

SWEDEN 2017 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution protects “the freedom to practice one’s religion alone or in the company of others” and prohibits discrimination based on religion. The government facilitated revenue collection for 17 religious groups through the taxation system and distributed publicly funded grants to 42 applicant religious groups in proportion to their membership. The government also provided grants to religious groups for religious education, spiritual work in the healthcare sector, refugee reception and integration, and security measures. The government continued to implement a plan to combat hate crimes, including religiously motivated ones. The plan resulted in additional funding and training for police and funding for civil society to combat anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim sentiments. The Living History Forum, a government-funded agency, trained 2,500 teachers and other school personnel on preventing and combating intolerance, including anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim sentiments. Leading national and local politicians, including the prime minister, condemned anti-Semitic incidents in December. After a television broadcaster aired footage of a government-funded Muslim school seemingly segregating its pupils by gender on a school bus, the prime minister called the separation of the students “despicable.” Jewish groups criticized the police for approving an application by the Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM), widely characterized as a neo-Nazi group, for a protest march that would have passed near a Gothenburg synagogue on Yom Kippur. A court later changed the routing of the march. Several representatives of the Sweden Democrats (SD) political party made anti-Muslim and anti-Semitic remarks. The prime minister and other national and local officials stated their public support for religious freedom and the protection of religious groups.

According to the government, there were 1,177 suspected religiously motivated hate crimes reported to the police in 2016, a 24 percent decline from 2015. As in previous years, Muslims were the most frequently targeted group and Jews the most targeted relative to the size of the community. Incidents included acts of violence, illegal threats, discrimination, defamation, hate speech, vandalism, and graffiti. The government’s National Council for Crime Prevention (NCCP) stated it was likely all hate crimes continued to be significantly underreported, and a suspect was charged in just 4 percent of cases reported in 2015. The nongovernmental organization (NGO) Open Doors reported 123 Christian immigrant interviewees, the majority from Muslim-majority countries, had been the victims of at least 512 anti-Christian incidents, including violence, sexual

assault, death threats, social exclusion, insults, and other threats between 2012 and 2017. Assailants threw flaming objects at the synagogue in Gothenburg and at the Jewish cemetery in Malmo in December, and protesters in Malmo yelled “shoot all the Jews.” Government officials, including the prime minister, condemned the Gothenburg and Malmo incidents. A Jewish association in Umea closed in April after repeated harassment, which it tied, at least in part, to the NRM. Jewish, Christian, and Muslim groups expressed concern about the increase in NRM activities. In what police suspected were cases of arson, the country’s largest Shia mosque, in Jarfalla, was severely damaged in a fire in April, and another mosque in Orebro was destroyed by fire in September. In September, 10 Muslim groups called for action to guarantee the safety of the country’s mosques and their visitors.

The Charge d’Affaires and other embassy officials continued to engage regularly with the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Culture, members of parliament, the Swedish Agency for Support to Faith Communities (SST), the office of the national coordinator to combat violent extremism, and national and local police on issues related to religious freedom, including reports of tensions between religious groups, reports of antireligious acts against immigrants and other minorities, and the increased activity of neo-Nazi groups. Embassy officials spoke to Christian, Jewish, and Muslim representatives in Gothenburg, Malmo, Stockholm, Umea, and Uppsala about their ability to practice their faiths freely and safely, and raised the concerns of specific religious groups with political leaders.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the population at 10.0 million (July 2017 estimate). According to the Church of Sweden (Lutheran), approximately 61 percent of citizens are members. According to government statistics and estimates by religious groups, 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) – together total less than 7 percent of the population. The Pew Research Center estimated in 2016 that 8.1 percent of the population is Muslim. According to the Official Council of Swedish Jewish Communities, Jews number approximately 20,000-30,000, concentrated mainly in larger cities such as Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Malmo.

Smaller religious communities include Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs, Zoroastrians, and members of the Church of Scientology, Word of Faith, the International Society

for Krishna Consciousness, the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (Unification Church), and Mandaism.

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.” The law mandates there be no limitation of rights or freedoms on the grounds of religious opinion.

The constitution instructs public institutions to combat discrimination based on religious affiliation. According to law, complaints about discrimination for religious reasons in the private sector, in the government, or by a government agency or authority must be filed with the Discrimination Ombudsman. The ombudsman represents an individual in the event of legal proceedings.

The constitution states that “the opportunities of religious minorities to preserve and develop a cultural and social life of their own shall be promoted.” No one is obliged to belong to a religious community or “divulge religious beliefs in relations with public institutions.”

There is no requirement in the law to register or recognize religious groups. Faith communities registering with the SST, however, receive tax exemptions similar to those of nonprofit organizations and are eligible to receive government funding. In order to register with the SST, a religious group must submit an application to the Ministry of Culture demonstrating the group fulfills certain requirements, including that it be stable and have operated in the country for at least five years, have a clear and stable structure, be able to function on its own, serve at least 3,000 persons (with exceptions), and be present in different locations in the country.

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, by a person certified by the National Board of Health and Welfare. The board certifies *mohels* (individuals who conduct ritual Jewish circumcisions) to perform the operations on boys younger than two months but requires the presence of a medical doctor, who must administer anesthesia to the infant.

The government facilitates fundraising by religious groups by offering them the option of collecting contributions through the internal revenue service in exchange for a one-time fee of 75,000 Swedish kronor (SEK) (\$9,200) and an annual fee of SEK 21 (\$2.60) per member per year. The Church of Sweden is exempted from the annual fee as it, unlike the other religious groups participating in the scheme, does not receive financial support from the SST. Only religious groups registered with the SST may participate in the scheme. Religious groups freely choose what percentage of members' annual taxable income to collect, with a median collection rate of 1 percent. When an individual joins a registered religious organization, the organization informs the Tax Agency that the new member wants to participate in the scheme. The Tax Agency subsequently begins to subtract a percentage of the member's gross income and distributes it to the religious organization. The contribution is then noted on the member's annual tax record. The member's contribution is not deductible from income tax. Seventeen religious organizations participate in the scheme, including the Church of Sweden, the Roman Catholic Church, four Muslim congregations, and two Syriac Orthodox churches.

The government provides publicly funded grants to registered religious groups through the SST, which is under the authority of the Ministry of Culture. The grants are proportional to the size of a group's membership. Registered religious groups may also apply for separate grants for specific purposes, such as security expenses.

The military offers food options compliant with religious dietary restrictions. Each military district has a chaplain who holds the position regardless of his or her religious affiliation. According to the law, chaplains may be of any religious affiliation, but all chaplains seconded to the armed forces belong to the Church of Sweden. Regardless of religious denomination, chaplains are required to perform religious duties for other faiths or refer service members to spiritual leaders of other faiths if requested. Jehovah's Witnesses are exempt from national military service. Armed forces guidelines allow religious headwear. Individuals serving in the military may observe their particular religious holidays in exchange for not taking leave on public holidays.

Religious education to include all world religions is compulsory in public and private schools. Teachers use a curriculum that encompasses lessons about the major world religions without preference for any particular religious group. Parents may send their children to independent religious schools, which are supported by the government through a voucher system and which must adhere to

government guidelines on core academic curricula, including religious education. Such schools may host voluntary religious activities outside the classroom, but these activities may not interfere with government guidelines on core academic curricula.

Hate speech laws prohibit threats or expressions of contempt for persons based on several factors, including religious belief. Penalties for hate speech range from fines to a sentence of up to four years in prison, depending on the severity of the crime.

Law enforcement authorities maintain statistics on hate crimes, including religiously motivated hate crimes. Authorities may add a hate crime classification to an initial crime report or to existing charges during an investigation, as well as at the trial and sentencing phase of a crime. In such cases, the penalties would increase.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

The Swedish Police Authority (SPA) continued to strengthen efforts to combat hate crimes, including antireligious hate crimes, in response to government directives from 2014. The police expanded its designated hate crime investigation units in Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Malmo and conducted training for police across the country throughout the year. The National Police Commissioner announced in September that an additional SEK 10 million (\$1.22 million) would be spent over the following year to prevent and investigate hate crimes. A follow-up report the SPA issued in February assessed “that it is still too early to comment on the effect with regard to the increased ability to investigate hate crimes.”

The SST offered security training to all 42 religious communities in its network and carried out such training for 75 religious representatives throughout the year. The training sessions taught the community leaders to evaluate and respond to threats, deal with hate crimes, and improve physical security.

The Jewish congregation in Malmo welcomed security grants from the SST that, for the first time, could be spent on hiring security personnel. The share of the congregation’s budget spent on security decreased significantly during the year as a result. The congregation also commended the Malmo police for providing increased protection during religious services and the municipal government for

funding public tours of the synagogue. The Stockholm Jewish congregation similarly welcomed the new security grants but nevertheless reported that it spent 20-25 percent of its budget on security.

Several Christian churches and organizations criticized the Swedish Migration Agency for its treatment of asylum seekers who risked religious persecution in their home countries. According to a representative of an ecumenical organization, Migration Agency staff routinely evaluated asylum seekers' claims to be Christian using questions that cast undue doubt on the asylum seekers' faith and required an unreasonable level of knowledge about scripture, denominations, and other aspects of Christianity. The Christian newspaper *Dagen* reported in July and August that the Migration Agency had denied asylum requests of nine self-professed Christians who risked religious persecution in Iran and Pakistan. The representative of the ecumenical organization estimated that the actual number of Christians who risked religious persecution in their home countries after being denied asylum was "much higher." The Migration Agency announced in July that it would review its procedures, investigate alleged wrongful denials of asylum, and increase religious training for its staff.

In April the Swedish Labor Court ruled against a midwife who had sued the regional administration of Jonkoping for discrimination on religious grounds. Hospitals in the region did not hire the midwife because she refused to participate in abortions, citing her Christian faith. The court ruled the regional administration's decision to employ other candidates willing to carry out all the duties of a midwife and participate in abortions did not constitute a violation of her religious rights.

The government continued to implement its "national plan to combat racism, similar forms of hostility, and hate crimes," launched in late 2016, including a focus on Holocaust remembrance. In accordance with the plan, the government gave the Living History Forum an additional SEK 14.1 million (\$1.72 million) to promote tolerance, including religious tolerance. Throughout the year, the forum and the National Agency for Education carried out college-accredited training for 1,200 teachers and other school personnel to prevent and combat intolerance, including anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim sentiment. The forum also arranged five conferences across the country attended by 1,500 school personnel on the same topics and conducted regular training for police, social workers, and other civil servants. In October the forum launched an online training platform to assist teachers in classes about anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim sentiment.

After the Jewish Association in Umea closed in April following threats and harassment, the Governor of Vasterbotten, Magdalena Andersson, and leading municipal politicians joined a “kippah (yarmulke) walk” in support of the city’s Jewish community. Minister for Home Affairs Anders Ygeman commented, “It is of course completely unacceptable that any person is subjected to threats based on his or her religion. We must therefore ensure that the association has all the support it needs.”

The SST regularly educated municipalities about how to support and communicate with religious minorities and promote religious tolerance on the local level, for example, in conjunction with the planned construction of a mosque in Karlstad.

The SST held courses throughout the year for foreign-educated religious leaders and religious youth leaders to inform them about their rights and responsibilities in accordance with national laws and norms and strengthen their ability to safeguard religious freedom in their communities.

An imam and a Christian leader separately expressed concern about calls from leading politicians for increased government control over government-supported independent schools run by religious groups, as well as calls by some politicians to ban such schools outright. The governing Social Democratic Party decided at a party congress in April to support a prohibition on all religious activities at schools receiving government funds, including independent schools. “I want all children to attend schools free of religious aspects,” stated Prime Minister Stefan Lofven. In April the leader of the Left Party, Jonas Sjostedt, called for a ban on all independent religious schools, adding that “it is completely wrong that schools exist in Sweden that indoctrinate children into a specific religion. To learn about religion is one thing – you should learn about all faiths. But to practice religion in school is another thing; it does not belong there.” The Liberal Party and the SD decided at their respective party congresses in November to support a prohibition on establishing new independent religious schools. Three SD Members of Parliament (MPs) – Jeff Ahl, Johan Nissinen, and Marcus Wiechel – introduced a bill in parliament in September to ban all such schools outright. By year’s end, the government had not taken any action to propose such a prohibition.

In April television broadcaster TV4 aired secretly recorded footage showing a government-funded independent school with a self-identified “Muslim profile” in Stockholm seemingly segregating its pupils by gender on a school bus. Some students and teachers said the school had separated the boys from the girls because the former were being disruptive. Reacting to the broadcast, Prime Minister

Lofven said, “I think this is despicable. This doesn’t belong in Sweden,” adding, “We take the bus together here, regardless if you’re a girl or a boy, woman or a man.” The school’s vice principal said it had no intention of separating the children by gender and said, “This is not something that has been known or sanctioned by school management.”

According to a survey conducted by the newspaper *Svenska Dagbladet* in April, there were 71 independent schools that self-identified as religious, of which 59 were Christian, 11 Muslim, and one Jewish.

Schools continued to sponsor visits to Holocaust sites such as Auschwitz as educational tools. Students participated in such trips regardless of religious background.

The SST distributed grants totaling SEK 88.8 million (\$10.84 million) to 42 religious groups in 2016, the latest year for which figures were available, consisting of SEK 53.5 million (\$53.5 million) for operating expenses, SEK 10.6 million (\$1.29 million) for theological training and spiritual care in hospitals, SEK 15 million (\$1.83 million) for building renovations and refugee assistance, and SEK 9.7 million (\$1.18 million) to install physical security measures and hire security personnel. Other than for operating expenses, the SST allocated funds based on grant applications for specific projects, which several religious groups often carried out jointly.

Financed in part by a grant of SEK 1.2 million (\$147,000) from the Agency for Youth and Civil Society (MUCF) and supported by the City of Malmo, the city’s Jewish congregation and NGO Xenofilia carried out training to combat anti-Semitism and other forms of religious intolerance in schools. A total of 256 teachers, librarians, student counselors, and youth leaders in Malmo and the broader Skane region participated in the project during the fall of 2016 and spring of 2017; 87 percent of participants stated the course had improved their ability to counteract anti-Semitism.

The MUCF distributed SEK 1.4 million (\$171,000) to civil society to combat anti-Muslim sentiment in 2016, the most recent year for which figures were available. For example, the MUCF awarded the NGO Fritidsforum SEK 811,000 (\$99,000) to counter anti-Muslim attitudes at youth recreation centers.

Some Muslim groups and the Official Council of Swedish Jewish Communities continued to state they considered the law requiring stunning of and/or

administration of anesthetics to animals prior to slaughter to be in conflict with their respective religious rituals. The Muslim community remained divided over whether the requirement conformed to halal procedures. The Jewish community reported the law effectively prevented the production of kosher meat. Most halal and all kosher meat was imported.

The Official Council of Swedish Jewish Communities, the U.S. NGO Anti-Defamation League (ADL), media, politicians, and others criticized the Gothenburg police for approving an application by the NRM for a protest march that would have passed within 500 yards of the Gothenburg synagogue on Yom Kippur (September 30). The Administrative Court of Gothenburg subsequently ruled to move the NRM's protest further from the synagogue.

There were multiple reports that representatives of the SD, the country's third largest political party, made denigrating comments about religious minorities. The newspaper *Expressen* and other media outlets reported in April that Susanne Larsen, the SD's party chairperson in Halland and a member of the Halmstad municipal council, had made denigrating comments about Muslims on social media and shared articles from anti-Muslim online sources. Larsen denied allegations that in 2014, she wrote, "Muslims are evil and dangerous. What the Swedish government is doing today with the construction of mosques is to recognize Islam as a religion, and then the Muslims have received what they need to continue their mission ... War is being imported to all of Europe in the form of Muslims." Larsen resigned in August, citing personal reasons, and the SD expelled her from the party in September.

In Fargelanda, the SD expelled a local politician and party member after public broadcaster *Radio Sweden* reported in February that he had made anti-Muslim comments on social media in December 2016: "We should begin by placing pig's blood and pig's offal in places where Muslims congregate. When they subsequently get angry and attack us, we can take the next step and claim self-defense as permitted by the law."

In January the SD forced a local politician to resign from the party after she told a newspaper she "hated all Muslims" and posted other derogatory comments about them online. The local SD leadership condemned her statements.

The SD expelled a local politician in Borlange in February after he referred to a party colleague as a "[expletive] Jew whore" in an audio clip that was circulated in the media.

In September Mattias Karlsson, an SD MP and the party's former interim leader, called the Church of Sweden's practice of occasionally inviting imams to read from the Quran in its churches "absurd, directly deplorable, and sickening." He added, "Reading from the Quran in a Christian church – when the Quran states that Christians should be killed – is almost comparable to reading aloud from *Mein Kampf* in a synagogue."

Speaking at the SD's party congress in November, Martin Strid, a local party representative from Borlange stated, "There is a scale from one to 100. At one end of the scale, you are 100 percent a human, humane. At the other end of the scale, you are 100 percent 'Mohammedan.' All Muslims are somewhere along that scale. If you are ISIS, you are pretty close to 100 percent 'Mohammedan.' If you are an ex-Muslim, you have come pretty far toward being fully human." He added, "[Islam] is a religion based on hatred, lies, and bondage ... The punishment for leaving Islam is death, the punishment for criticizing Islam is death, and the punishment for making jokes about Islam is death." SD leader Jimmie Akesson threatened to expel Strid from the party and called his statements "completely unacceptable" and "the worst thing I have ever heard in such a context." Strid left the SD shortly after the party congress, and members of the public reported him for hate speech to the police and the discrimination ombudsman.

An SD-owned online newspaper, *Samtiden*, featured authors who made denigrating comments about Islam and Muslims. For example, on May 29, columnist Olof Hedengren called Islam an "existential threat," and on April 25, he stated, "Islam is nondemocratic, homophobic, segregationist (us versus 'the infidels'), and demeaning to women."

In conjunction with International Holocaust Remembrance Day on January 27, Minister for Home Affairs Ygeman and Minister for Culture and Democracy Kuhnke spoke at separate events to commemorate victims of the Holocaust and call for religious tolerance. Prime Minister Lofven condemned the Holocaust during a visit to Auschwitz in June accompanied by a survivor.

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

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

According to an annual report by the NCCP, the number of hate crimes, which the NCCP classified as having a religious motivation, reported to the police declined by 24 percent in 2016, (the latest year for which figures were available) to 1,177, compared with 1,558 in 2015. According to the NCCP, “The statistics in the report can indicate how hate crimes are labeled as such in police reports and indicate structures among reported cases. However, the statistics say very little about the prevalence of hate crimes in society because most acts of crime are not reported to the police.”

Reported hate crimes with suspected anti-Muslim motives declined by 21 percent (to 439), those with suspected anti-Christian motives declined by 26 percent (to 289), and those with suspected anti-Semitic motives declined by 34 percent (to 182). As in previous years, Muslims were the most frequently targeted group among reported cases, and Jews were the most targeted relative to the size of the community. The number of reported incidents in the category “other antireligious hate crimes” declined by 19 percent (to 267). The NCCP categorized this group of incidents as those directed at religions other than Islam, Christianity, or Judaism; those between denominations of the same religion; and those related to conversions from one faith to another.

For each group in the NCCP report, the most common type of reported incident was making of illegal threats. The NCCP identified 38 anti-Muslim acts of violence (a decline of 17 percent), 32 reported anti-Christian acts of violence (no change from 2015), 10 reports of anti-Semitic violence (an increase of 25 percent), and 56 acts of violence in the category “other antireligious hate crimes” (an increase of 47 percent). Other types of reported incidents included discrimination, defamation, hate speech, and vandalism and graffiti.

According to the NCCP, the share of total reported hate crimes committed at housing facilities for asylum seekers increased from 1 percent in 2015 to 6 percent in 2016. The increase was particularly pronounced for reported anti-Christian incidents and those in the category “other antireligious hate crimes,” which increased from 7 percent to 13 percent and from 10 percent to 16 percent, respectively.

An NCCP poll released during the year illustrated the issue of underreported hate crimes. Of 11,600 Swedish residents who participated in the poll, 0.6 percent stated they were victims of religiously motivated hate crimes in 2015 – equivalent to approximately 47,000 individuals as a proportion of the country’s population. Only 26 percent of respondents who said they had been victims of such crime,

however, had reported the incident to the police, according to the poll. Of those incidents that were reported, the NCCP stated authorities charged suspects in only 4 percent of cases.

The NGO Open Doors released a report describing the results of a survey, conducted between February and May, on religious persecution of Christian migrants in the country. The report consisted of a survey among 123 individuals who arrived in the country after July 1, 2012, and had “experienced religiously motivated persecution in Sweden due to their Christian faith.” The study questioned victims about the types of religious harassment they had experienced; it was not a survey of the prevalence of religiously motivated incidents experienced by all migrants. Respondents reported they had been the victims of at least 512 acts of religious persecution because of their Christian faith since arriving in the country. Fifty-three percent of respondents had reportedly been victims of at least one act of religiously motivated violence, 45 percent had received at least one religiously motivated death threat, and 6 percent were reportedly victims of religiously motivated sexual assault. Other incidents of religious persecution included social exclusion (30 percent), insults (28 percent), and threats (26 percent).

The respondents identified the perpetrators as other refugees and migrants (in 415 incidents), interpreters (in 52 incidents), and others (in 45 incidents). Eighty-one percent of respondents reported the anti-Christian incidents taking place in housing operated by the Swedish Migration Agency. Of the 123 participants in the study, 75 percent were male and 85 percent were citizens of Iran, Afghanistan, or Syria. Converts were overrepresented in the study, constituting 77 percent of participants. According to the report, only 33 respondents reported at least one of the incidents to the police, and only 49 out of 512 incidents were reported to the police. The authors of the report consequently concluded the actual prevalence of religious persecution of Christian migrants was significantly more widespread than suggested by the number of incidents reported to the police.

On December 9, a group of 10-20 masked men threw flaming objects at the synagogue in Gothenburg. No one was injured in the attack, and the building did not catch fire. Members of a Jewish youth group hosting a party in a connecting building hid and alerted police. Police arrested three men for suspected arson, one of whom remained detained by the end of the year, and the other two remained suspects. The prosecutor in charge of the case said she believed the incident was a response to unrest in the Middle East following the recognition of Jerusalem by the United States as the capital of Israel. The community group Together for West

Göteborg arranged a demonstration on December 10, during which they “love bombed” the synagogue by decorating it with flowers and paper hearts.

On December 11, an unknown perpetrator threw two Molotov cocktails at a chapel in a Jewish cemetery in Malmö. There were no injuries, and the chapel did not sustain any damage.

On December 12, two young men issued a bomb threat to a security guard working at the offices of the Malmö Jewish congregation.

At a protest in Malmö on December 8 and 9 in response to the U.S. recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, protesters shouted “shoot all the Jews” and “the Jews should remember that Mohammed’s army will return,” according to public broadcaster Radio Sweden. The Jewish community in Malmö reported the statements to the police as hate speech.

Prime Minister Löfven condemned the incidents in Göteborg and Malmö in a statement issued on December 10, which read in part, “I am outraged at the attack on the Göteborg synagogue yesterday and at incitements of violence against Jews at a demonstration in Malmö. Anti-Semitism has no place in our Swedish society. The perpetrators will be brought to justice.” Prime Minister Löfven and other ministers also spoke at a demonstration of approximately 150 persons in support of religious rights and tolerance outside the Great Synagogue of Stockholm on December 20. Mayors Ann-Sofie Hermansson of Göteborg and Kent Andersson of Malmö condemned the incidents and issued their support for the Jewish communities in their respective cities. Minister for Culture and Democracy Alice Bah Kuhnke attended a “kippah (yarmulke) walk” in Malmö on December 16 in support of the city’s Jewish community. Minister for Coordination and Energy Ibrahim Baylan and Minister for the Environment Karolina Skog both visited the Göteborg synagogue to show the government’s support. Other members of the government, including Minister for Foreign Affairs Margot Wallström and Minister for Justice Morgan Johansson, also condemned the incidents in Göteborg and Malmö, as well as anti-Semitism more broadly.

The country’s largest newspapers condemned the attacks on the Jewish congregations in Göteborg and Malmö. The country’s largest broadsheet *Dagens Nyheter* stated in an editorial on December 10, “Anti-Semitism is a specific type of disease that must be strongly attacked wherever it spreads.” The country’s largest tabloid *Aftonbladet* stated in an editorial on December 11, “It is

important that the perpetrators in Gothenburg and Malmo are brought to justice. It must be clear to all that Sweden does not accept any form of anti-Semitism.”

The Jewish association in Umea closed its office in April and was looking for a new location in response to repeated neo-Nazi threats and harassment, which it tied, at least in part, to the NRM. For example, one member received Nazi literature in her home mailbox every year on January 27, International Holocaust Remembrance Day; individuals repeatedly placed stickers featuring Nazi imagery and links to the website of the NRM and painted swastikas and the phrase, “We know where you live,” on the association’s building. Association members received online threats, and neo-Nazis interrupted at least one of the association’s events. In addition, a board member’s car was vandalized in an incident that the police suspect may have been tied to his involvement with the association. Victims reported a number of the incidents, but police had made no arrests by year’s end. Speaking about the closure of the Jewish association’s office, a representative of the ADL said, “This situation simply cannot be acceptable in today’s Sweden.” The ADL wrote to Prime Minister Lofven, urging the government to do more ensure the protection of Jewish institutions in the country.

An imam in Malmo reported that members of his congregation were frequently victims of harassment on religious grounds, mainly in the form of hate speech. According to the imam, most victims did not report the incidents to the police due to a belief that the perpetrators would neither be identified nor brought to justice.

The newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* reported in May that suspected supporters of ISIS and other extremist groups had threatened and harassed Shia Muslims, including by making death threats.

The country’s largest Shia mosque, the Imam Ali Islamic Center in Jarfalla, was severely damaged on April 30 in what police labeled a suspected act of arson. A representative of the congregation stated, “There is hatred and threats against us because Islamic State considers us their greatest enemy, whereas rightwing extremists view Muslims as a homogenous group.” Police arrested and quickly released a suspect shortly after the incident and had made no subsequent arrests by year’s end. No one was injured in the fire.

A mosque in Orebro was destroyed in a fire on September 26. Police labeled the incident as suspected arson and arrested a suspect on the same day. The suspect admitted to the crime, but police stated they did not believe there was a political or religious motive, citing the suspect’s possible mental illness.

In response to the arson attack on the mosque in Orebro and to “a series of attacks on mosques since 2014 that are becoming more frequent and vicious,” 10 Muslim groups issued a joint statement in September. They “demanded that necessary action is taken to guarantee the safety of the country’s mosques and their visitors,” and added that Muslim groups “have repeatedly pointed out the threat and security risks the country’s mosques. The government agencies in question have responded with an unwillingness to take action.” A leader of a signatory group added in an interview with news service *TT*, “We think this is so serious that the authorities must act quickly and forcefully to stop similar attacks against mosques and other religious places of worship, such as synagogues and churches.”

The NRM was involved in a number of antireligious incidents during the year, and Jewish, Christian, and Muslim leaders described the increased activity of the group as a significant concern for members of their faiths. In September a court in Eskilstuna charged an NRM member with hate speech for raising a Nazi flag outside the Eskilstuna city hall to commemorate Adolf Hitler’s birthday on April 20. On September 30, Yom Kippur, approximately 500 supporters of the NRM marched through Gothenburg, clashing with police and approximately 10,000 counterdemonstrators. Jewish community members said their Yom Kippur observance was not disrupted. Police arrested 22 NRM supporters and on December 18, charged NRM leader Simon Lindberg with hate speech for raising his fist and yelling “Hell seger (Hail victory)” during the September 30 march.

On December 18, a court in Gothenburg convicted 11 counterdemonstrators, sentencing eight to prison, for throwing rocks and firecrackers at police during the NRM’s September 30 march in Gothenburg.

A group of self-professed NRM members disrupted the December 20 demonstration supporting religious rights in front of the Great Synagogue of Stockholm, which included the participation of Prime Minister Lofven and other political leaders, by yelling during a speech by Minister of Culture Alice Bah Kuhnke. Police arrested one man for hate speech.

On September 20, the Hudiksvall District Court convicted a man of hate speech for posting on social media a picture of himself wearing a T-shirt with the text “Death to ZOG [Zionist Occupation Government].” According to the magazine *Expo*, the man “had been involved in the white power movement for several years.”

An imam at a mosque in Helsingborg called Jews “the offspring of monkeys and swine” during a speech at a protest in July against Israeli policies in Jerusalem. A local Jewish group reported the imam to the police for hate speech.

In March the World Jewish Congress released a report analyzing anti-Semitism on social media in the country in 2016. According to the report, there were approximately 2,350 anti-Semitic posts on social media in 2016, a decline from previous years. The report stated the government had been actively working to prevent such occurrences. It reported most of the anti-Semitic discourse consisted of expressions of hatred against Jews and the use of anti-Semitic symbols.

Citing a lack of evidence, a court in Malmo acquitted a man with stated ISIS sympathies of terrorist charges in conjunction with a fire at a Shia mosque in the city in 2016.

In July NRM members vandalized an art installation in Visby commemorating victims of the Holocaust. The perpetrators posted pictures of the incident on their own online Twitter feed.

Individuals posted NRM leaflets on the Malmo synagogue on two separate occasions.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

The Charge d’Affaires and other embassy representatives continued to engage regularly with the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Culture, MPs, the SST, the office of the national coordinator to combat violent extremism, national and local police, and local government officials on issues related to religious freedom, including concerns of specific religious groups, reports of tensions between religious groups, reports of religiously motivated acts against immigrants and other minorities, and the increased activity of neo-Nazi groups.

Embassy officials spoke to Christian, Jewish, and Muslim representatives in Gothenburg, Malmo, Stockholm, Umea, and Uppsala about their security concerns and about threats to religious freedom more broadly.

Embassy officials made presentations on two occasions, in February and November, to a group of young evangelical Christian leaders on religious freedom in the country and abroad.