

**Intervention of the APFF at the Forum on Minority Issues  
of the UN Human Rights Council  
Geneva, 24-25 November 2016**

Mr Chairman,

What can the 310,000 francophones living in the north of Belgium expect in the event of a natural, industrial or nuclear disaster or a pandemic in light of the fact that the UN recommends that its member states « *provide timely information in a format and language that is appropriate and culturally tailored to the specific minority groups* »?

This is the question raised by the Association for the Promotion of French Culture in Flanders (APFF) as Flanders refuses to recognise the French-speaking minority living on its territory. To such an extent that the protection of national minorities and the fight against linguistic discrimination are sensitive -- even taboo -- subjects in Belgium.

It should be noted that as a consequence of Flanders' attitude towards its French-speaking minority:

- Belgium has not yet ratified the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities of the Council of Europe, over fifteen years after signing it. This, in spite of the recommendations made by Russia, Switzerland and Hungary in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of 2011 and 2016;

- Neither has Belgium ratified Protocol No. 12 to the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, which prohibits any form of discrimination including discrimination based on language. It must be noted that Protocol No. 12 was approved by all relevant parliaments (federal and federated) with the exception of the Flemish Parliament.

Furthermore, Belgium has not yet designated the competent body to deal with discriminations based on language as provided for in the 2007 Anti-discrimination Act (Article 29 (2)).

Among a series of failures, the parliamentary committee of inquiry into the attacks of the 22nd of March in Brussels highlighted the lack of a French translation of the emergency response plan at Brussels national airport, located in Flanders. The Governor of Flemish Brabant, Lode De Witte, stated that « *a plan in Dutch is sufficient since the services involved are either from Flanders or from Brussels and are therefore supposed to be bilingual* ». His statement was greeted with anger by the francophone members of the committee who, obviously, do not share this opinion.

In order to ensure that adequate information is available to all minorities in the event of a disaster, the APFF urges the authorities, on the one hand, to ensure that for each of the national languages (French, Dutch and German) at least one over-the-air news radio channel is broadcast throughout the Belgian territory. These radios, in addition to their usual broadcasts, must be charged with informing the public about measures to be taken in the event of disasters, at a local, provincial, regional or federal level.

Currently, in Flanders, French-language RTBF programming cannot be followed comfortably beyond Ghent on portable radios.

In addition, the APFF demands that all the information on measure to be taken in the event of a disaster be centralised and made available on a single, multilingual website. Currently, this is far from

being the case. The information is spread over several sites such as [www.info-risques.be](http://www.info-risques.be), [www.seveso.be](http://www.seveso.be), [www.risquenucleaire.be](http://www.risquenucleaire.be), etc.

If you visit the French-language pages of the *Info-risques* website and want to download the information brochure on industrial risks, you are redirected to the English-language pages of the *Seveso* website. If you wish to listen to the Seveso alert siren, the caption is displayed in Dutch.

Should you wish to know where the Seveso companies are located in Ghent or Antwerp, remember to enter « Gent » or « Antwerpen » in Dutch in the search form, even though you might be on the French version of the site, otherwise an error message will be displayed. « Crainhem » spelled in French does not yield any results even though it is one of the communes with language facilities in the suburbs of Brussels!

When you finally find the list of the 23 Seveso sites in the Ghent region and if you want to know what safety measures to take, here again you will be disappointed: you only learn that company X or Y produces this or that toxic substance. But there is not the slightest trace of specific protective measures to be taken in the event of an accident for each company!

The conclusion is clear: the APFF considers that the resources implemented to inform minorities in the event of a disaster are clearly inadequate in Belgium.

This observation, like our intervention, is supported by the Coalition of Francophone Associations in Flanders (CAFF) (1) who participated in Belgium's second Universal Periodic Review (UPR) by sending a written contribution to the UN (<http://www.francophonie.be/caff/main/pdf/ctcaffenv1b.pdf>).

We thank you,

(1) The Coalition of Francophone Associations in Flanders (CAFF) regroups six associations representing the 310,000 francophones in Flanders including the outskirts of Brussels and the entity of Fourons : « Action Fouronnaise », « Association culturelle de Dilbeek » (ACD), « Association de Promotion des Droits Humains et des Minorités » (ADHUM), « Association francophone de Leeuw-Saint-Pierre », « Association pour la Promotion de la Francophonie en Flandre » (APFF) and «Citoyens de Zaventem».

### **For more information**

Please visit our site (<http://www.francophonie.be/ndf>).

### **About the APFF**

The Association for the Promotion of French Culture in Flanders (APFF) has no political objective. It simply wants French, one of Belgium's official languages, to have the right to be used in Flanders in the same way as any other language.

The APFF promotes French culture in particular by publishing the magazine « *Nouvelles de Flandre* » on its website (<http://www.francophonie.be/ndf>). Here you can also find a calendar of activities in French and the addresses of French-speaking resources in Flanders, as well as articles

and information on French culture in general. A newsletter, a paper version of the magazine, is also published every three months.

Anyone who is interested in the APFF can become a member. The annual membership fee is 15 EUR for Belgium and 30 EUR for abroad, payment to be sent to the APFF's account number 210-0433429-85 (IBAN : BE89 2100 4334 2985 – BIC : GEBABEBB). Members and donors receive the « *Nouvelles de Flandre* » magazine every three months.

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