

**MESSAGE FROM DR. MARKUS KREMER,**

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Dear participants of the FECRIS International Conference in Sofia!

Warm greetings from Stuttgart both from me and my esteemed predecessor, Hans-Werner Carlhoff.

Since 1993, in Baden-Württemberg, there is an inter-ministerial working group with the mission of informing and warning about the existence and risks of so called sects and psycho-groups. As the chairman of this working group, I feel linked with a similar objective to FECRIS and its partner organisations. Unfortunately, due to official duties, this year it was not possible for me to participate in today's event. I therefore take this opportunity to address a few words of encouragement and support for your important work.

Our common theme has by no means lost its importance. On the contrary: The "market" of the (supposed) offers for salvation is constantly evolving, especially in terms of structures. While 25 years ago, there were clearly defined, closed groups, called "sects/cults" which were fought because of their questionable beliefs, extremist religiosity or malpractices, it has now shifted to an almost endless variety of offers that are addressed in various ways to all levels of society. The Social networks and the loss of an overall consensus on values promote the spread of dangerous teachings and lifestyles.

This year's conference focuses on the role of women in sects/cults. In this context women appear under various forms: as "victims", as supporters of a group, as concerned persons or relatives, as "mediums", or simply as a caring mothers and wives.

Why are women increasingly affected by the cult problem?

Firstly, one might consider the thesis of sociologists that religion is primarily a female phenomenon. Women are appear more sensitive to existential and transcendental questions or answers. Everyone may think whether this is the case or not. It is true that outside the major religions "the Offers of meaning" focus on issues where women have a certain "natural" competence: motherhood, nature, health & healing, holism, security, harmony, etc. At the same time traditional religions more than ever reflect an anachronistic Patriarchal bias that keeps women away from office and influence and prevents female participation. In contrast, sects emphasize a certain "equality of the select", be they men or women. They thus overcome social role models and offer women in particular a welcome package of self-realisation. They disguise their true interests: trying to exercise power over people and bring them into dependency and "bondage". Unfortunately, the concerned persons often notice these dangers too late and can no longer effectively distance themselves from the "cult/sect system".

All the more reason for enlightenment and support by church, state and civil society organisations of which you are the representatives here today in Sofia. Here FECRIS has the significant and praiseworthy task of combining the interests of many individual national initiatives and to make their voices heard at European level on behalf of present and future "victims".

In this sense I wish the conference a good and promising course and all of you all the best!