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<https://www.forbroundtable.org>

To:

All French Deputies  
All French Senators

Brussels, the 25th of January 2021

Copies to:

- Kishan Manocha, Head, Tolerance and Non-Discrimination Department, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
- Ahmed Shaheed, UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief
- Eamon Gilmore, EU Special Representative for Human Rights

**Re: The current bill on “Consolidating the Respect of the Principles of the Republic”**

Dear Member of the French Parliament,

We write as an informal group of organizations and individuals who are scholars, religious leaders and human rights advocates. We are from many faiths or acting in a secular capacity, representing a high degree of diversity. While there is very little we agree on theologically, or politically, we all agree on the importance of freedom of religion or belief for all faiths and none.

We write to you concerning the bill currently debated at the French Parliament about “Consolidating the Respect of the Principles of the Republic”. France is watched internationally with great expectations on this topic, and sometimes also with great concern due to the content of the law and the surrounding statements by several politicians.

While we believe that France is absolutely entitled to create legislation in order to tackle the problems of terrorism, including Islamist terrorism and radicalization, we believe also that the way to achieve this purpose is not to add further/new restrictions to freedom of religion or belief in the country. During the hearings of January 4<sup>th</sup> at the National Assembly, several religious leaders have expressed their view that the law proposal would create a climate of general suspicion “against” religions, and is, in its current state, going to greatly increase State control and restrictions on all religious groups.

It’s not even a question of “balance” between security and freedom of religion or belief, as basically, governments should ensure both, but both go shoulder to shoulder and not opposing each other. As said by the OSCE Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights in its 2019 document “Freedom of Religion or Belief and Security Policy Guidance”,

...much of the contemporary discourse on freedom of religion or belief and security calls for a balance between these values or suggests that at least some aspects of this freedom must be sacrificed to achieve security. This discourse contradicts the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security, which does not frame freedom of religion or belief and security as competing rights, but recognizes them as complementary, interdependent and mutually reinforcing objectives that can and must be advanced together.

That is why we urge you to make sure that the law fulfills its stated purpose: combat terrorism and violence and groups which engage in such activities or advocate the use of violence and hatred. For this you will also have to make sure the law does not create more restrictions and suspicion for the vast majority of religious groups of any nature and creed that are peaceful and not engaged in such activities. We trust that you have the power and willingness to do so.

On the other hand, we believe that the discussed bill is an opportunity to modernize the law and adapt it to France's existing religious diversity. Any provision that will increase freedom of religion or belief, and will increase also non-discrimination between beliefs and belief communities, will also increase security. France has here an opportunity to reach the highest standards in terms of freedom of religion or belief and become one of the countries that would be the most aligned with international standards as set by OSCE, the UN and the Council of Europe. It's up to you to take this opportunity and transform the concerns of believers and human rights advocates into legitimate progress.

We strongly and respectfully advise you become acquainted with several guidelines published by the OSCE and the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe: *Freedom of Religion or Belief and Security: Policy Guidance* (2019), *Guidelines on the Legal Personality of Religious or Belief Communities* (2014), *Guidelines for Review of Legislation pertaining to Religion or Belief* (2004).

This bill is a major issue for France, and for the fate of all believers of France, and it is also an issue for the world, as the outcome of your work will be watched and evaluated internationally. Will the law target religions, and increase restrictions on freedom of religion or belief, or will it correctly target terrorists and violent components of the French society? We definitely hope it will be the second option, and we trust that you will hear that call.

Respectfully,

Organizations

**21Wilberforce**

**ADO Alevi Philosophy Center Association**

**ADIP \_ ARBP Anatolian Religions and Beliefs Platform**

**Affirm Human Rights (UK)**

**All Faiths Network (UK)**

**Bitter Winter, a daily magazine on religious liberty and human rights**

**Boat People SOS - Religious Freedom Project**

**CAPLC - Coordination des Associations et des Particuliers pour la liberté de Conscience**

**Center for Pluralism**

**Center for Studies on Freedom of Religion Belief and Conscience (LIREC)**  
**Centro Vedico Dharma (Spain)**  
**CESNUR**  
**Christian Heritage Trust**  
**Christian Solidarity Worldwide - CSW**  
**Committee for Religious Freedom in Vietnam**  
**European Baptist Federation**  
**European Federation for Freedom of Belief - FOB**  
**European Interreligious Forum for Religious Freedom (EIFRF)**  
**Fedinsieme (Faiths Together), Italy**  
**Freedom2Care**  
**Gerard Noodt Foundation for Freedom of Religion or Belief**  
**Human Rights Without Frontiers**  
**International Christian Concern**  
**International Organization to Preserve Human Rights**  
**Minaret Foundation**  
**ORLIR, International Observatory of Religious Liberty of Refugees**  
**Patmos Institute (USA – Cuba)**  
**United Sikhs Australia**  
**United Sikhs Canada**  
**United Sikhs France**  
**United Sikhs UK**  
**Universal Peace Federation in The Netherlands**  
**World Union of Old Believers (Moscow)**

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Founder and Chairman

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World Union of Old Believers

**Naseer Ahmed Shahid**

Missionary

Ahmadiyya Moslem UK

**Shingara Singh Mann**

President

United Sikhs France

Humanitarian Aid (Sikh Aid)

Civil & Human Rights (ICHRA)

Community Empowerment & Education (CEED)

**Bachittar Singh Ughrha**

Founder and President

Center for defence of human rights

Founder and Vice President

Gurdwara (Sikh Temple) Geneva, Switzerland

**Dr. Rabinder Sohil**

Founder and Chair

'Oneness' Universal

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