

Message at the opening of the Conference from the President of FECRIS, André Frédéric (Belgium)

Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends,

First of all, I would like to request your understanding for my regrettable absence from this conference, which we have been preparing since our gathering in Brussels last year, and to which I was looking forward.

The specific circumstances tied to the ongoing political turmoil in France, coupled with the uncertainties surrounding travel, have compelled me to step back. I cannot afford to take even the slightest professional risk that might affect my commitments for the upcoming week.

The important thing is that you are here to pursue our common objective: to defend the victims and their families from undue influence. And the mission is far from complete.

The succession of crises, ranging from the challenges posed by Covid-19 to the tragedies stemming from global warming, the energy crisis, and Russia's aggressive military actions against Ukraine, have collectively destabilized our democratic societies. Most critically, they have shaken our fellow citizens, who find themselves in a state of perpetual concern while seeking answers to their existential queries.

Many of them find their stability in their work, their family, and their commitment to community life. Regrettably, there are others who fall prey to alluring but perverse visions of an illusory paradise. The rise of social networking platforms has played a significant role in ensnaring those who are more vulnerable.

Vigilance must be our watchword.

In my view, public authorities must persist in their endeavours to counteract undue influence, as is being done in France through MIVILUDES and in Belgium through CIAOSN – examples that I'm well-acquainted with. However, increased resources are needed! In my country, for instance, the emphasis currently rests on combating radicalism and terrorism, a justifiable focus, yet it must not come at the expense of tackling other practices that jeopardize the daily lives of our citizens. Additional resources must be made available.

On a different note, greater support should be extended to dedicated organizations tirelessly working on behalf of victims of undue influence. FECRIS continues its unwavering efforts to unite individuals towards achieving these aims. We are not abandoning hope of bringing the debate to every State where this is possible, so that legislation criminalising the abuse of weakness can be adopted. The task is enormous, but our determination is strong.

I extend my best wishes for a remarkable conference, one that I'm confident will illuminate the various facets of undue influence within healthcare that are rampant across the globe. This event also offers a platform for meaningful exchanges and the forging of connections with likeminded individuals who share our concerns.

Allow me to conclude by invoking the words of the esteemed French writer and actor, Georges Perron: "Health, much like freedom, only becomes truly apparent in its absence."

I wish you all an excellent conference, which I am convinced will shed new light on the sectarian practices in healthcare that are flourishing everywhere.

It will also be an opportunity to talk to each other and forge links with people who share the same concerns.

I'd like to finish by quoting the French writer and actor Georges Perron
"Health is like freedom, it only exists when you lack it".