

**TOWARD A FAIR ASSESSMENT  
OF NICHIREN DAISHONIN'S BUDDHISM  
IN FRANCE**

**A REPORT BY THE SOKA RELIGIOUS COUNCIL  
OF NICHIREN BUDDHISM**

Paris, November, 2009

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## PREFACE

In view of the various allegations that have been made in recent years in France against the Soka movement of Nichiren Buddhism, the present series of documents responds to these allegations via a counter-inquiry that sheds light on the relevant issues in a factual and soundly argued fashion.

The current situation – the result of three investigations that have acquired an aura of authority by virtue of having been conducted by French government institutions – calls for a fresh view that is democratically oriented and presents a genuinely adversarial response to the purportedly objective, legitimate and impartial information that has been disseminated thus far.

Especially since these reviews have since been officially disregarded by the authorities but keep being spread, either with malicious intent or in good faith in certain cases, particularly by the media, rumor, or Internet yet.

2006 marked the tenth anniversary of the publication of the report realized by the first parliamentary Investigation Commission on Religious Sects. Since 1996, numerous evolutions have changed the situation that was created by the National Assembly's publication of a "blacklist" of 173 religious groups that are classified in France as "sects."

Hence the time has come to put these matters in perspective and conduct a genuinely objective investigation into the religious practices of the followers of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism in France. For what is at stake here is respect for freedom in a democratic society.

But in order to genuinely understand the issues involved, we will first need to describe the role played by Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism in the structures and institutions of the group known as Soka Gakkai. These structures and institutions are the outward manifestation of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism and the expression of its organizational modalities.

As will be shown in the present report, the common denominator of all these structures and activities is the belief in and practice of Buddhism as manifested by religious invocation before the Gohonzon, which is an object of veneration<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless we need to try to understand the reasons for the ostracism that French followers of the Soka movement of Nichiren Buddhism have suffered at the hands of its opponents, who claim it is a "sect", although, as will be explained further, many (and increasing) official recognitions have later been given, finding no sectarian deviance, neither within the religion or the Soka movement itself, nor among its practitioners.

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<sup>1</sup> *Global Citizens: The Soka Gakkai Buddhist Movement in the World* edited by David Machacek and Brian Wilson, L'Harmattan, Paris, 2004

## **I. OVERVIEW OF THE METHODS USED IN FRANCE TO STIGMATIZE NICHIREN DAISHONIN'S BUDDHISM AND THE SOKA GAKKAI MOVEMENT**

### **1. The recourse to “guerilla-style semantics” through the defamatory and questionable use of the term “sect”**

“Guerilla-style semantics” have involved the recurrent use of terms that have managed to taint the ambient discourse, legitimize an ideology, and condition the behavior and attitudes of the French citizenry and its political leaders through negative media coverage and the use of loaded terms containing veiled threats and half-hearted reassurances.

We are dealing here with a type of “semantic warfare” where imposing a certain type of vocabulary is tantamount to imposing certain values.

This has resulted in the imposition of a specific vocabulary *and* set of values via a process that began with the invocation of repellent myths such as those concerning “influential foreigners” and the “Yellow Peril”, as well as the use of classic manipulative methods, which are described below.

Certain accusatory methods, legitimate though they may be, have been used against “sects” in a manner that violates the rules of democratic discourse and debate: anonymous accounts, the (statutory) secrecy of jury deliberations, the absence of genuinely adversarial debate, and the refusal to accept expert opinions from specialists such as jurists (including lawyers, who specialize in adversarial debate), sociologists of religion, and so on. These factors are the main drivers of the misconstrual of the Soka movement of Nichiren Buddhism religion.

However (and needless to say) one must avoid the pitfall of naiveté here, since certain realities that have been described in France concerning “sects” and “deviant behavior by sects” reflect the activities of groups and ideologies whose common denominator is totalitarianism in the original sense of the term. When these groups are subjected to critical scrutiny via argumentation and the use of rebuttal evidence, as well as through judicial investigations, the true nature of such groups will be revealed (and justifiably so) and they will suffer the legal consequences of their actions.

However, this mechanism of vigilance and suppression should be deployed in a wholly democratic environment, to avoid, as it has been the case with the Soka Gakkai and the Nichiren Buddhism religion, serious unfounded and defamatory accusations, which are always difficult to erase even if they are officially recognized as such later.

## **2. An analysis of the allegations that have been made against Soka Gakkai reveals the following:**

### **2.1 Regarding the origin of the allegations:**

The allegations tend to come from opponents of Soka Gakkai, often from within the Buddhist community (see for example the remarks below concerning Daniel-Léonard Blanc's letter); these are people who are biased because of their own particular involvement with Buddhism.

In a ruling concerning a publication handed down in 1992, the Nanterre Tribunal de Grande Instance found fault with a reference to Daniel-Léonard Blanc by French deputy Alain Vivien:

*"...A cursory reading of the passage about the movement – which repeats the allegations of a competing organization as if they were realities, whereas in fact no attempt was made at a serious investigation of the matter – should have prompted the journalist to exercise extreme caution, which he failed to do."*

It is often the case that allegations that were made by a tiny handful of people are attributable to an internal dispute that originated among members of the Buddhist community.<sup>2</sup>

### **2.2 As for the methods used:**

The information that forms the basis for the allegations concerning Soka Gakkai, is said to have been developed by the General Information department of the French police: the Renseignements Généraux, whose investigations are conducted under the cloak of secrecy. However it has clearly been confirmed by the Interior Minister himself<sup>3</sup> that:

*"The police at both the national and local levels (had) found no drift in sectarian activities of the Soka Gakkai movement in France."*

Under these circumstances, it is unclear how the Renseignements Généraux could have more complete information ; furthermore had any grave conclusions been reached, they would have necessarily been forwarded to the Interior Minister, who has never mentioned anything to that effect.

In the same way, the reports on "sects" issued to date by parliamentary committees are based on anonymous testimony, were conducted without the benefit of opposing testimony, and do not include the transcripts of the hearings. No followers of Nichiren Buddhism were asked to testify before any of these committees.

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<sup>2</sup> D.-L. Blanc, an ex-follower of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism and self-described president of Association des Bouddhistes de France, a group of which Mr. Blanc is the sole representative and which is not be confused with Union Bouddhiste de France (UBF), which is today the official liaison between French Buddhists and French governmental institutions. As for Mr. Blanc, he is a person of dubious repute (see Annex 1 and Mr. Blanc's peculiar and revealing Web site, whose pronouncements should be taken with a large pinch of salt at a minimum, and which should in any case have been verified before being reproduced verbatim in the report without being validated). It should also be noted that in 1998 the Constitutional Council found Mr. Blanc guilty of violating electoral regulations and revoked his right to vote for 12 months.

<sup>3</sup> Letter from the Interior Minister to the President of Soka Gakkai France, dated December 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2003.

Thus these methods violated the principle of a right to a fair trial.<sup>4</sup> In 1996, Jean Vernet, the official delegate of the French episcopate (order of bishops) for sect related issues stated the following:

*“The list of groups that are classified as ‘sects’ in the report – its merits notwithstanding – makes me uneasy. I wonder who is really behind this list, usurping as it does judicial authority by pronouncing a de facto guilty verdict that the accused has not been given the chance to refute in most instances. In fact, there has been no trial – as is required by law – during which opposing arguments are presented. However, the numerous historical examples of this practice should alert us to its potential risks.”<sup>5</sup>*

### **2.3 As for the discrepancy between the scope of the “sect” accusation that has been leveled at Soka Gakkai and the reality (described below) to which this accusation refers:**

Simply reading through the detailed description of the allegations (likewise described below) allows for an assessment of the discrepancy between the negative light in which Soka Gakkai has been portrayed and the truth concerning the actions for which the movement is criticized.

### **3. The absence of any legal infraction**

**It should be noted that none of the allegations described below are based on a single factual reference to any legal infraction (since none has never occurred) or to any ruling against Soka Gakkai, its leaders or its members in any civil or criminal proceeding.**

And this in spite of the fact that in any democracy worthy of the name, whenever a citizen is accused of civil or legal wrongdoing, the accusation

- must be proven, on pain of prosecution for abusive complaint and slander;
- must provide the accused the opportunity to defend himself (even in a non-adversarial proceeding) lest the accused be denied a fair trial;

Unfortunately this has not been the case with the allegations that have been made here.

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<sup>4</sup> Note should also be made in this context of the injurious consequences of the malevolent conflation constituted by the following passage from the committee’s report in 1996: “(...) Numerous cases of improper use of economic structures (...) which is also the case with Soka Gakkai International France. Certain cults are known to have employed illegal workers or to have engaged in various types of fraud or racketeering.” (see below) In what sense is Soka Gakkai guilty of “improper use of economic structures?” No one knows. What in fact is “improper use of economic structures?” Is it an illegal act? But there’s worse still. Negative conflation with “sects” could convey the impression that Soka Gakkai is guilty of offenses related to fraud, racketeering or employing illegal workers – but without a shred of proof, and for good reason, since no criminal complaint concerning such offenses has ever been filed against Soka Gakkai.

<sup>5</sup> In *Pour en finir avec les sectes – Le débat sur le rapport de la commission parlementaire*, Editions Dervy, Paris, 1996

#### **4. The absence of any effective means to respond to the allegations leveled by government authorities**

Having been confronted with a “fait accompli” of allegations leveled by government authorities, the Soka movement of Nichiren Buddhism has not had at their disposal an effective means to respond to these allegations.

People tend to lend credence to a government report, according to the following reasoning: “Since a parliamentary committee has endorsed these views, they must be true;” and in this process statements that began life as mere assertions mutate into official reality.<sup>6</sup> (

Hence the central issue here is this: what effect do the conclusions reached by a parliamentary committee have when these conclusions that are ten years old, and were contradicted in 2006, are not subjected to any adversarial debate; since by law, no legal action can be brought against the content or authors of such reports<sup>7</sup>.

The grave consequence of this situation for the Soka Gakkai movement is that this type of information can never be viewed in an objective and impartial light, and thus refuting it would necessitate proving the negative case (how does one prove that a specific group is *not* a sect?), which is virtually impossible since the documentation that forms the basis for parliamentary reports is archived indefinitely, and are not subject to legal action.

#### **5. The use of the volatile term “perniciousness”**

In the absence of evaluation benchmarks, use of the volatile term “*perniciousness*” opens the value-judgment floodgates, thus leaving organizations that are victimized by the consequent allegations with no guarantee of fair treatment.

#### **6. The absence in the various annual reports issued by the inter-ministerial committee, until 2006, of any information concerning Soka Gakkai**

Finally, it should be noted that **prior to 2006** neither the Soka Gakkai movement, nor the cult of Nichiren Buddhism, nor the institutions that fall within its purview, had ever been so much as mentioned in the various annual reports issued by the inter-ministerial committee known as “Miviludes”, an acronym for “Committee of Vigilance and Combat Against Deviant Cult Activities,” or its predecessor “Mils”.

The first official mention of Soka Gakkai in a Miviludes report came in the 2005 version (issued in 2006). However, a short time after the report was issued, the committee’s president admitted that nothing negative concerning the Soka Gakkai had ever come to his attention during the period of his presidency (from 2003 to 2008)<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> See Jean Baubérot, *Le rapport de la commission parlementaire sur les sectes entre neutralité et « dangerosité » sociale*; and Karel Dobbelere’s article *La Soka Gakkai face au rapport in: Pour en finir avec les sectes – Le débat sur le rapport de la commission parlementaire*, Editions Dervy, Paris, 1996)

<sup>7</sup> See in the annexes the exchange of letters [in the Annex] with deputies Alain Vivien and Alain Gest).

<sup>8</sup> See Annex 14, letter from Jean-Michel Roulet, President of Miviludes, to President of Soka Religious council of Nichiren Buddhism, dated May 21<sup>st</sup>, 2008.



## II. OVERVIEW OF THE ALLEGATIONS MADE AGAINST SOKA GAKKAI BY PUBLIC AUTHORITIES SINCE 1980 AND THE SUBSEQUENT ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THEIR UNFOUNDED AND DEFAMATORY CHARACTER

The nature and scope of the allegations against Soka Gakkai are clearly revealed by a thorough review of the relevant legislative and other official documents that have been made public.

A complete list of these allegations can be found in Annex 4.

However, it should be noted that the *sole element* that constituted a “springboard” for these allegations came in the first parliamentary report, under the presidency of Alain Vivien, in the form of a letter from Daniel-Léonard Blanc to the president of Soka Gakkai International in Japan, whereby the following should be noted:

- This letter was written by a former member whose tactics and intellectual coherence are questionable<sup>9</sup>;
- It is disquieting, if not downright shocking, that a parliamentary committee reached the conclusion that the movement is a “sect” solely on the basis of one letter that was sent to the organization’s president;
- **Finally, it would appear that the mere fact that Soka Gakkai was mentioned in this context in the 1983 parliamentary report gave rise to totally groundless suspicions that were subsequently “recycled” and that were based on the false assumption that since Soka Gakkai is mentioned in the report, this must mean that the organization is guilty of wrongdoing. And later on, even Alain Vivien himself implicitly admitted that the committee had undoubtedly jumped to conclusions... but that it was now too late to rectify the situation<sup>10</sup>.**

The following should be borne in mind: in the 1990s Soka Gakkai Japan separated from the “official” priesthood of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism with a view to promoting a more authentic and sincere Buddhism that focuses far more intensively on inner faith than on overly formalistic religious practice. This separation may have triggered an certain ostracism linked to the well known phenomena of “religious competition”.

This separation was also the precipitating event for two additional evolutions: (a) the initial vicious and totally unjustified attacks on Soka Gakkai that were launched by other extremely biased Buddhists; (b) the difficulties in gaining recognition (at least in France) of the form of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism practiced within the Soka Gakkai movement by some representatives of more traditional and official Buddhism. This development has prompted “the members of Soka Gakkai to regard themselves as the Protestants of Buddhism”<sup>11</sup>. This [asking these people for their assessment of Soka Gakkai] is like the Vatican being asked in the early 15th century if the followers of a certain Martin Luther or Calvin were good Christians!

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<sup>9</sup> See Annex 1, as well as note 1 above, both of which are highly revealing.

<sup>10</sup> See Annexes 2 and 3: the exchange of with Mr. Vivien

<sup>11</sup> Thierry Mathé: *Le bouddhisme des Français*, Ed. L’Harmattan 2004, p. 56

It was solely on the basis of such considerations that allegations began being made against the Soka movement of Nichiren Buddhism.

### **III. POINT BY POINT RESPONSE TO THE ALLEGATIONS THAT HAVE BEEN MADE AGAINST THE SOKA GAKKAI AND NICHIREN DAISHONIN'S BUDDHISM**

Negative views of the Soka movement of Nichiren Buddhism have been expressed by the pejorative use of the term “Asian sect”. However, in Asia in general and in Japan in particular, the term “sect” refers to a school or movement of religious thought, void of any pejorative connotation in reference to the five following allegations, from the more “classic” allegations to the more recent ones:

- a “nationalistic and intolerant” Buddhism
- “oriental” and “foreign”
- “money” and financial power
- “humanitarian showcase”
- “cult domination” of children

#### **1. A Buddhism described as being “nationalistic and intolerant”: an accusation reflective of competition amongst religious groups**

Neither Miviludes nor the members of the various parliamentary committees have ever disputed the inherently religious nature of the Soka Gakkai movement, which is an avowedly Buddhist organization.

##### **1.1 Regarding the form of the accusation:**

##### **The modernity of the Soka movement and the buddhist religion of Nichiren**

Olivier Roy, a specialist of religious matters, head of studies at the EHESS, acknowledged the modern aspect of the Soka Gakkai buddhist activities:

*“...the reappearance of religion today is different from its traditional form... Soka Gakkai’s buddhism is a modern construction)”<sup>12</sup>*

Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism is practiced by “lay” believers who live and work in society. Instead of following the Hinayana tradition which is dedicated to the salvation of monks, Nichiren Daishonin embraced the Mahayana (“great vehicle”) tradition. This is the path which aims to make salvation available to all people and is also the philosophy adhered to by other major schools of Buddhism such as the Tibetan school of the Dalai Lama, the Zen schools and so on.

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<sup>12</sup> In Les métamorphoses de la Religion, Le Nouvel Observateur, October 16-22, 2008

But some appear to have been confused by the panoply of Buddhist doctrines.

Hence, an “analysis of doctrinal classification criteria” came to the conclusion that the doctrine of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism constitutes a “nationalist and intolerant version of Buddhism.” However, the text offers no explanation as to how “nationalist” and “intolerant” are meant in this context. Hence this rather summary and pejorative view of the doctrine employs moralistic rhetoric in terms of identity related values (nationalist) and rejection (intolerance).

This is all the more peculiar in that the other branch of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism has gained total mainstream acceptance without being labeled a “sect,” despite the fact that it is associated with exactly the same philosophy, spirituality and writings of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism.

### **A unique opponent : L’ « Association des bouddhistes de France » (the French buddhist association)**

Some years ago, the opponent Daniel-Léonard Blanc, ex-member of Soka Gakkai, committed various ideological excesses in the name of the Association des Bouddhistes de France in an atmosphere of doctrinal competition.

Alain Vivien’s 1983 report is silent on the representativeness and visibility of Association des Bouddhistes de France, which is not recognized by other branches of French Buddhism.

L’Union Bouddhiste de France is the official national organization. Referring to this sole opponent of Soka Gakkai, Vivien states that:

*“The salient feature of this pseudo-Buddhist sect is that it has been repeatedly spurned by the Association des Bouddhistes de France.”*

### **Recognition of the movement in Europe**

Researches have been confronted with certain difficulties when attempting to collect information regarding religious matters (it must be underlined here that the French State forbids itself from intervening in the subjective appreciation of religious matters) : specialists have pointed out that if in the present day, Buddhism might be able to challenge Judaism’s rank as fourth most important religion in France, *“it is a faith that concentrates all the problems that may appear when attempting to perform a census... it is under the supervision of the Union bouddhiste de France, that fails to recognise at least one important group due to dogmatic divergences, the Soka Gakkai »*<sup>13</sup>.

It is noteworthy in this regard that the Soka Gakkai organizations in Austria and Great Britain are members of the League of Austrian Buddhists and of the Network of Buddhist Organizations (UK) respectively, both of which are affiliated with Union Bouddhiste Européenne, which is based in Paris<sup>14</sup>.

Thus, ever since the issuance of Alain Vivien’s report in 1983, rejection as a “genuinely Buddhist” association has been elevated to the status of hard evidence – like an established

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<sup>13</sup> In *Comment procède-t-on pour la France ?*, Sciences Humaines, novembre 2008.

<sup>14</sup> See Annex 19

truth that requires no further verification. The methods that have been used reflect positions that stake out a moral dividing line between the “right” and religiously correct kind of Buddhism, versus the “wrong” and religiously incorrect variety. The frontier thus created separates two types of Buddhism that are to all intents and purposes mutually exclusive.

In this scheme of things, the religion of Nichiren Buddhism is denied the status of a “true” Buddhism, one endowed with irreproachable virtues. **This good versus evil dichotomy is based on no evidence of any kind concerning the worth of the beliefs and practices of the followers of the said religion in France today.** But like all religions, Buddhism comprises various schools, all of which are made up of various spiritual paths, secular institutions, religious institutions, denominations and sects in the sociological sense of the term (*supra*).

It is unacceptable that the committee members based their conclusions on the claims of a single individual, Daniel-Léonard Blanc, an ex-member of the group (despite the fact that defection generally results in a negation of the group that has been left), or on an analysis realized by the educational authorities (although it is difficult to understand where they would have acquired the requisite religious expertise, particularly in Buddhism), in the absence of any historical, religious or sociological perspective. In a sense, the references used by the committee negate the depth and complexity of the methods used in the sociology of religion to provide insight into the workings of religions.

But above all, and in view of the nature of the individual involved, it is surprising that a mere letter from such a person could have precipitated all of these unverified allegations and suppositions to the effect that Soka Gakkai is allegedly a “sect”<sup>15</sup>.

## **1.2 Regarding the substance of the accusation**

The recourse to labels such as “nationalist” and “intolerance” stems from a representational system and a system of imaginary symbols, rather than an established reality.

Only a close study of the history of the ideas held and actions taken by the 13th century Japanese monk Nichiren Daishonin would allow for a definitive determination as to whether such an unacceptable “version” of Buddhism even exists.

In point of fact, this alleged historical “version” is diametrically opposed to the beliefs and practices of the religion of Nichiren Buddhism, which is practiced in 192 countries and territories and neither promotes nor defends a national or nationalist vision of Buddhism.

As practiced, it places great importance on respecting the beliefs of others, and makes no attempt to pressure its followers into relinquishing their personal values and beliefs. These tenets are codified in the Constitution of the Soka movement of Nichiren Buddhism, which states as follows:

*“Followers of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism endeavor to reflect the values and principles of their religion by showing tolerance and respect for diversity of religious belief, even in*

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<sup>15</sup> See Annex 1 and note 2

*situations where they are conveying to others, via dialogue and exchange, the religious teachings which they embrace.”<sup>16</sup>*

It should also be borne in mind that the founder of Soka Gakkai, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, died in prison in 1942, where he had been incarcerated for his opposition to the militarist, imperialist and nationalist Japanese government of the period (his successor Josei Toda was likewise incarcerated).

Hence the allegations that have been made against Soka Gakkai in this regard are groundless and incoherent.

Finally, regarding the initial accusation of the first parliamentary report of 1983, the parliamentary commission of 2005 presided by M. le député Georges FENECH, clearly pointed out a report published in 2006, that the Soka Gakkai doctrine « *does not implicate any deviant behaviour.* »<sup>17</sup>.

## **2. “The Orient” and “the Foreigner,” which are suspect in France**

A broad range of “geographical” allegations have been made against the Soka movement of Nichiren Buddhism, including that it is an “oriental movement,” or that it advocates “a dynamic of popular subversion” based on “Soviet inspired pacifism.” The “Oriental” and “Soviet” spaces are found to be alarming, as is the “international basis” that gave rise to the religion, which result in the following disparaging characterizations: “drawn toward the Orient;” a fascination with “Oriental spirituality;” “the existence of an international head office located abroad;” “the key role played by foreigners;” and the group’s “infiltration dynamic” in France. As was the case at the most deranged period of the Cold War and McCarthyism, this type of assertion reinforces prejudice by stoking anxieties.

The recourse to this system of prejudices has catastrophically stigmatized the Soka movement of Nichiren Buddhism and its followers, culminating in “Yellow Peril” discourse.

Electing to employ a discourse that centers on the rejection of foreigners and all that is international catalyzes an underlying national tendency to balk at foreign cultures and above all, and far worse, activates dormant xenophobic impulses. In *La force du préjugé – Essai sur le racisme et ses troubles* (Editions La Découverte, Paris, 1987), Pierre-André Taguief ascribes this ethnocentric rejection of cultural diversity to “the marriage of ethnocentrism and xenophobia, which is attributable to two phases of a single process, namely withdrawing into oneself and excluding others.”<sup>18</sup> Taguief also cites Paul Feyerabend, who said:

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<sup>16</sup> Article 18 of the Constitution Soka for the cult of Nichiren buddhism, available on the website : [www.consistoire-soka.fr](http://www.consistoire-soka.fr)

<sup>17</sup> See Annex 10 : Excerpt from the report of the Parliamentary Investigation Commission in 2006, on the influence of the sectarian movements on the health of minors, titled "The Stolen Childhood. The juvenile victims of sects " (report n °3507, given on December the 12<sup>th</sup>, 2006), p. 39.

<sup>18</sup> Pierre-André Taguief, *La force du préjugé – Essai sur le racisme et ses troubles*, Editions La Découverte, Paris, 1987, p.80

*“All it takes is a few well chosen words to inspire fear of chaos in the minds of even the most enlightened individuals, thus provoking in them an ardent desire for simple rules and dogmas that can be followed without having to reconsider things at every turn.”*

Neither Tibetan Buddhism nor the various schools of Asian Buddhism provoke the kind of calumny that has been heaped upon French followers of the Soka movement of Nichiren Buddhism. Moreover, no French person would dare stigmatize Judaism for its “foreign” origins or fault Islam for being based on the writings of an Arab prophet, even less question the teachings of Jesus Christ because of the Palestinian origin of their conception.

Again, no empirical evidence has been presented that would substantiate these fears of the foreign and universalist elements of the said movement: no evidence, for example, that the movement is a threat to France’s national security, defense or armed forces<sup>19</sup>.

Thus the disparagement of the Soka movement of Nichiren Buddhism in France is unacceptable, in the same way that the fear of the foreigner has always been unacceptable, whether the foreigner is a Jew, Muslim or just a Polish plumber...

And this evolution is all the more grave and worrisome when this distrust is spread and sanctioned by official institutions. The followers of this religion with its universal message solemnly call for the truth of these matters to be restored to the light of day.

It is noteworthy in this regard that only a few hundred of the more than 17,000 practitioners of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism in France are of Japanese origin, and that only two of the five board members of the Soka Religious Association of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism (ACSBN) are Japanese.

### **3. “Money” and financial power, maliciously denounced**

#### **3.1 Preliminary observation**

A preliminary observation is necessary at this juncture if we are to understand why the allegations against Soka Gakkai in France cast such a wide net, including “financial power,” “unimaginable financial clout” and “establishment of a federated structure”.

These allegations, which center on the use of large scale legal and economic resources for the benefit of the “sect,” provide only partial and truncated information. For example, although the accusation of “tax fraud” is completely unfounded, it is not amenable to refutation since by law no legal action can be brought against the content or authors of an official report.

This modus operandi nurtures the idea of hidden bank accounts and financial assets, and the image of a clandestine and opaque organizational structure – which is belied by reality (*infra*) – even though the various administrative bodies of the organization, prefectural branches, offices responsible for paying taxes in particular, provided and still provide information when requested.

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<sup>19</sup> Part 4 of the Penal Code: Crimes and offences against the Nation, the State and Public Order

When it comes to taxes for example, in 1990 French tax authorities notified Soka Gakkai that a tax adjustment procedure was going to be undertaken, and since that time have been kept updated concerning the organization's tax status. In 2007 many fiscal controls were conducted on four associations linked to the movement, none of which led to any recovery or penalty.

Similarly in social matters, the different controls conducted by the URSAFF have never led to any procedures. Moreover, the so called "revelations" in the parliamentary report were based on information supplied voluntarily (and without duress) by Soka Gakkai on request from the tax authorities.

**Thus, in view of all this, how can it possibly be claimed that the organization lacks transparency?**

This image conveys the impression that the movement comprises an impenetrable and tentacular economic "empire." This ideological representation of the movement's organizational and financial situation appears to be based on the assumption that the "sect" is lucrative, that its actions are profit oriented, and that it seeks to assume a dominant position in France.

This reading of the situation has obscured the legality of the organizational structures, which are basically of an associative nature, and which serve a movement comprising individuals who practice Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. And all of this despite the fact that Soka Gakkai voluntarily provided the entirety of the information contained in the parliamentary report, in response to a request and on the basis of a questionnaire that was formally transmitted to groups that were suspected of being "sects"<sup>20</sup>.

**3.2 « A common law and economy » for all religious and cultural activities, ignored**

But most important of all, the parliamentary report fails to take into account the legal and economic structures that are common to all religious activities in France and that are based on the following social arrangements, which have been used by some groups for more than a century, most notably Catholics, Protestants, Jews, and more recently by Muslims and Buddhists:

- **Under French law, religious groups are entitled to realize concurrently and on the basis of various legal forms, religious, cultural, humanitarian, educational, philanthropic, charitable, publishing, and other activities.**

In realizing these activities, the groups are required by law to avail themselves of numerous institutional structures such as corporations, cultural associations and the like that are subject to differing legal, tax and social regulations.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> See Annex 11

<sup>21</sup> See for example the extremely diverse "constellation" of structures in the Roman Catholic church, including diocesan corporations (in French, "associations diocésaines"), Bayard Presse (an influential publishing company owned by the Congrégation des Assomptionnistes), Secours Catholique, the Monastic brand, private secondary schools, socially responsible investment funds, and so on. (For recent presentations see Le Point, July 13, 2006: *Businessmen en robe de bure*; and l'Express, August 17, 2006: *Divins touristes*.) The same holds true



In fact, the sphere of religious activities is greater than that of strictly devotional ones owing to the Council of State's administrative interpretation of the regulations governing "organizations exclusively devoted to religious worship."

All religious organizations and movements in France are required to establish a series of parallel institutional or organizational structures owing to the fact that, pursuant to the Law of 9 December 1905, such organizations are themselves allowed to realize religious activities only, to the exclusion of all else.

- **Religious or religion related activities can be for-profit<sup>22</sup> or not for profit, and can be subject to taxation or tax exempt.**

From the standpoint of their legal status, these activities do not become any less religious if owing to their tax classification they are subject either to general income tax, or to business tax within the meaning of the General Tax Code (e.g. organizations that manage major religious sites such as the Lourdes Grottos; or religious communities that carry out agricultural activities, wine production and so on).

Some religious activities are managed with a view to turning a profit, and thus their activities are taxable. Since tax regulations are neutral, they do not automatically affect the legal status of the persons that fall within the purview of these regulations.

Thus, by law, the mere fact that a religious organization runs a for-profit business cannot result in the organization losing its legal and ideological status.

- Religious organizations in France are free (within the limits of the law) to create structures of a purely religious or non-religious nature, acquire moveable assets and real estate assets, buy and sell goods, accumulate savings, receive charitable contributions and other types of contributions from public or private sources (e.g. simple donations, bequests, capital contributions), hire and fire personnel and so on.
- **Religious organizations in France may (within the limits of the law) establish at their discretion a centralized and hierarchical management infrastructure for their various legal and financial structures**, and in so doing implement a centralized or decentralized executive management organization. This arrangement primarily aims to maintain the homogeneity of legal processes, and consolidate and harmonize the rules governing organizational processes and the workings of religious activities. This centralized model, which is based on France's Gallican (Roman Catholic) and Synodial (assembly of bishops) tradition and is essentially that of the Roman Catholic Church and France's Protestant Federation (among others), is subject to change in response to the needs of the relevant groups and their canonical or internal rights.

However, for some people, religious movements that are classified as mere "sects" (without having been given the opportunity to contest this classification or prove its falseness or veracity) are in principle not entitled to avail themselves of the structures instituted by the

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for the various Protestant groups, as well as for other Buddhist communities, whose activities have not been the target of any allegations.

<sup>22</sup> e.g. religious publications, e.g. the Bayard Presse (particularly La Croix) and many others: *Témoignage Chrétien, Familles Chrétiennes*, etc.)

Law of July 1, 1901 concerning organizational bylaws or the expanded legal capacity conferred by the tax status of religious organizations pursuant to Title IV of the Law of December 9, 1905 concerning the separation of Church and State!

This restriction is undemocratic in that it makes a distinction between citizens on one hand, and followers of a religion on the other. Hence, groups that are classified as “sects” solely on the aforementioned grounds and that have recourse to their registered bylaws would be guilty of violation of the Law of 1901 on the grounds (among others) that this status would be allegedly “beneficial.”

But this interpretation is erroneous. Could the common-law entitlement for organizations pursuant to the Law of July 1, 1901 be inherently *beneficial*? Absolutely not. Does the law allow for a derogation of legal rights and duties? No. Does it constitute or provide a tax haven? Once again: absolutely not.

### **3.3 Only a logical, well argued and factual response can hope to refute in its entirety the erroneous information that has been disseminated, albeit in perfectly good faith in some instances.**

In view of the seriousness of the allegations that have been made against the Soka movement of Nichiren Buddhism by France’s public authorities – allegations that slander and defame the honor, reputation, and status of the religions and its followers .

#### **An audit of Soka Gakkai’s finances, accounting practices and assets**

The currently ongoing independent audit of Soka Gakkai’s finances, accounting practices and assets being undertaken by a reputable international firm of auditors will allow for an assessment of all of the issues that have been raised by France’s public authorities, and will provide a complete picture of the legal, tax, financial and asset status of the Soka Gakkai organization in France.

#### **Its findings underline the legal, financial and fiscal conformity of the movement’s activities.**

The international audit cabinet operations and investigations focused on the following parameters:

- The level of the activities’ financing, and the correct use and assignment of funds to the finalities and object of the concerned organisms, and that the said funds were not used by the leaders;
- Investigation of the affirmation stating that the association exercises pressure on the followers for payment. In reality only a third of the followers contribute financially ;

these contributions are of unequal amounts (roughly from ten to one hundred Euros<sup>23</sup>) and void of any coercive character<sup>24</sup>;

- The analysis of potential flows to and from abroad (regularity, source and destination), demonstrating that case they have been none for more than thirty years;
- the lack of "misappropriation of economic circulation" as discussed, without reference to a specific event by the second Parliamentary Committee (p. 81);
- the lack of public funding from international organizations or institutions of United Nations;
- Finally, the absence of claims to the Public revenue office.

### **About the tax liability mentioned in the report "Cults and money" of 1999**

With regard to this latter item, it should be noted that the parliamentary committee's 1999 report entitled *Les sectes et l'argent* ("Sects and money") mentions taxes that were unpaid as at the latter date, although this tax adjustment actually related to a tax payment from the 1980s.

Couched in these terms, the statement sounds factual. However, it should be noted that the statement pertains to a tax adjustment procedure for which a notification was issued in 1990 and again in 1991, but which concerns fiscal years 1987-89, and in whose regard a ruling was handed down by the Tribunal Administratif of Paris on April 14, 1999 and the Cour Administrative d'Appel of Paris on December 31, 2003.

Hence, as at the date the committee's report was written, like any other taxpayer, the said association was legally entitled (after having provided the relevant financial guarantees) to a tax deferment pursuant to Article L. 277 of the Law on Tax Procedures.

Needless to say, in the interim, Soka Gakkai has regularly paid the amounts due within the statutory deadline. The fact of establishing if the Soka movement is or is not a sect has no relevance whatsoever to the fact that, the Soka Gakkai, as any taxpayer, should enjoy the rights and guarantees offered by Law and the use of these elementary rights should not be interpreted as a sign of fraud.

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<sup>23</sup> e.g less than the average amount of "denier" of the Church "for practicing Catholics, which are suggested to give equivalent a working day, out of offertory on Sunday.

<sup>24</sup> For example, a documentary broadcasted on France 3, on September 13th, 2008, under the headline "The Case Akira Ojima", gave speech for more than fifty seconds to two persons referring (totally out of context of this matter) to the Soka Gakkai as a "*Mafia sect practicing racketeering from its members*". After an explanation to FRANCE TELEVISIONS (France 3) and Production Company SUNSET PRESS, this passage was deleted from the subsequent replay of the October 4; the producer has clearly and officially recognized that, given the "*report of your accounting auditor [and after] further research [and] the outcome of this research, we concluded that the talking of the interviewed persons were unfounded, and we removed in the documentary any reference to your movement in view of the replay scheduled for October 4th, 2008 [...] we recognize that the terms used by respondents to describe your religious movement were not justified ...*" (See Annex 12). So far it is the audit report cited above which confirmed the absurdity and defamatory character of the charges relating to financial transactions in Soka Gakkai.

As for the tax adjustment procedure itself, which was prompted by circumstances similar to those that gave rise to such procedures for thousands of organizations of every description in the 1990s, suffice it to say that the new tax regulations pertaining to non-profit organizations<sup>25</sup>, particularly where executives' salaries and the sectorization of commercial activities are concerned, would now preclude any further tax adjustment procedure for Soka Gakkai, even on identical or similar grounds.

Finally, in the interest of completeness, and since the committee's report fails to mention the matter, it should be noted that several days before the court hearing for the same case, French tax authorities were forced to grant Soka Gakkai tax relief for two million francs in taxes that had been wrongfully imposed on the organization. As a result of this unfounded and unjust procedure, the Soka movement's European Nichiren Soshu association<sup>26</sup> was awarded ten thousand francs in damages and interest in a civil suit against the French Minister of the Economy (pursuant to former Article L.8-1 of the Code of Administrative Lower Courts and Appeals Courts), via a ruling (not subject to appeal) handed down by the Tribunal Administratif de Marseille on December 22, 1998.

Publication of the findings and conclusions of the aforementioned independent audit will dispel any doubt, point by point, concerning the relevant factual elements, thus allowing for refutation of the allegations leveled by certain government authorities during the period referred to above<sup>27</sup>.

### **Concerning real estate**

From a strictly subjective standpoint, the second parliamentary committee found that Soka Gakkai had made significant investments in "prestige" real estate, which was allegedly *"used as a showcase for the cult, which by displaying its affluence hopes to prove that it is an honest and respectable organization (...) and to establish its reputation from a cultural standpoint."*

The fundamental assumption employed here was based on the idea that the movement allegedly suffers from a lack of integrity that could be detrimental to its respectability. Hence (the committee reasoned), this lack prompted the movement to defend and extend its sphere of influence by using its assets as a "showcase," i.e. fancy window dressing with a view to camouflaging a reality that is perhaps less appealing.

Once again, this reasoning is simply tendentious and constitutes a genuine trial by innuendo based on virulent prejudice.

And what, after all, is involved here? In point of fact, the perfectly above-board purchases of the following properties: (a) Chateau des Roches, the former home of Victor Hugo, which now accommodates a cultural center in Bièvres (Hauts-de-Seine region); (b) Domaine Defarges in Trets (Bouches-du-Rhône region) as well as the château du Pré in Chartrettes (Seine et Marne).

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<sup>25</sup> Since the tax statements of September 15th, 1998 and February 16th, 1999 -- Bull. Official Tax 4 H-5-98 and 4 H-1-99, then the finance law for 2002 of December 31st, 2001, and finally the tax statement of December 18th, 2006 --Bull. Official Tax 4H-5-06.

<sup>26</sup> 26 Former article L.8-1 in Code of Administrative Courts and Administrative Courts of Appeal

<sup>27</sup> See note above

Hence these allegedly prestigious assets amount to a total of three properties, two located in a Paris suburb, and the other in a remote rural area.

### **Chateau des Roches, in Bièvres: an homage to Victor Hugo**

This estate is home to Maison Littéraire de Victor Hugo, a museum that is open to the public and was founded in homage to the French humanist and poet Victor Hugo. The museum has permanent exhibits in memory of this great writer that embody his literary output and promote the universal ideals for which he fought. The museum's collection comprises 3,400 items, including manuscripts, letters, diaries, and a number of rare portraits and photographs. Some of the items in the collection are classified as national treasures under the historical monuments law. The museum hosts colloquiums, exhibitions and lectures on Hugo's life and work that pay homage to the genius of humanism that Hugo was – a value shared, embodied and fostered by the Soka movement of Nichiren Buddhism (along with Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, Victor Hugo is one of the most famous, read and esteemed French writers in Japan).

### **Domaine Defarges: the county of Alexandre Dumas**

In 1974, the movement purchased a property in the town of Trets in the Bouches-du-Rhône region, which gained renown owing to Alexandre Dumas' *The Count of Monte Cristo*. In Japanese, Monte Cristo is translated as “rock king,” the idea being that each adherent's faith should be as solid as a rock.

Toward this end, the property accommodates the European institute of the movement. The size of this European oriented institute, which regularly hosts meetings of members from across Europe, is concomitant with the organization's capacity requirements in terms of access, attendance, catering and lodging. This type of European center is of a dimension which corresponds to use on a continental scale.

What do these real estate purchases share in common with the “prestige” that they allegedly engender solely on the grounds that they are expensive and splashy? Nothing whatsoever. These properties are mere gathering places that provide opportunities for dialogue on spiritual and humanistic values.

What do these holdings have in common with the prestigious assets of numerous mainstream churches, including French ones as well as modern buildings? For example Evry Cathedral, Lyon Mosque, the pagoda temple in Bois de Vincennes, and the new Lerab Ling pagoda temple, which is currently under construction in the Hérault region, none of which surprise or shock anyone ?<sup>28</sup>

What does the public transparency of these purchases have in common with the prestigious complexes operated by some of France's religious groups and that are frequented by a mere handful of people?

These questions call for nuanced responses that respect the values, beliefs and religious practices of France's various religious communities.

It should also be noted that the administrators of the organizations concerned (Association Cultuelle Soka du Bouddhisme de Nichiren, association Soka Gakkai France, etc.) work on a volunteer basis and are not paid, even in kind. The same holds true for those who hold positions of responsibility equivalent to that of religious ministers within the group, who are

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<sup>28</sup> see *Le Figaro*, August 2, 2006, p. 9: “Five million French people feel an affinity for Buddhism”

remunerated for the regular jobs they perform outside the movement in society, but provide religious services free of charge within it.

#### **4. The “humanitarian showcase” allegation: a simplistic and gratuitous generalization**

##### **4.1 Involvement in humanitarian activities of international institutions considered as a lack of respectability**

According to the committee’s report, the consultancy status of a non-governmental organization at an international organization such as the UN is “ill defined” and constitutes a showcase like an art opening – in short, window dressing that is deserving of condemnation.

Here again, as mentioned above, the committee’s fundamental assumption is based on the tendentious and prejudicial notion that the movement suffers from a lack of integrity that could be detrimental to its respectability.

Hence (the committee reasoned), this lack had prompted the movement to defend and extend its sphere of influence by using its assets as a “showcase,” i.e. fancy window dressing that attempts to camouflage a reality that is perhaps less appealing.

And once again, this is tendentious reasoning, particularly since the vast majority of churches and religious groups realize charitable acts in exactly the same way, because these acts reflect the most fundamental of their theological virtues: Christian charity (one of the three cardinal virtues), the Islamic concept of Zakât (one of the five pillars of Islam) and the making of offerings (one of the five Buddhist paramitas (practice leading to perfection/transcendence)).

Using as an argument the fact that the president of Soka Gakkai International, Daisaku Ikeda, was awarded the 1983 United Nations peace prize is tantamount to calling into question the very credibility and validity of the prize, as well as the credibility of the UN itself, since it insults the most eminent representatives of that body, particularly those responsible for awarding such prizes.<sup>29</sup>

Now that this issue has been raised, it will undoubtedly require clarification in the future.

##### **4.2 ...That could allegedly lead to a financial bonanza/fortune**

According to a twelve line section entitled “Emergency humanitarian aid and deviant cult activities: opportunistic assistance,” Miviludes expressed the view that obtaining UN consultancy status, which the committee characterizes as a “label of respectability,” constitutes a “major reputation enhancement.”

With regard to the Soka movement, Miviludes has failed to demonstrate or provide **any** explanation as to the connection the committee posits between humanitarian activities and “deviant cult activities.”

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<sup>29</sup> In same vein, it should be noted that Soka Gakkai International president Daisaku Ikeda has been awarded over 200 honorary degrees, including doctorates from some of the world’s most prestigious universities, and it would also be slanderous to assume that these honors were conferred lightly. Dr. Ikeda has also made official visits to prominent individuals such as François Mitterrand at the Elysee Palace, Jacques Chirac at Paris City Hall, Alain Poher at the French Senate, René Huygues at Institut de France, Michael Gorbachev at the Kremlin, and Margaret Thatcher at 10 Downing Street. He has also received visits in Japan from André Malraux and Michel Baroin (who was president of the Committee for the Bicentenary Celebration of the French Revolution) and others, in all instances at the express request of the individual concerned. Although this list is far from complete, it speaks eloquently for itself, and also raises the question as to how – if Soka Gakkai really were an organization of dubious repute – so many prominent individuals could have been unaware of this, since they of course would have been provided with the relevant information by their own government agencies?

Miviludes also claims that obtaining UN consultancy status grants an organization access to a “*financial gold mine*” – a reference to the anticipated benefits derived from “*public financing courtesy of international organizations (...) or other public institutions.*”

However, no fact has come to light that would support Miviludes’s theory of the “opportunistic sect:” not a single figure, date, name, or financial transaction has been mentioned in connection with this alleged “*public financing*”. The black picture painted in the report is a slander on the humanitarian and humanistic actions realized by the followers of the Soka movement of Nichiren Buddhism, who are accused of being “rapacious.”

The following facts also come into play here:

- Soka Gakkai International, which is based in Japan, is the organization in question, i.e. the one that has NGO status at the UN. With 12 million members in Japan and ties to the country’s third largest political party (which has been a member of the ruling democratically elected government for a number of years), Soka Gakkai has no need to enhance its reputation by becoming an NGO at the UN;
- The same movement receives no financing of any kind from the French or Japanese government, from the UN, or from any other source. To the contrary: the organization raises funds among its members to finance its humanitarian activities.

## **5. “Cult domination” of children**

### **5.1 Sudden appearance of this new count of accusation in 2006:**

In their forceful and detailed descriptions of “cults,” neither Deputy Alain Vivien in 1983 nor the parliamentary committee reports published in 1995 and 1999 say anything about cult domination of the children of parents who practice Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism.

Hence the sudden appearance of this new accusation in 2006 is disquieting, for after all, wouldn’t the deputies (like the numerous institutions and prominent individuals that met with the president of Soka Gakkai (*see above*)) have already looked into and noted something along these lines in 1983, 1985 and 1999?

In retrospect, such criticism seems even more surprising:

- Around the same time, in a report published in 2006 concerned by the same topic, the parliamentary committee recognised explicitly that the Soka movement’s doctrine « does not implicate any deviant behaviour. »<sup>30</sup>;
- The president of the MIVULIDES admitted explicitly that throughout the period of his presidency (2003-2008), never did State services (nor local ones for that matter)

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<sup>30</sup> See Annex 10: Excerpt from the report of the Parliamentary Investigation Commission in 2006, on the influence of the sectarian movements on the health of minors, titled “The Stolen Childhood. The juvenile victims of sects ” (report n °3507, given on December the 12<sup>th</sup>, 2006), p. 39



bring to his attention any information implying deviant behaviour on the movement's, nor its followers part<sup>31</sup>.

The mere 25 lines devoted to the Soka movement in the Miviludes report confine themselves to a general description of parents' attitudes. The report does not mention anything specific relating to protective measures for youth, studies of social phenomena, or administrative or legal proceedings.

Yet, Miviludes attempted to accuse the organization of "cult domination," on the basis of **misleading and truncated excerpts from the movement's publications.**<sup>32</sup> This concept of "cult domination" does not occur in the Family and Social Welfare Code, the Public Health Code, the Penal Code, or in the discipline of social psychology.<sup>33</sup>

This volatile and nebulous term has thus been borrowed from the vocabulary used by psychologists.

Although in the same breath the government invokes the legal concept of the "protection of minors," which comes from the aforementioned statutes. Thus is the association established between the statutory protection of children, which is codified in standard laws, and "cult domination," a term of dubious validity that is rooted in the realm of value judgment and dogma.

In order to flesh out the extra-legal concept of "cult domination," Miviludes enumerates a series of scenarios without mentioning a single hard fact in their regard:

- Miviludes intimates that Soka Gakkai practices religious endogamy (marriage within the group), which is characterized as a "conduit for the propagation of doctrine"
- "Children are not the focus of parental attention" because parents are too busy with religious activities
- The formation of "youth groups" by the organization
- "The children live cloistered and isolated lives"

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<sup>31</sup> See Annex 14, letter from Jean-Michel Roulet, President of Miviludes, to President of Soka Religious council of Nichiren Buddhism, dated May 21<sup>st</sup>, 2008.

<sup>32</sup> For example, the wrong fact mentioned in the MIVILUDES 2005 report (p. 13) : a practice of prayer "one to three hours per day" when the worship of Nichiren Buddhism only suggests (and does not impose) a practice whose length is free, twice-daily (no more or less than other religions like Islam for example), which is not the same thing. According to a recent survey, nearly half of the four million Muslims in France do their five daily prayers -- (Survey "Life" 2006/Le Figaro, 23/09/2006).

In the same way, the words "to make a couple for Kosen Rufu" tends to make believe that a union would be forced for a guru or a deity whatsoever, whereas this notion of "Kosen Rufu" defines only, in buddhist terms, the domestic harmony between a husband and his wife ...

This reasoning is as absurd and simplistic as the one of some extremists getting out of its context a phrase from the Koran (or even some Ulama), the Bible or the Gospels - compared to the entire text, but also in relation to the historical and socio-cultural environment - to reject the whole religion concerned, without discernment or measure.

<sup>33</sup> "Domination" (emprise) is defined in the French dictionary Le Petit Robert as "moral or intellectual domination, i.e. influence"

## **5.2 Letter to Miviludes (2006)**

Having been slandered in this fashion<sup>34</sup>, Soka Gakkai sent a letter to Miviludes on July 19, 2006 pointing out the following:

- No concrete fact or explanation has been put forward proving religious endogamy (e.g. the number of endogamous marriages). According to the latest statistics, our movement has 4,268 males and 9,718 female members who actively practice Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism within the Soka Gakkai in France, which means that at least 5,450 of our female members (well over 50 percent) are single, or are married to non-practitioners of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism<sup>35</sup>.
- No concrete fact or explanation has been put forward proving that members of Soka Gakkai are coerced into practicing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism (i.e. praying, attending meetings) or that any sanctions are meted out for failing to practice.
- The excerpts from the movement's publications have been taken out of context, and are misleading and truncated, thus conveying the exact opposite impression of that intended by the full text<sup>36</sup>
- Parents espouse love, goodness, consideration for others, and caring for their children, including in households where a parent or child is not a practitioner of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism (see the text above)<sup>37</sup>.

## **5.3. Letter from Miviludes (2008)**

The absurdity of these accusations became clear on the 21st of May 2008, when the president of the Miviludes addressed a letter to the president of the Soka religious council of Nichiren Buddhism, in which a clear evolution is apparent through certain precise points:

- *« I confirm that since the beginning of my presidency of the Miviludes, i have never received any alerts concerning your organisation, neither from State services nor local authorities »*

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<sup>34</sup> See Annex 9 : Letter from the association Soka Gakkai France on July the 19th, 2006 to the President of MIVILUDES, and its annexes

<sup>35</sup> This brightening statistic has then been demonstrated very clearly and objectively by the survey made under supervision of a bailiff in December 2006 and January 2007 (see Annex 13: Survey on family life of practitioners of Nichiren Buddhism)

<sup>36</sup> See the letter of July 19, 2006 in the Annex 9, as well as note supra on the misconstrual of the prayer practices of members

<sup>37</sup> In cases of family disputes (divorce) unfortunately common in many families, in households where one spouse is practicing the religion of Nichiren Buddhism, this practice is often put forward by the other spouse for custody of the children. Except in particular contexts, almost all court decisions never hold this argument to remove the affected joint custody. On this point see the attached document: "Legal doctrine and jurisprudence" or, simply as a recent example among many others: "... if Mrs. H. recognizes her belonging to the Buddhist movement Soka Gakkai, which faces her freedom of thought, the social inquiry report nor any other item shows that the remarks or the attitude of the child, as related by the investigator, show out more social initiation than indoctrination; it is also to observe that the child is educated in a Catholic school. It is therefore not necessary to order the mother not to subject the child to any influence of the Buddhist movement SOKA GAKKAI "(Tribunal de Grande Instance de Bayonne, Family Court, October 13, 2008, Mr. L.C and Mrs HK).

- « During our exchanges, you have answered my various questions and have informed me of the modifications to your statutes and structures ; you have explained the approach you have adopted towards filing the statutes of your associations and have produced various documents issued by prefectural services. »
- « Considering the (parliamentary) list of 1995, i hereby inform you that, following the instruction of Mr. Prime Minister, the State services shall refrain from referring to it, but that it is not within their power to amend it or annul it»<sup>38</sup>.

The said « document issued by prefectural services » refers to the decision made by the Prefect of the Hauts-de-Seine<sup>39</sup>, on the 9th of November 2007, authorising two donations to the Nichiren Buddhism's Soka association, thereby officially acknowledging that the said association withholds an exclusive character of worship as defined by the law of the 9th of December 1905.

The instructions of the prime minister, (circular of the 27th of may 2005 concerning the danger of sectarian abuses)<sup>40</sup> correspond to a reorganisation of the activity of State services:

- « It has been decided that instead of ostracising certain movements, a particular vigilance can be exercised towards any organisation that may appear to pose a threat to the individual liberty of its members
- «This concern regarding legal security is not meant to undermine the current action ; on the contrary it shall guarantee its efficiency ».
- « However it is clear that such an approach can only be efficient if civil servants and public agents extend their activity to the field, and do so with discernment. »
- «This vigilance must take into account the evolution of the « sect phenomenon », which renders obsolete the list of sectarian movements of 1995 ».

It is also in this general approach that the Interior Minister has adopted the methods of prefects, as can be understood in **the circular of the 25th of February 2008**, concerning the dangers of sectarian abuse:

*“The Prime Minister’s circular of the 27<sup>th</sup> of May 2005 clearly stresses the importance of refraining from uses of the lists of 1995, and of focusing instead on a logic based on facts, which give a wider scope of investigation, not limiting the said investigations to pre established groups”.*

To reach this conclusion, the Interior Minister underlines that:

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<sup>38</sup> See Annex 14: Letter from Jean-Michel Roulet, Président of MIVILUDES, to the President of the Soka religious council of Nichiren buddhism, May 21<sup>st</sup>, 2008.

<sup>39</sup> See Annex 15 : decision made by the Prefect of the Hauts-de-Seine, November 9th,2007

<sup>40</sup> See Annex 15: Circular of the Prime Minister on fight against sectarianism, May 27th 2005 (JORF n°126, June 1st 2005, p. 9751).

*“The concept of « sect », though it be frequently employed, is not a concept of law, but a concept based on fact, consequently, the central element is public order “<sup>41</sup>.*

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<sup>41</sup> See Annex 17: Circular of the Interior ministry on fight against sectarianism, February 25th 2008 NOR/INT/A/08/00044/C).

Hence it is clear that the concerned public authorities (Parliament, Interior Ministry, MIVILUDES ...) have acknowledged the excessive character of the « ostracism » of certain religious movements, that has not only produced flagrant injustice, but threatens the credibility of the legitimate fight against « true » sects and sectarian abuse as well .

**Fortunately for the French branch of the Soka movement and the Nichiren Buddhism cult, the past accusations have been officially labelled as mistakes.**

**However, the stigma of these accusations weighs heavily in the minds of public opinion and the media, after over twenty years of slander and defamation (the past accusative documents are still available and distilled on the internet ; the said documents are too old for any legal action to be taken (prescription)).**

The Soka movement and the Nichiren Buddhism cult need to justify themselves in order to break this deadlock. Such in the purpose of the present document.

#### **IV. ANALYSIS OF THE SOKA MOVEMENT OF NICHIREN BUDDHISM IN TERMS OF THE PREVAILING PARAMETERS AND PRESUMPTIONS CONCERNING RELIGIOUS “SECTS”**

##### **1. Criteria set forth in the parliamentary report of 1996**

Cognate with what has been stated above, if the following **ten criteria** “*that would allow for the belief that the suspicion is justified that a self-described religious movement might in fact be a sect*”<sup>42</sup> are examined **objectively**, it emerges that none of them apply to the Soka movement of Nichiren Buddhism:

- **“Psychological manipulation”**: no proof of this, or even the slightest hint of a presumption of it, has been mentioned, nor has any accusation in this regard ever been made against Soka Gakkai.
  
- **“Exorbitant financial demands”**: Soka Gakkai only sells its members (via structures that are now fully compliant with French tax regulations) products and services that are actually provided to these members, namely religious objects and meals and accommodations within the framework of the consequent structures, just as any other religious organization does (a diocese, congregation, site dedicated to adoration of the Virgin Mary and so on).  
It should also be noted that only one third of the practitioners donate money to the organization (in widely varying amounts at the discretion of each donor) to finance worship and religious activities<sup>43</sup>.
  
- **“Coercing members into renouncing their environment of origin”**: No complaint or verdict in this regard could be or has ever been sought against the movement or any of its members or leaders. No allegations in this regard have ever been made against the organization, nor any complaints registered with MIVILUDES as acknowledged by its own president<sup>44</sup>.
  
- **“Physical abuse”**: No complaint has ever been filed or accusation leveled against the Soka movement or its members in this regard, and with good reason since no movement’s rule, policy or publication advocates this type of activity. No allegations in this regard have ever been made.

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<sup>42</sup> 1996 report, p. 13. The committee’s extremely cautious wording is apparently meant to indicate that extreme care should be exercised in considering whether to classify a religious group as a sect.

<sup>43</sup> See Annex 18: Extracts from the financial audit conducted by an outside firm. On this point see especially supra and note 22, regarding the financial audit of the movement.

<sup>44</sup> See Annex 14, letter from Jean-Michel Roulet, President of Miviludes, to President of Soka Religious Council of Nichiren Buddhism, dated May 21<sup>st</sup>, 2008.

- **“Recruitment of children”**: The most Soka Gakkai ever does is offer teenagers or young adults who wish to do so the opportunity to join choruses or other musical groups, just as any church, educational organization or youth organization would do. (In any case no more than a few dozen young people in the Soka Gakkai movement in France are involved in such activities, out of a total of 17,000 practitioners). No concrete accusation has ever been made or specific fact cited in this regard, and with good reason. The investigation of the family life of the followers of the Nichiren Buddhism cult, conducted under the supervision of an usher, show that statistically in families where at least one member was a cult follower, behaved similarly to a “normal” French family, regarding notably child education and the conduct of internal family<sup>45</sup>.
- **“Anti-social discourse”**: Soka Gakkai does not advocate disobedience in the legal, political, military, public health, educational or any other realm. To the contrary: in keeping with the teachings of traditional Buddhism, practitioners of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism are encouraged to “contribute toward the prosperity of their respective societies as good citizens” (Article 5 of the Soka Gakkai International charter). No allegations in this regard have ever been made.
- **“Disturbing the peace”**: No allegations have ever been made against Soka Gakkai in this regard, nor has any legal complaint ever been filed.
- **“Running afoul of legal authorities”**: One branch of Soka Gakkai was audited by tax authorities, but apart from that no other civil or criminal complaint has ever been filed against any branch of Soka Gakkai or its members or leaders.
- **“Improper use of economic structures”**: The only incident in this regard (the ambiguous nature of the concept of “improper use of economic structures” notwithstanding) was the tax audit that was realized for one branch of Soka Gakkai in France. However, the tax adjustment procedure that resulted from this audit does not in and of itself demonstrate a tendency to use economic structures “improperly,” for the following reasons:

  - Thousands of organizations of every description have undergone tax audits of this type (and for the same reasons). Such audits were particularly prevalent when the Soka Gakkai audit was conducted, between 1985 and 1995 (prior to issuance of the Tax Directive of September 15, 1998).
  - The audit was not a sign of “improper use,” but instead resulted from an erroneous interpretation of the tax regulations governing the taxability of specific commercial activities. Moreover, the French tax authorities found that the association had acted in good faith.

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<sup>45</sup> See Annex 13: Study on the family life of the Nichiren Buddhism’s followers, 2006.

- In any case, even if the audit were simply **a means of presuming that there be grounds for suspicion**, this fact **alone** would not be sufficient grounds to classify an organization that undergoes a tax audit as a “sect”.
- **“Attempted infiltration of public institutions”**: No official allegations have ever been made in this regard. The fact is that practitioners of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism come from all professions and walks of life, just like the rest of the French population.

## **2. Criteria put forward by the Ministry of Justice**

In a directive dated February 29, 1996 (JO du 5 mars, p. 3409), the Ministry of Justice affirmed the validity of the aforementioned “religious cult” criteria, noting that the following main violations of the general penal code warrant the suppression of cult-like activities and thus allow a group to be classified as a “sect.”

- ***Concerning the general penal code, the violations which would allow for suppression of cult-like activities are as follows:***
  - *fraud; homicide; premeditated or non-premeditated assault*
  - *failure to assist a person in danger; sexual violence; procuring*
  - *inciting minors to debauchery; sequestration of a minor; violent acts*
  - *torture; fraudulent abuse of a state of ignorance or a position of weakness; putting a minor at risk; drug trafficking*
- ***The following infractions of the penal code are relevant to the above:***
  - *The unlawful act defined in Article 31 of the Law of December 9, 1905 concerning the separation of church and state, and providing for sanctions for the fifth class of infractions, namely “those that are committed by means of any act, act of violence, or threats against an individual, either by instilling in him a fear of losing his job or of being physically harmed himself, fear of harm to members of his family, or fear of harm to his assets, such that the individual is or feels coerced into (a) practicing a religion; (b) becoming or ceasing to be a member of a religious organization; (c) helping to finance or refraining from financing the expenses of a religious organization.”*
  - *Infractions of the Public Health Code, particularly concerning the illegal practice of medicine (Articles L. 372 et. seq., of the Public Health Code)*
  - *Infractions of the Building Construction and Housing Code*



- *Infractions of the General Tax Code, particularly the provisions concerning tax fraud (Article 1741 of the General Tax Code)*
- *Infractions of the Labor Code, particularly concerning unduly long working hours or work realized by undocumented workers*
- *Infractions of statutes concerning mandatory school attendance (Law of March 28, 1882, Directive 59-45 of January 6, 1950, Decree 66-104 of February 18, 1966, Decree 59-39 of January 2, 1959 concerning scholarships.)*
- *Infractions of the Social Security Code*
- *Infractions of customs regulations, particularly with regard to declarations concerning international capital transactions (Article 464 of the Customs Code)*

Despite the fact that the Ministry of Justice notified its personnel (and with good reason) to exercise heightened vigilance in respect to the aforementioned matters (particularly in cases where complaints were filed against a group or leader thereof that was mentioned on the list of religious “sects”), Soka Gakkai was accused or convicted of **none** of the unlawful acts mentioned above.

In addition, police at both the national and local levels have indicated that no instance of deviant behavior by Soka Gakkai has ever been observed or reported<sup>46</sup>.

The only time the group has come remotely close to running afoul of the law was, as mentioned above, when one of the activities (publishing religious books and organizing seminars) carried out by one branch of Soka Gakkai was subject to a tax adjustment in a context that affected a large number of organizations of all types and that fell outside the purview of religious or cult-related matters. Moreover, this incident involved a tax *adjustment* and not tax *fraud*<sup>47</sup>, and the tax authorities explicitly stated that the branch of Soka Gakkai concerned had acted in good faith and would therefore not be penalized financially for having acted in bad faith.

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<sup>46</sup> Letter from the Interior Minister to the President of Soka Gakkai France, dated December the 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2003

<sup>47</sup> Within the meaning of Article 1741 of the General Tax Code

## **V. ERRORS OF INTERPRETATION AND MISCONSTRUAL OF CERTAIN BASIC FACTS**

Hence, the whole of the allegations that have been made are attributable to three errors of interpretation and the misconstrual of certain basic facts:

### **1. Error 1: The assumption that the resources used by the movement prove that it is a “sect” not because of the resources themselves, but on the grounds that a religious “sect” is involved.**

First, it would appear that the resources and means used by the group are being confused with the group’s aims. Hence, the few fact-based allegations that have been made with a reasonable degree of accuracy involve matters:

- that are either of minor importance : a tax adjustment without any imposition of financial penalties for acting in bad faith, involving absolutely no tax fraud, and arising from events that date back two decades;
- or are perfectly above-board actions : owning real estate, selling Buddhism related products, realizing activities specifically for young people, and the fact that the parent international organization has representative NGO status at the UN),
- which have nevertheless been used to demonstrate that the movement is extremely active and must therefore be harmful since it is simply assumed that the group is a cult.

However, this assumption – that it must be a cult – has never been proven, while at the same time the “evidence” has been egregiously exempted from all critical scrutiny, when it stems from a “respectable” citizen or a mainstream (or non-mainstream) religious group.

### **2. Error 2: A sophism that is based on erroneous or incomplete premises that result in nonsensical conclusions**

Using the same kind of reasoning as that described above, detractors reach the dangerous conclusion that a specific group is a cult by drawing attention to details, actions or scenarios that are associated with religious cults, but are also characteristic of many other perfectly respectable religious groups.

In this scheme of things, if a presumably respectable religious group employs legal techniques, management strategies or any other managerial method, this is regarded as good governance. But if a religious group or religion that has been classified (whether rightly or wrongly) as a “sect” (cult) uses these same tactics, it proves that they are in fact a cult. But this kind of reasoning, which at first glance is coherent and appealing, is in fact incoherent as it confuses premises with the “desired” conclusion, since it is based on an assumption that could well be erroneous (although this is not always the case, e.g. if the movement is in fact a cult) or at a minimum has not been proven.

Every philosophy student learns about Plato's absurd syllogism (absurd because the basic hypothesis is erroneous or incomplete), which leads to the following sophism: *All cats are mortal. Socrates is mortal. Therefore Socrates is a cat.* When applied to the scenario under discussion here, an analogous sophism such as the following might result: *Tax adjustments are (or should be) imposed on all "sects." A tax adjustment was imposed on a branch of Soka Gakkai. Therefore Soka Gakkai is a "sect."*

Whereas the correct reasoning in this case would of course be as follows: *All cats are mortal. Socrates is a cat [assuming that the name of my cat is Socrates]. Therefore Socrates is mortal.* Or put another way: *A tax adjustment should be imposed on all "sects." Movement x is a "sect" [on the grounds that this hypothesis has been proven]. Therefore a tax adjustment should be imposed on Movement x.*

### **3. Error 3: The recourse to unsubstantiated rumor and the attendant absence of any factual reference or significant purpose**

Apart from the facts mentioned above under "Error 1" (which are not inherently significant in any case), all of the other arguments that have been brought to bear and that would in fact be of greater consequence and have serious repercussions if they were valid, have no basis in fact, but are instead based on either:

- unsubstantiated rumors;
- a **single** letter written 25 years ago by a former follower of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism and whose motives are suspect (see Annex 1);
- phone calls – whose provenance, content, nature and number are wholly unverifiable and in any case not specified – that were allegedly received by an anti-cult organization.

All of the allegations that have been made against Soka Gakkai are listed in Annex 4. However, it should be noted that the **sole element** that constituted a "springboard" for these criticisms came in the first parliamentary report (under the Miviludes presidency of Alain Vivien) in the form of a letter from Daniel-Léonard Blanc to the president of Soka Gakkai International in Japan, whereby the following should be noted:

- This letter comes from a former member of Soka Gakkai whose methods and intellectual coherence are questionable<sup>48</sup> (see Annex 1).
- It is disquieting, if not downright shocking, that a parliamentary committee reached the conclusion that Soka Gakkai is a "sect" solely on the basis of one letter that was sent to the organization's president;

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On this point see Annex 1, to the least edifying, and footnote 2 of this Report.

- Finally, it would appear that the mere fact that Soka Gakkai was mentioned in this context in the 1983 parliamentary report gave rise to totally groundless suspicions that were subsequently “recycled” and that were based on the false hypothesis that since Soka Gakkai is mentioned in the report, this must mean that the organization is guilty of wrongdoing. And later on, even Alain Vivien himself implicitly admitted that the committee had undoubtedly jumped to conclusions, but that it was now too late to rectify the situation<sup>49</sup>.

In any democracy worthy of the name, if a legal complaint is lodged against a citizen, it falls to the accuser (even in the non-adversarial French legal system), on pain of prosecution for slander, to prove that the allegations in the complaint are true and are based on empirical and well founded evidence.

However this is not at all the case in the present instance. And moreover, inasmuch as the allegations were made by government bodies (Miviludes and a parliamentary commission), the accused party (Soka Gakkai) cannot possibly defend itself since (a) it has never been formally indicted; and (b) by law, no legal action can be brought against the content or authors of the government reports containing the allegations.

The absurdity of the situation is further amplified by the fact that the very same public authorities have since reviewed their positions, and today consider that there were no longer grounds for their former criticism. Sadly, despite the exposed evolution, these criticisms remain vivid in the eye of detractors

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<sup>49</sup> Annexes 2 et 3 : Echange de lettres avec M. Alain Vivien en 1985

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Soka Gakkai movement and Nichiren Buddhism, which have been active in France for decades, seek to establish religious harmony among its followers as well as an environment where the group can realize its religious activities without being subjected to rumors and false allegations.

In light of the condemnatory stance taken by the media and the destructive conflation of disparate elements that has characterized the discourse on Soka Gakkai, the reality of the situation calls for the exercise of caution vis-à-vis testimony from former members (who are respect worthy but clearly biased), when it comes to the evaluation of beliefs and references to traditions.

Once an atmosphere of fear had been created with a view to discrediting any such groups, and in a climate of moral panic concerning “sects”<sup>50</sup>; between 1989 and 1994, a total of 477 phone calls were received concerning Soka Gakkai in France by an anti-cult association. “The matter is too serious to be left in the hands of those who manipulate irrational overreaction and soap opera emotions”<sup>51</sup>.

Emile Poulat notes the following:

“If we want to emerge from the realm of confusion and conflation, we need to distinguish between a catch-all concept of ‘sect’ and the classic concept of long standing that situates “sect” in the religious domain. In the latter scenario, the criteria within the domain of faith and religion take precedence over external characteristics that transform expressions of religious faith into criminal complaints”<sup>52</sup>.

Hence, the actions that have been imputed to the Soka Gakkai movement in France and Nichiren Buddhism can be summarized as follows:

- a tax audit realized for one of the branches of the movement during a period (the 1990s, prior to issuance of the Tax Directive of September 15, 1998) when thousands of other organizations were subject to similar such audits;

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<sup>50</sup> According to the first parliamentary report (p. 31), between 1989 and 1994 the Association for the Defense of the Family received 477 phone calls (a number that is unverifiable) concerning the Soka movement of Nichiren Buddhism. Apart from the possible empirical significance of this type of information (“advice given by phone,” although the nature and quality of the calls, or even the actual number of calls relative to the total number received, are unknown), this observation – assuming it is valid and even if it is accurate, which seems highly unlikely – would be completely out of proportion to the cries of alarm that have been raised concerning this allegedly dangerous “sect.” It should also be noted that merely classifying a group as a sect tends to provoke phone calls or complaints the minute the slightest problem arises. Moreover, can we imagine that 477 calls of complaints over 6 years (nearly 80 per year, or 6 per month, or 1 at 2 calls per week!) would not have generated any complaints or any reports of sectarianism among services local and national Police (see post very explicit on the point Minister of Interior dated December 23rd, 2003) or from the MIVILUDES (see letters from JM Roulet dated May 27th, 2008, see Annex 14). Let’s be serious, there’s a time when excess plot makes the storyteller much less credible!

<sup>51</sup> Henri Tincq, religion columnist for *Le Monde* in his article, *Le ‘Spectre’ Soka Gakkai*, June 4-5, 2000, p. 21

<sup>52</sup> (*Sociologues et sociologie devant le phénomène sectaire*, Actes du colloque *Les nouveaux mouvements religieux et le droit dans l’Union européenne*, Lisbon, November 8-9, 1997, Giuffrè Editore, Milan, 1999, p. 14)

- the fact that Soka Gakkai was accorded a tax deferment (as any taxpayer would have been) while the ruling on its case was pending;
- a letter from 1982 expressing negative views on Soka Gakkai that was sent to the president of the organization by a former member of Soka Gakkai France, and which, contrary to appearances, expresses the views of the author and no one else;
- receiving donations in France from Japanese members of Soka Gakkai three decades ago that allowed the organization to purchase facilities whose size is consistent with the growing number of Soka Gakkai members throughout Europe (but no funds were transferred to Japan, and thus no allegations of tax fraud were made – and with good reason);
- a truncated excerpt (which was also misleading, since it was taken out of context) of an article that appeared in a 1999 issue of the Soka movement’s monthly magazine;
- humanitarian activities realized by members of an international organization that is an offshoot of the Soka movement but that receives no government aid and finances all of its activities from members’ contributions;
- Finally, it should be noted that (a) **none** of the “cult” criteria mentioned by the 1996 Gest-Guyard report of 1996 apply to the Soka Gakkai movement of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism or any of its members or leaders; and (b) the latter parties have never been found guilty of any wrongdoing in either a criminal or civil proceeding.

These attempts to discredit the Soka movement have serious repercussions for the Soka movement and Nichiren Buddhism itself, for practitioners and their families, and for the legitimacy and credibility of our democratic institutions.

In the ten years that have elapsed since publication of the first parliamentary committee report, it has become obvious that the Soka Gakkai movement should never have been included on the cult “blacklist.”

Unjustified opposition to the movement has arisen because of allegations made during this period by Buddhist opponents of the Soka movement of Nichiren Buddhism, and because the methods employed to formulate allegations against some cults did not make a clear and objective distinction between new religious movements and groups that genuinely fall into the category of “cult.” This matter should be laid to rest, in keeping with the policy defined by Prime Minister’s Directive of May 27th, 2005, which indicates that the relevance of the list of movements elaborated by the deputies is diminishing.

The allegations discussed in the present report will ultimately undermine the principle of secularism. For do we not undermine the very foundations of public action when we attempt to suppress purportedly dangerous beliefs and ideas by calling them “deviant,” and by “combating” them using government resources and institutions? In such cases, do we not run risk that in using the “common good” as a pretext to enforce community standards, the government will become an arbiter of dogma and value judgments and in so doing will trample on the rules of open and impartial debate, which are central to a democratic society?

Moreover, in failing to “separate the wheat from the chaff”, these government institutions run the risk of achieving the exact opposite of their goal, in that an attentive and serious-minded public will ultimately put these allegations in perspective and cease to take them seriously, including allegations that relate to groups that actually are cults and a danger to society.

We can now only assume that public authorities Interior Minister dated 23rd of December 2003, letter from the president of the MIVILUDES dated 21st of May 2003, decision of the prefect of the Hauts de Seine of the 9th of November 2007<sup>53</sup>.

For what is at stake here is respect for the principles of a democratic society and of secularism, which are also cherished within Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism.

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Annexes 14 et 15.