the goals of the group's leaders, to the actual or possible detriment of members, their families, or the community. Unethically manipulative techniques of persuasion and control include but are not limited to: isolation from former friends and family, use of*

*special methods to heighten suggestibility and subservience, powerful group pressures, information management, suspension of individuality or critical judgment, promotion of total dependency on the group and fear of leaving it.”*

**FECRIS and OSCE** Our interest in making a contribution to OSCE deliberations is simple. We wish to highlight the plight of victims and their families. We believe that the organizations generally known as cults are totalitarian in nature, and infringe the basic human rights of their members. We do not believe that cults have any role to play in a body such as OSCE whose aim, among others, **is the protection of those persecuted for their religious beliefs. Cults are rarely persecuted. They are not religions or even belief systems. Their participation in OSCE and similar meetings is an affront to cult victims and their families:** it gives spurious respectability to activities which would be deprecated by concerned, liberal minded people everywhere. Furthermore, we fear that their presence risks damaging OSCE's credibility, and distracting attention from its valuable work in protecting human rights and freedoms.