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***International Association of Free Thought***

***Association Internationale de Libre Pensée***

***Asociación Internacional de Libre Pensamiento***

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## Resolution of the IX<sup>th</sup> World Congress of IAF

The work of the IX<sup>th</sup> World Congress of the IAF in Grenoble/Lyon (France) focused on two main themes: **bringing justice to the victims of the crimes of the Churches** and organising an **international network of solidarity with Freethinkers** who are victims of repression and social hardship.

These questions seem to us to be linked by problems of human conscience. This is the debate between '*Solidarity between the oppressed, victims of crime and repression, versus the Omerta of the Churches*'. The Protestant philosopher **Paul Ricoeur** (a philosopher whose views we may not share) was right to say: '*Ethics is the relationship to oneself, Morality is the relationship to others*', and we add that this is why Morality is always social. **Freethought** being the grandchild of **Free Will**, **Freethinkers** can accept this definition without difficulty.

The founding Congress of the **International Association of the Freethought**, in Oslo in August 2011, made the demand for Justice for all victims of the Churches one of its three permanent international campaigns. It is taking action at all levels and in all possible institutions to ensure that this **work of justice** moves forward.

## ***Crimes and Punishments***

● On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of January 2019, **Christian Eyschen**, spokesperson for the IAF wrote to **Pope Francis**: '*We have written on two occasions, on the 17<sup>th</sup> of October 2014 and again on the 12<sup>th</sup> of January 2015, to the **Congregation of Bon-Secours** asking it to take responsibility for the hidden deaths and mass burials without authorisation of around 800 very young children in the buildings belonging to the Congregation in Tuam in Ireland between 1925 and 1961. We did not receive any response to date, suggesting that the **Congregation of Bon-Secours** considers that it has no moral responsibility or remorse for this scandal.*

*The Minister for Youth Affairs in the Government of the Republic of Ireland, Mrs Katherine Zappone, hand-delivered a letter to **Pope Francis** during his visit to Ireland this year, asking that the Church 'make a substantial contribution to the costs' of the search and proper burial, which are estimated to be in the region of €12 million. In response, the Pope apparently offered only his prayers, but declined to make any financial contribution.*

*It is quite unconscionable that the entire cost of these transactions should be borne by Irish taxpayers, particularly in view of the Church's immense wealth. According to the Australian newspaper **The Australian** on 14/7/2018, **Cardinal Pell** had apparently uncovered €1.1 billion in unaccounted assets for*

*the Vatican alone.*

*Whichever arm of the Church pays, then we call on **Pope Francis** to show tangibly that his words are sincere by promptly paying €6 million to the Irish government. Otherwise these words will be interpreted as empty and devoid of repentance for the obscenity of the actions committed by the **Order of Bon Secours** against these innocent children.' We have been given confirmation that this letter was delivered personally to the **Pope**, who never replied to our request.*

The **Libre Pensée** has carried out a major campaign of secular investigations into the wealth of the **Catholic Church** in France which has demonstrated, with supporting evidence (the **Conference of Bishops of France** even confirmed this during a documentary on public television in which the **Libre Pensée** took part), that the Church possesses at least **8 billion euros**, which is to be compared with the 20 million it will allocate to the fund to compensate the 330,000 victims of its crimes.

- On the 12<sup>th</sup> of March 2019 in Lyon (France), the **Libre Pensée of France** and the **National Secular Society of the United Kingdom** issued a **joint Declaration** on the crimes of the Churches and paedophilia within them: *'The Church must be held to account before the Justice of Men! The facts have been established. The guilty parties have been named. A Catholic Church official has been convicted because he was found guilty. Justice must be done for all the victims of the clergy!'*»

- The representative of the **IAFT**, **Michel Godicheau**, stated on the 11<sup>th</sup> of September 2019 at the plenary session of the 42<sup>nd</sup> Session of the **UN Human Rights Committee**: *'The truth is necessary for the reconstruction of victims. Our international association proposes that only civil law should be recognised and that the religions responsible, and in particular the Holy See, should open their archives to investigators appointed by the criminal authorities of member countries.'*

- In May 2023, our friend and comrade **Keith Porteous Wood** was interviewed by the **French Libre Pensée**. He answered the following question: **You produced a report for the UN detailing the scale of sexual crimes committed by clerics in France and the extent to which the French justice system has dealt with them. What did your report say?**

« **KPW** : **CIASE** (The Independent Commission on Sexual Abuse in the Church) has estimated that 330,000 children have been victims of clerical abuse in France over the last seventy years, which means that there have been around one million cases of abuse. **CIASE** has warned that this abuse is continuing. The most basic preventative response would be to require all reasonable accusations of abuse to be referred to the police, as French law has required since 2000. It is inexcusable that **CIASE** has not recommended this. Nor did the **Church** hierarchy; to this day it does the opposite by imposing an **absolute omerta on the disclosure of abuse**. This leaves abusers free to continue abusing almost with legal impunity. What other organisation could get away with this, apart perhaps from the **Mafia**?

Another atrocity concerns compensation for victims whose lives have been ruined by the abuses. So far, very few have been compensated, and the sums received have been derisory, falsely justified by the **Church hierarchy**, which falsely claims that it is impoverished. However, as the **Libre Pensée** and **France 2** (the French public television channel) have brilliantly exposed, the **Church's** available assets exceed **8 billion euros**. I invite you to get hold of the excellent book that the **French Libre Pensée** has just published, which details the fascinating results of its judicial investigations into the astonishing wealth of the Church.

In these circumstances, it is morally and legally scandalous that €60,000 is the maximum the **Church** is prepared to pay (but rarely does). A fairer sum would be closer to twenty times that amount. We have also raised with the **UN** the legally questionable obstacles preventing the **Church** from being sued in the French courts for fair compensation. To its credit, **CIASE** has raised this issue.

● The **IX<sup>th</sup> Congress of the IAF** heard the message sent by the Catholic priest **Pierre Vignon**, who was behind the massive petition that led to the resignation of **Philippe Barbarin**, **Primate of the Gauls** and a Catholic Church dignitary implicated in the **Omerta** organised within the Catholic clergy: *'I received your invitation as a desire for dialogue, and please believe me that I regret not being able to follow it up in concrete terms. It seems important to me to clear the horizons... From the moment that the clergy in particular reject **clericalism**, as **Pope Francis** explicitly invites them to do (Cf. **Letter to the People of God** of the 20<sup>th</sup> of August 2018), in which he defines clericalism as a deviant way of conceiving authority in the Church.*

*He had this powerful phrase: 'To say no to abuse is to say no categorically to all forms of clericalism'. This is the higher concept of **freedom** that allows everyone to unite in respect, dialogue and esteem. If we depart from this essential axis, we open the door to social hatred, which nobody needs.*

*It was on the basis of this **letter** that I published my **Open Letter to Cardinal Barbarin**, to which the President of **La Parole Libérée** (an association for victims of the Church) attached an online petition. It was the popular response to this common-sense appeal that led **Cardinal Barbarin** to resign the following year.*

*I regret nothing of what I did at the time, because we are all made for higher values such as **Truth, Justice and Freedom**, just as we are all made to breathe the fresh air of the heights'.*

● On the 11<sup>th</sup> of October 2025, to conclude its **IX<sup>th</sup> World Congress**, the IAF organised a public Conference in Lyon (France); where the Tsunami against the crimes of the **Catholic Church** began in France after having gained strength and vigour in the United States; where **Freethinkers** from the five continents debated fraternally with the **Associations of Victims of the Catholic Church**.

Beyond our differences, we are all demanding and taking action to ensure that justice is truly served for all the victims of ecclesiastical crimes. It has to be said that while this cause is advancing, it is not advancing enough because of the permanent **Omerta** of Catholic institutions to cover up the criminals and try to make the crimes committed disappear. The recent affair in France of the complicit silence of the **Prime Minister** in office, **François Bayrou**, on the violence and rapes committed against young children in the Catholic establishment of **Notre-Dame de Bétharram**, shows everyone the realities of the **Catholic Omerta**.

The political powers very often act in concert with **Catholic** dignitaries and the **Vatican**, on every continent, to conceal the facts and protect the criminals, as they did, in particular, to conceal the collaboration of the **Episcopates** with the **totalitarian regimes** and the help they gave to Nazi war criminals to flee Europe to escape the Tribunals where they had to render account.

## ***It's the Catholic Omerta against human morality and justice!***

The **IX<sup>th</sup> World Congress of the International Association of Freethought** resolves to pursue the international campaign, at all levels and everywhere, so that the work of Justice is amplified. Reparations due to the victims are too few and too weak, where they began weakly and scandalously absent in many cases and places.

Criminals must answer for their criminal and heinous acts. No one should evade **human justice** to avoid answering for these acts. The **IAFT** calls for international legal and institutional reflection to ensure that the statute of limitations does not excessively protect them from punishment.



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## *International mutual aid and solidarity between Freethinkers*

The IX<sup>th</sup> World Congress of the International Association of the Freethought also debated in its Agenda the question of the implementation of a true Mutual Aid and Solidarity between the **Freethinkers** and their **respective Associations** on the five continents to help each other against repression, difficulties of all kinds and to try to solve the problematic social situations for their members confronted with the adversities of life.

The IX<sup>th</sup> World Congress of the International Association of the Freethought also reflected on the various aspects of this **mutual aid in solidarity**, drawing on a few definitions that could be common to all.

**Solidarity** is essential to **mutual aid**, which is not the result of an expectation of reward, but of instinctive feelings of solidarity. It is also a belief in the indisputable dignity of every human being, every person who has the potential to bounce back (build his or her life project) and the need to establish social justice everywhere and fight inequalities together through **Mutual Aid** and **Solidarity**. This means taking into account all the life paths of individuals, including their fragility, vulnerability and precariousness.

Mutual aid means helping each other. **Mutual aid** is therefore based on a mutual approach in which the balance between receiving AND giving is essential. **Solidarity** represents a relationship of help between people who share the same interests in order to pursue their objectives. **Solidarity** remains an important part of society's fight against the hardships of life, including isolation. Its synonyms are altruism, camaraderie, mutual aid, philanthropy and unity.

**Fraternity** is a two-beat waltz where solidarity and friendship set the tempo. The richness of any human group lies in communication, **mutual aid** and **solidarity**, all aimed at a common goal: the fulfilment of each individual while respecting differences. Solidarity is the tenderness of peoples.

As **Freethinkers**, we believe that the course of events, impoverishment and repression mean that we must act to prevent our comrades in difficulty from sinking and to enable them to continue to exist and to act; this means that we need organised solidarity between the '*haves*' and the '*have-*

*nots'*, who are doomed to the servitude of oppression, exploitation, domination and wars waged by '*those who always want to sing us the old song of human misery*', as the great pacifist **Jean Jaurès** put it. It is this organised solidarity that we want to help build in the **Mutual Aid and Solidarity of Freethinkers** throughout the world.

The historical roots of this desire for **Mutual Aid and Solidarity** lie in the **age-old tradition of solidarity among Freethinkers**: **Freethinkers** come together to think together and carry out the actions they decide to defend the achievements of **Civilisation** and the **Liberation of Humanity**. But beyond this activity, they forge bonds of brotherhood and solidarity which, in times of need, can prove useful, even indispensable. It is for this reason that they reflected and debated during **the IX<sup>th</sup> Congress of the IAF**, on the basis of experiences lived and reported from different countries, to think about building an international structure of **Mutual Aid and Freethinking Solidarity** for the organisation of this solidarity.

No decision has yet been taken, other than to think about it and incorporate all the possible contributions of experience in this area in the various countries. Perhaps an **international foundation** should be set up to create a common fund for actions? This is just one avenue among many.

The *Proceedings of the IX<sup>th</sup> Congress of the IAF* in different languages will publish all the contributions on these issues, so that everyone can form an opinion and put forward proposals that could be discussed at the **next Congresses of the International Association of Freethought**.

Grenoble, October 11<sup>th</sup> 2025

