

SWEDEN 2013 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies generally protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom. There are some limitations on religious practice, such as a ban on kosher slaughter and the prohibition of home schooling on religious or philosophical grounds.

There were reports of societal abuses and/or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice; however, prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom. Examples of abuses include harassment or assault of those in religious garb, and vandalism of religious property.

The U.S. embassy maintained regular contact with the government and representatives of religious groups to discuss religious freedom. Embassy officers increased outreach to several religious communities, including Jewish and Muslim minorities, to promote tolerance and to counter anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim sentiment. In September President Obama made an historic visit to the Great Synagogue of Stockholm on the eve of Rosh Hashanah. The Department of the Treasury hosted a ceremony honoring Raoul Wallenberg in the presence of the King and Queen of Sweden and members of the Wallenberg family.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the population at 9.1 million (July 2013 estimate). Religious membership or affiliation is concentrated in a few major religious groups. According to the Church of Sweden (Lutheran), approximately 67.5 percent of citizens are members; other Christian groups, including the Roman Catholic Church, the Pentecostal movement, the Missionary (or Missions) Church, Jehovah's Witnesses, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), total less than 5 percent of the population. Membership in the Church of Sweden has decreased steadily since it separated from the state in 2000. Researchers estimate that approximately 6 percent of the population is Muslim.

According to the Official Council of Swedish Jewish Communities, the number of Jews is approximately 15,000 to 20,000. Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform synagogues are found mostly in large cities.

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Smaller religious communities are concentrated in larger cities and include Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs, Zoroastrians, Hare Krishnas, and members of the Church of Scientology, Word of Faith, and Unification Church.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies generally protect religious freedom.

In addition to the Church of Sweden, 41 recognized religious groups raise revenues through the Commission for State Grants to Religious Communities, a governmental body under the authority of the Ministry of Culture. Member contributions are made through the national taxation system based on official membership roles. Among the religious groups receiving contributions are the Swedish Missionary Church, Roman Catholic Church, Swedish Alliance Mission, Baptist Union of Sweden, Salvation Army, Methodist Church in Sweden, Pentecostal Church, the Jewish Central Council, the Islamic Cooperation Council, and the Evangelical Church.

Recognition or registration is not required to carry out religious activity. Faith communities are taxed similarly to non-profit organizations. Religious groups wishing government aid need to apply for it. In reviewing such applications, the government considers the number of members in the group and its length of establishment, and aid is granted to religious groups in amounts proportional to their active membership.

Complaints about discrimination for religious reasons in the private sector, in the government, or by a government agency or authority need to be filed with the Discrimination Ombudsman (DO). The DO will then represent the individual in the event of legal proceedings. The DO received 82 complaints related to religion and religious beliefs in 2012, the latest available figure.

Hate speech laws prohibit threats or expressions of contempt for persons based on several factors, including religious belief.

According to the law, animal slaughter must be preceded by stunning and/or the administration of anesthetics to minimize the animal's suffering.

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The law stipulates that male circumcision may be performed only by a licensed doctor or, for boys under the age of two months, in the presence of a person certified by the National Board of Health and Welfare (NBHW). The NBHW has certified mohels (individuals who conduct ritual Jewish circumcisions) to perform the operations but requires that an anesthesiologist or other medical doctor accompany them.

Individuals serving in the military are given the opportunity to observe religious customs. The military offers food options compliant with religious dietary restrictions and allows time off for appropriate mourning periods. Each military district has a chaplain who holds the position regardless of his or her religious affiliation. In religious issues the chaplain represents his or her own faith, but is responsible to arrange contact with military chaplains from other faiths as requested. Some regiments have an imam to facilitate Muslim soldiers' religious observance. Jehovah's Witnesses are exempt from national military service. Armed forces guidelines allow religious headwear. Individuals serving in the military may observe religious holidays in exchange for time off on another public holiday.

Religious education covering all world religions is compulsory in public and private schools. Parents may send their children to government-supported independent religious schools which must adhere to government guidelines on core academic curricula. The governmental Living History Forum promotes national educational programs on the Holocaust and anti-Semitism.

Law enforcement authorities maintain statistics on hate crimes, and police hate-crime units exist throughout the country. Authorities can add a hate crime classification to the initial reporting or to existing charges during an investigation, as well as to the trial and sentencing phase of a crime as appropriate. The Stockholm County police have a hate crime unit that trains police officers to detect, raise awareness of, and inform the public of hate crimes. A hate crime unit also exists in Malmo.

The government is a member of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, formerly the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research.

Government Practices

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Muslim groups complained about the government's implementation of anti-terrorism laws.

In February the Swedish Muslim Organizations network complained the government did not take discrimination against Muslims seriously. The organization submitted a report to the UN Racial Discrimination Committee with examples of acts of intolerance against Muslims related to anti-terrorism laws and misperceptions of some Muslim religious practices. The examples included a ban on newscasters wearing headscarves on public television and religious-racial profiling in the application of anti-terrorism laws. The Minister for Integration, Erik Ullenhag, previously had commented that lack of knowledge by the social services sometimes led to possible discrimination, and the government took any discrimination against Muslims seriously.

In April law enforcement officials granted permission for a mosque to make a public call to prayer from its minaret. This was the first time a mosque was granted permission to do so.

The Malmo police hot line for victims of hate crimes, established the previous year, continued to operate. Several local police authorities provided training aimed at detecting hate crimes when complaints were filed. Representatives from the hate crime unit visited high schools to raise awareness of hate crimes and how to report them, and encouraged more victims to report abuse. Information for victims of hate crimes was available in several languages, and local authorities provided interpreters to facilitate reporting. Unit representatives noted that many victims chose not to report incidents due to privacy concerns, however. In January a man in Malmo was convicted of a hate speech crime for giving a Nazi salute in a public park. This was the first time in three years that a Malmo resident was convicted of a hate crime.

In June the Supreme Court passed down guidance to lower courts about implementation of a clause in the education law specifically stating religious reasons were not valid justification for granting permission to home-school children. This was triggered by a 2012 appellate court decision approving a permit for an Orthodox Jewish family to home-school their children based on social reasons. The Supreme Court ruled the stated social reasons were not enough to grant a continued permit.

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In March public prosecutors announced they had stopped investigating the September 2012 attack against the Jewish Community Center in Malmo, stating there was no evidence to consider it a hate crime or related to anti-Semitism.

On August 27, the country celebrated the first Raoul Wallenberg Day in memory of the Swedish diplomat who saved thousands of Hungarian Jews from being sent to concentration camps during the Second World War. A young Iranian Swede from Malmo, Siavosh Derakhti, who started the movement called “Young Muslims against anti-Semitism,” received the first Raoul Wallenberg Prize, awarded for combating racism and increasing understanding among different groups.

School sponsored visits to Holocaust sites such as Auschwitz were common educational tools. Students participated in such trips regardless of religious background. The Living History Forum, a government agency, estimated that 10 percent of all primary and secondary school students had visited a Holocaust site as part of their education.

The Living History Forum, together with the Association for the Survivors of the Holocaust, continued its Tell the Future project, which aimed to carry on the memory of the Holocaust by having survivors tell their stories to people between the ages of 17 and 35. The forum prepared a project for teachers based on Raoul Wallenberg’s story.

The Muslim community remained divided over whether certain anesthetic methods of stunning animals before slaughter required by the law conflicted with halal requirements. The Jewish community reported that the strict laws effectively prevented the production of kosher meat. Most halal and kosher meat was imported.

Some Jews and Muslims stated that the law on male circumcision interfered with their religious traditions.

The Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency cooperated with religious communities on a national level to promote dialogue and prevent conflicts leading to anti-Muslim and anti-Semitic incidents. Several seminars and inter-religious dialogues, took place throughout the country.

In September the government announced a 10.5 million Swedish kroner (SEK) (\$1.6 million) increase in funding to religious communities for 2014-2016. The extra funds were intended to support increased venue costs and faith-related

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services in the health care system. In 2012, 60 million SEK (\$9.4 million) were distributed to religious communities.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Because ethnicity and religion are often closely linked, and new immigrants are often from diverse religious and ethnic groups, it was difficult to categorize many incidents specifically as ethnic or religious intolerance, or intolerance toward immigrants.

The National Council for Crime Prevention (NCCP) reported that most crimes deemed to be anti-Islamic hate crimes were either harassment against veiled women or hate speech. The NCCP stated that crimes against persons and damage to property, including graffiti, were the most common offenses related to religion.

The NCCP hate crime report for 2012, the most recent available, counted 310 anti-Islamic hate crimes, compared to 280 anti-Islamic hate crimes in 2011. Arab and Somali immigrants were the main targets of anti-Islamic behavior. In August an unknown attacker assaulted a pregnant Muslim woman, tore off her veil, and shouted racist insults at her. The police registered the incident as a hate crime. Swedish women responded with an online protest, posting pictures of themselves wearing hijab to Twitter and Facebook feeds.

On November 18, assailants destroyed the main door of the Fittja mosque in Stockholm and threw approximately 10 pigs' feet into the mosque. The police classified the event as vandalism and hate crime, but had not identified any suspects by year's end.

The number of reported anti-Semitic crimes increased from 194 in 2011 to 220 in 2012, the most recent year for which data was available. The NCCP did not consider the increase a trend, but a normal fluctuation. In Malmo, however, the number of reported anti-Semitic hate crimes rose to 60 in 2012 and 35 in the first half of this year, as compared to 44 reported in 2010 and 2011. Anti-Semitic incidents included threats, verbal abuse, vandalism, graffiti, and harassment in schools. Anti-Semitic incidents were often associated with events in the Middle East and actions of the Israeli government, and local Jews were at times blamed for Israeli policies. The Jewish communities in Stockholm and Malmo reported that youth of Middle Eastern origin perpetrated many of the anti-Semitic hate crimes.

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The European Union's Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) survey on anti-Semitism, released in November, found 48 percent of 810 Swedish respondents (out of a "core Jewish population" of 15,000) had experienced or observed anti-Semitic verbal or physical attacks and 75 percent of respondents had not reported these incidents to the police; 80 percent believed anti-Semitism had gotten worse over the past five years and 18 percent had considered emigrating because of anti-Semitism.

Local authorities in Malmo established a Forum for Dialogue to promote mutual understanding between the Jewish and Muslim communities and to take joint action to combat intolerance. The dialogue forum continued to meet on both a regular and when necessary basis during the year. Among other things, the forum sent a letter to all the schools in the district encouraging them to stop "every-day-racism."

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. embassy engaged regularly on religious freedom issues with government officials such as the ministers of integration, democracy, and faith communities.

The U.S. embassy maintained regular contact with local religious leaders, and embassy officials participated in events promoting interfaith understanding and religious tolerance, such as a ceremony held in the Stockholm synagogue commemorating the Kristallnacht pogrom of 1938. The Ambassador met with several high level religious leaders.

In April the embassy hosted a Diversity Dialogue on anti-Semitism with political, academic, religious, and media representatives.

In May the Department of the Treasury hosted a ceremony in which the design of the Raoul Wallenberg congressional gold medal was unveiled, in the presence of the King and Queen of Sweden and members of the Wallenberg family.

On September 4, the eve of Rosh Hashanah, President Obama visited the Great Synagogue of Stockholm, sending an important message about tolerance, including combating anti-Semitism. The President honored Wallenberg's memory in his remarks at the Synagogue, and visited the Holocaust Memorial on a wall outside the synagogue that bears the names of the 8,500 relatives of Jews living in Sweden murdered by the Nazis.

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During President Obama's visit, the embassy facilitated a meeting between the President and Siavosh Derakhti, who established the group Young Muslims Against Anti-Semitism.

On October 1, the U.S. embassies in Stockholm and Copenhagen joined in commemorations marking the 70th anniversary of the rescue of Danish Jews.