

CESNUR - Centro Studi sulle Nuove Religioni diretto da Massimo Introvigne

www.cesnur.org

Israeli Anti-Cult Law: Jim Richardson' letter to Minister of Justice Shaked

A



To Minister of Justice Shaked:

I am Professor of Sociology and Judicial Studies at the University of Nevada in Reno, NV, where I have directed for 30 years a graduate degree program for trial judges in conjunction with the National Judicial College, which is headquartered on our campus (see www.judicialstudies.unr.edu). I have done research for several decades on New Religious Movements (NRMs), focusing on recruitment and conversion, as well as other aspects of minority religious groups. I recently completed a term as President of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, which is the largest interdisciplinary organization studying religion in the world. The organization publishes a major journal in the field of scientific studies of religion, a journal in which I have

published a number of articles. I was a visitor in Israel in 1999 having been invited to present some of my research at a closed conference jointly sponsored by Israeli Security and the United States FBI. I later published that presentation in a German academic journal.

Much of my research and scholarly writings have dealt with the concept of “brainwashing,” which is, as you may know, a pseudo-scientific concept used as an ideological weapon against unpopular minority religious groups. The concept has no basis in scientific explanations of why people participate in religious groups, as I have demonstrated in many of my writings. I attach one of those writings for your review, but can furnish more. These writings and those of some of my colleagues in America have convinced the courts to disallow such pseudo-scientific evidence in civil actions, and also disallow such claims as a defense in criminal cases as well. I can send another recent paper that summarizes these legal battles if you wish.

I have also participated in a number of legislative and legal action dealing with participation in NRMs and other minority religions of various kinds, including testifying in American courts and state legislatures, in the High Court in London, is a major case in Moscow, Russia, and I have consulted on similar cases in New Zealand and Australia. In all of those matters I have presented, either through amicus briefs or direct testimony, sound research results indicating the “brainwashing” and “mind control” are not scientific

concepts. Virtually all participants in NRMs or other minority faiths do so of their own volition, exercised as adults.

I also have written critiques of the very negatively connoted term “cult”, and suggested that its usage is as an ideological weapon to use against unpopular minority faiths, and that the term should be disallowed in any legal or legislative setting. I attach one such writing for your review, in which I stress the subject nature of the term, and that it has no legal definition. The proposed legislation that your committee is reviewing is very similar to such efforts made several decades ago in America, all of which failed on constitutional and definitional grounds. (I can send some articles about such efforts if you desire.)

The term “cult” cannot be defined in a manner that passes evidentiary tests; such terms can be and are subjectively applied to unpopular groups, and have been in America and many other countries. Similar efforts to pass legislation banning “cults” and setting up institutional structures to deal with these alleged harmful groups have been made in a number of other countries, as well, and most have not passed muster when thorough scientific research and reasoning were applied to the concept by the legislatures and the courts, including the European Court of Human Rights, on which I have done considerable research. I can furnish some of the research if you want.

I urge you not to support the proposed legislation. It has very little relationship to the reality of people participating in minority religions.

If I can be of any assistance to you in this matter, please let me know.

Respectfully submitted,

James T. Richardson

James T. Richardson, J.D., Ph.D.
Foundation Professor of Sociology and Judicial Studies
Director, Judicial Studies Program
Mail Stop 311
University of Nevada, Reno
Reno, NV 89557

[A Social Psychological Critique of Brainwashing Claims About Recruitment to New Religions](#)

[Definitions of Cult From Sociological-Technical to Popular-Negative](#)

CESNUR reproduces or quotes documents from the media and different sources on a number of religious issues. Unless otherwise indicated, the opinions expressed are those of the document's author(s), not of CESNUR or its directors.



[Home Page](#)

[Cos'è il CESUNR](#)

[Biblioteca del CESNUR](#)

[Testi e documenti](#)[Libri](#)

[Convegni](#)

[Contatti](#)