

SWEDEN 2014 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution protects freedom of worship and requires public institutions to combat discrimination based on religious affiliation. Police forces across the country maintained hate crime units to detect and raise awareness of hate crimes. In September the Supreme Court ruled a 56-year-old man's physical abuse of two veiled women was a hate crime. The government provided funds to increase the security of Jewish congregations following several anti-Semitic incidents. Muslim groups continued to complain about the government's implementation of anti-terrorism laws.

Most reports of societal abuses related to religion involved harassment of individuals and damage to property, including graffiti. Most anti-Semitic incidents involved hate speech or unlawful threats and were often associated with events in the Middle East. Most anti-Islamic incidents involved harassment of veiled women or hate speech. Arab and Somali immigrants were the main targets of anti-Muslim hate crimes.

The U.S. embassy regularly engaged with government officials and local religious and community leaders on issues related to religiously-motivated violence and discrimination. Embassy officials also hosted, supported, and participated in events to promote interfaith understanding and tolerance.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the population at 9.7 million (July 2014 estimate). According to the Church of Sweden (Lutheran), approximately 65.9 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, Jews number approximately 20,000, and live mostly in large cities.

SWEDEN

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 Framework

The constitution provides “the freedom to practice one’s religion alone or in the company of others, as far as societal peace is not disturbed or it causes general offense.” No one is obliged to belong to a religious community.

The constitution states public institutions shall combat discrimination based on religious affiliation. 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 represents an individual in the event of legal proceedings.

The constitution encourages religious minorities to preserve and develop a cultural and social life of their own.

In addition to the Church of Sweden, 44 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 rolls. 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 can apply for government aid. 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.

SWEDEN

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.

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 an anesthesiologist or other medical doctor to 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 for arranging 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 public holidays.

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.

Law enforcement authorities maintain statistics on hate crimes, including religiously motivated 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 at the trial and sentencing phase of a crime, as appropriate.

Government Practices

SWEDEN

In September the Supreme Court ruled a 56-year-old man's physical abuse of two veiled women was a hate crime. The Supreme Court stated the man attacked the women because they were wearing veils. The victims were unknown to the man and they were both severely injured. Witnesses heard the man screaming obscenities about Muslims, saying "I hate you all." The Supreme Court sentenced the man to two months in prison and a fine of 50,000 kroner (SEK) (\$ 6,483) to be paid to the victims. The man also lost his job as a teacher.

Muslim groups continued to complain about the government's implementation of anti-terrorism laws, saying legal certainty standards seem to have been lowered in anti-terror cases and applied only to the Muslim community. They cited the fact that all 26 arrests in 2013 under the anti-terrorism laws involved Muslims. They also said their perception was that all Muslims seemed to be under suspicion.

The Commission for State Grants to Religious Communities released a report in November on xenophobic acts against faith communities, including acts against members of the communities as well as against religious properties. The report stated these crimes were a major problem and there appeared to be a high number of unreported incidents. The report said the failure to report incidents might be due to a lack of confidence in the police and the judiciary, or to police inexperience in handling these types of cases. The report listed a variety of measures to rectify this development.

The Stockholm County police maintained a hate crime unit to train police officers to detect, raise awareness of, and inform the public of hate crimes, including those that were religiously-motivated. Hate crime units also existed in Malmo and Gothenburg. The Malmo police hot line for victims of hate crimes, established in 2012, 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. Police provided information for victims of hate crimes in several languages, and local authorities provided interpreters to facilitate reporting.

Following a neo-Nazi May Day march, the prime minister, while supporting freedom of speech, said, "...It is now important that those who have used violence will be held accountable. We must clearly put a mark against anyone who uses or advocates violence and hatred as the basis for political influence. We all have a responsibility not to bring hatred in to Swedish politics...."

SWEDEN

In early August the government announced it would grant SEK 2 million (\$259,000) to the Swedish Jewish Council to increase security for Jewish congregations in response to a long-time complaint from the Jewish community that it was required to use a large part of its own funds for security in light of religious tensions. The government did not provide funds for security to other religious communities, although all religious communities receiving funds from the government were free to use those funds for security.

On August 27, the country celebrated the second 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.

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 which promotes national educational programs on the Holocaust and anti-Semitism, estimated 10 percent of all primary and secondary school students had visited a Holocaust site as part of their education. Together with the Association for the Survivors of the Holocaust, the Living History Forum continued its “Tell the Future” project, aimed at ensuring the memory of the Holocaust by having survivors tell their stories to people between the ages of 17 and 35.

The government is a member of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.

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 the strict laws effectively prevented the production of kosher meat. Most halal and kosher meat was imported.

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

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

SWEDEN

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

In July, a man in Malmo was assaulted after hanging an Israeli flag from his window. The man reportedly exchanged words with men on the street after his window had been smashed. He was assaulted by 10 men with iron pipes. The police did not make any arrests but classified the case as an aggravated assault and a hate crime.

In August unknown men attacked a Malmo rabbi. The attackers drove up beside him, screamed obscenities about Jews, and threw a bottle towards him. The incident occurred when the rabbi was on his way home from the synagogue at night. A few hours earlier someone else, also in a passing car, threw a lighter towards the rabbi when he was on his way to the synagogue. The attack was reported to the police and classified as a suspected hate crime and assault.

Several prominent politicians condemned anti-Semitic violence. They participated in *kippa* (yarmulke) walks against anti-Semitism, in which Jews and non-Jews wore Jewish symbols, organized by the Jewish communities in Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Malmo.

In September the DO reported receiving 90 complaints during the year related to religion and religious beliefs. This compared to 108 complaints for all of 2013.

The government's National Council for Crime Prevention (NCCP) stated crimes against persons and damage to property, including graffiti, were the most common offenses related to religion. The NCCP reported most crimes deemed to be anti-Islamic hate crimes were either harassment against veiled women or hate speech. According to the United Islamic Association of Sweden, mosques had become targets where Muslims were subjected to hatred and prejudice. There were reports of mosques covered in anti-Islamic graffiti and broken windows.

The NCCP hate crime report for 2013, the most recent available, counted 330 anti-Islamic hate crimes, compared to 310 anti-Islamic hate crimes in 2012. Arab and Somali immigrants were the main targets of anti-Islamic behavior. Because religion and ethnicity are often closely linked, it was difficult to categorize many incidents as being solely based on religious identity.

During the first six months of the year, the NCCP counted 28 anti-Semitic hate crimes in Malmo, compared with 68 such crimes in 2013. In August the Malmo

SWEDEN

hate crime police noted an increase in anti-Semitic hate crimes, which they stated were most likely connected to the conflict in Gaza. For the entire country, the NCCP reported a decrease in anti-Semitic crimes from 220 in 2012 to 190 in 2013, the most recent years for which full data was available. The NCCP considered the decrease a normal fluctuation.

Anti-Semitic incidents reported by the NCCP included hate speech (48 percent) and unlawful threats or harassment (32 percent). Among the perpetrators, 61 percent were not known previously by the victim, and crimes were committed mainly in public places and on the internet. There were also incidents of vandalism, mostly involving graffiti.

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.

The Simon Wiesenthal Center left in place its travel warning first issued in 2010 for Jews traveling in southern Sweden, saying Jews in Malmo could be “subject to anti-Semitic taunts and harassment.”

In October two swastika flags were raised in Kronoberg in southern Sweden. One was raised in a school courtyard, but was taken down early in the morning by school staff. The second was outside a grocery store in Vaxjo. The two events were classified as hate speech and the cases were with the attorney general for assessment.

In June the Swedish Committee Against Anti-Semitism (SKMA) received SEK 5 million (\$648,000) in funding from the government for an educational program directed at high school students on anti-democratic ideologies and the Holocaust, and other crimes against humanity. The grant was designed to help SKMA organize student trips to Holocaust sites in Poland and two seminars. The program also includes training to understand the consequences of racism and anti-democratic ideas, and, in turn, promote democracy and basic human rights values for ninth grade students at various high schools around the country. Approximately 400 students and about 45 teachers will participate.

SWEDEN

Local authorities in Malmo continued the Forum for Dialogue to promote mutual understanding between the Jewish and Muslim communities and to take joint action to combat intolerance. The forum met regularly during the year.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. embassy engaged regularly with the Ministries of Integration and Democracy on issues related to overcoming religious tensions and increasing tolerance.

The U.S. embassy maintained regular contact with local religious leaders to discuss anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim hate crimes, among other issues. Embassy officials participated in events promoting interfaith understanding and religious tolerance. The Ambassador and embassy staff met with several high-level Jewish and Muslim leaders to discuss the law on circumcision, hate crimes, countering violent extremism, interfaith dialogue, and tolerance.

In April the U.S. attorney general gave a speech to the parliament where he cited religious freedom among basic rights and praised the country's anti-discrimination laws.

In March the embassy hosted and engaged in a variety of activities relating to diversity and youth outreach. A U.S. NGO representative sponsored by the embassy visited Sweden to engage with students at Islamic schools and marginalized communities on the contributions of moderate Islam.

The embassy hosted a number of U.S. speakers to promote religious diversity and the need for engagement with minority religious communities, especially the Muslim community.

In July Raoul Wallenberg was posthumously awarded the U.S. Congressional Gold Medal for his "efforts and heroic acts during the Holocaust" by saving tens of thousands of Jews in Budapest at the end of World War II.

In November embassy staff visited Malmo to discuss the government's most recent efforts to combat anti-Semitism and reduce religious tensions in the region.