



January 17<sup>th</sup> 2016

### **MEIDA Center's Position Paper on the Law Proposal for the Handling of Harmful Cults – 2015**

The Law Proposal defines what is a "Harmful Cult", makes it an offense to lead a Harmful Cult, and offers a mechanism of confiscation of property of the head of the cult. In addition, the proposal initiates a data base on Harmful Cults and an infrastructure of mental treatment for the victims of the Cults and their family members. Finally, the proposal makes it possible to appoint a custodian to a person who is under the influence of a Harmful Cult. As delineated below, it is MEIDA Center's position that **this law proposal is in discord with current academic research and with the positions of legislative bodies and courts in Israel and abroad, may cause unnecessarily harm to the personal autonomy and rights of individuals, and is not needed.**

The proposal defines a Harmful Cult as a group using "methods of control over thought processes and behavioral patterns". This definition relies on the theory of Mind Control, which is not accepted in the academic research and was rejected by legislative bodies and supreme courts in Israel and abroad. Moreover, **this concept negates the belief in the personal autonomy and responsibility of individuals and their accountability for their actions** (the Israeli Supreme Court dealt extensively in the case of the followers of Elijah Hen).

Article 6 of the proposal allows for a custodian to be appointed to a legal adult who is under the influence of a Harmful Cult. **Appointing a custodian to a legal adult who has chosen freely to join a group**, even if a harmful one, **is a disproportionate violation of individual autonomy**, without any proper academic and psychological backing.

Our position is that **the existing laws in the Israeli legal corpus are sufficient, and the new law is unnecessary**. The State of Israel has no difficulty to indict cult leaders, and is equipped with a variety of fitting criminal offenses, as can be learned from the case of Goel Ratzon (who was sentenced to thirty years in prison) and D.A. (sentenced to twenty-six years in prison).

**Therefore, MEIDA Center recommends not accepting the law proposal as it currently stands.**

We will be happy to supply further information, provide references to the legislative state of affairs in Israel and abroad as well as to academic research on the subject, participate in meetings, and answer any question.

Cordially yours,

Prof. Boaz Huss, Dr. Rachel Werczberger, Dr. Tomer Persico, Dr. Adam Klin-Oron, Dr. Marianna Ruah-Midbar, adv. Masua Sagiv – members of the Board of Directors of MEIDA Center.



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MEIDA Center at the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute collects reliable and objective information on contemporary religious groups in Israel, with the aim of providing it for the service of the State's organs and the public at large. The Center is operated by qualified researchers in the field, using scientific tools and maintaining strict academic standards.

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