

# **SWEDEN 2018 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 more than doubled security funding for religious organizations. Christian organizations stated the Migration Agency denied asylum to Christians fleeing religious persecution. One Christian committed suicide in September after authorities denied his asylum application. The government gave funding to 43 religious groups and facilitated revenue collection for 17 of them. The prime minister and other politicians condemned anti-Semitism and other religious intolerance. There were numerous reports of anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim remarks by members of the Sweden Democrats and other political parties, and party members proposed bills to prohibit the Muslim call to prayer, nonmedical circumcision of boys, and students and teachers from wearing the hijab in school. The Social Democratic Party, Sweden Democrats, and Left Party proposed bans on independent religious schools.

There was a report of an attack against a Christian convert seeking asylum and reports of threats, harassment, and discrimination against Jews and Muslims and attacks on their property. An Uppsala University survey released in June found 52 percent of 106 Muslim congregations responding had received threats, and 45 percent reported at least one attack against their properties in 2017; 15 percent reported more than 10 incidents. Jewish-owned houses were set on fire on two occasions in Lund.

The Charge d’Affaires and other U.S. embassy representatives continued to meet with the Ministries of Justice and Culture, parliament, the Swedish Agency for Support to Faith Communities (SST), police, and local government on religious freedom issues, welcoming government efforts to improve security for religious groups and highlighting threats to member of some religious minorities, including immigrants. Embassy officials spoke about religious tolerance with Christian, Jewish, and Muslim representatives in Malmo and Stockholm. The Department of State Senior Advisor for Combating Anti-Semitism met with government officials and Jewish and Muslim leaders in Stockholm and Malmo, calling for more efforts to protect religious groups. The embassy hosted a function at which grandchildren of a Nazi SS officer and a Holocaust survivor spoke about religious tolerance.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the population at 10.0 million (July 2018 estimate). According to the Church of Sweden (Lutheran), approximately 59 percent of citizens are members. According to government statistics and estimates by religious groups, other Christian groups – including the Roman Catholic Church, Pentecostal movement, Missionary (or Missions) Church, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints – together total less than 7 percent of the population. The Pew Research Center estimated in 2016 that 8.1 percent of the population was 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, International Society for Krishna Consciousness, 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 investigates each case and issues a decision that is not legally binding. The decision includes recommendations to prevent future discrimination. The ombudsman takes some cases to court each year, in part to create legal precedent. The ombudsman can represent the individual making a complaint in the event of legal proceedings if he or she requests it.

The constitution states, “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 for religious groups to register or otherwise seek recognition. Faith communities registering with the SST, however, receive tax exemptions similar to those of nonprofit organizations and are eligible to receive government funding. 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 Tax Agency in exchange for a one-time fee of 75,000 Swedish kronor (\$8,400) and an annual fee of 21 kronor (\$2) per member per year. The Church of Sweden is exempted from the annual fee because 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. The Tax Agency subtracts a percentage of the member's gross income and distributes it to the religious organization. The member's contribution is not deductible from income tax. Seventeen religious organizations participate in the scheme, including the Church of Sweden, 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. 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. The law specifically exempts Jehovah's Witnesses from national military service. Other conscientious objectors may apply for nonarmed military service but are in practice not inducted into the military. 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 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 the government supports 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 incident.

Law enforcement authorities maintain statistics on hate crimes, including religiously motivated hate crimes, issuing them every two years. Law enforcement authorities may add a hate crime classification to an initial crime report or to existing charges during an investigation. Prosecutors determine whether to bring hate crime charges as part of the prosecution, and the defense has an opportunity to rebut the classification. In cases where the criminal act involves a hate crime, the penalties increase.

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

### **Government Practices**

Several Christian organizations – including the Christian Council of Sweden, which represents 27 Catholic, Free Church, Lutheran, and Orthodox Churches,

with 6.5 million members – criticized the Migration Agency for rejecting asylum applications of Christians – primarily converts – who said they risked religious persecution in their home countries. In addition, these critics said the methods used by the agency to evaluate asylum seekers’ Christian status required the applicants to demonstrate unreasonable knowledge of scripture and did not sufficiently take into account their participation in religious activities and references from their clergy.

In September an Afghan asylum seeker in Jonkoping who converted to Christianity in the country in 2016 committed suicide after authorities rejected his application for asylum on the grounds of religious persecution in his home country. The man’s pastor, Chatrine Carlson, told the newspaper *Dagen* that “his Christian faith was not deemed to be genuine. The authorities concluded, therefore, that he faced no risks upon his return and that he did not have a legitimate asylum claim. But he was open and clear about his Christian faith and he was part of our congregation’s network for converts.” Ulrik Josefsson, the chair of the man’s church in Jonkoping, told the same newspaper, “We have seen this guy participate in our activities. If his faith was not genuine, then my faith is not genuine.”

As part of its continuing “National Plan to Combat Racism, Similar Forms of Hostility, and Hate Crimes,” the government more than doubled its allocation from 2017 – to 22 million kronor (\$2.46 million) per year in 2018 and 2019 and 15 million kronor (\$1.68 million) annually thereafter – to improve the security of religious organizations and civil society. The government moved the responsibility of dispensing the funding from the SST to the Legal, Financial, and Administrative Services Agency. The move enabled a wider range of civil society organizations, including religiously oriented nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) not registered with the SST, to apply for funding to improve their security, for example, by purchasing security cameras and hiring security guards.

In October Chairman of the Official Council of Swedish Jewish Communities Aron Verstandig stated he welcomed the government’s increased allocation of funds in support of religious organizations’ security measures. He projected the initiative would ease the financial burden of security spending currently borne by the country’s Jewish congregations. In an interview with Israeli newspaper *Israel Hayom* in September, Verstandig described the nationalist right in the country as an indirect but palpable threat to the Jewish community and called on politicians to rein in neo-Nazis and their activities.

The Police Authority spent an additional 10 million kronor (\$1.12 million) to prevent and investigate hate crimes.

Some Christian leaders stated the government largely ignored cases of persecution against Christian asylum seekers and refugees during the year. Deputy Secretary-General of the Swedish Evangelical Alliance Jacob Rudenstrand and Director of the Christian NGO Open Doors Sweden Peter Paulsson said that Christian refugees faced persecution, particularly from Muslim refugees, that they were not safe in the country, and that the government needed to take measures to ensure the Christians' safety.

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 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.

In August the country's labor court ruled in favor of a Muslim woman who had filed a complaint via the Discrimination Ombudsman of anti-Muslim discrimination in the workplace. At a job interview in 2016, the woman refused to shake hands with a male supervisor, stating physical contact with nonfamily members of the opposite sex was contrary to her religious beliefs. As a result, she said she was no longer considered for employment. The labor court ruled the company violated her rights protected under Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights and ordered the company to pay her 40,000 kronor (\$4,500).

There were multiple reports that representatives of the Sweden Democrats – the country's third largest political party, which received 17.6 percent of the vote in the September parliamentary elections – made denigrating comments about religious minorities.

In response to criticism by Center Party leader Annie Loof for earlier comments he had made about minorities in the country, Sweden Democrats Member of Parliament (MP) and then-Second Deputy Speaker of Parliament Bjorn Soder repeated in an op-ed in the newspaper *Dagens Industri* in August his belief that there was a distinction between Jews and Swedes, because “the Sweden Democrats believe nationally recognized minorities should be exempted from our general goal of assimilation.” Official Council of Swedish Jewish Communities Chairman

Verstandig wrote in response in the same newspaper that the Sweden Democrats' policies "would make Jewish life in Sweden practically impossible. For example, the party wants to ban circumcision of newborn boys and make it illegal to import kosher meat." Political leaders, such as Prime Minister Stefan Lofven and Minister for Rural Affairs Sven-Erik Bucht, also condemned Soder's comments.

On August 31, the newspaper *Expressen* stated a number of Sweden Democrats candidates in the September 9 general election had made anti-Semitic comments on social media. Martin Sihlen, a candidate for the municipal government in Orkelljunga, questioned the number of persons killed in the Holocaust, referred to the "Jewish plague," and wrote online that "Hitler did not lie about the Jews," and "Hitler was not bad." Per Olsson, a candidate for the municipal government in Oskarshamn, shared an image of Anne Frank wearing a shirt reading "Coolest Jew in the Shower Room," as well as a photograph of Adolf Hitler. Raghu Jacobsen, a candidate for the municipal government in Stenungsund, wrote, "As long as the Rothschilds run the economy, and as such modern slavery on this planet, there will be anti-Semitism." He also shared an image stating, "What's the difference between a cow and the Holocaust? You can't milk a cow for 70 years straight." The Sweden Democrats expelled the three candidates in response to media reports about their activities online, and none of them was elected.

According to a June 19 article in *Expressen*, Mikael Bystedt – a staffer for the Sweden Democrats in parliament, candidate for local and parliamentary elections, and deputy party chair in Taby – made anti-Muslim comments on social media. He compiled a list of measures "to save Sweden" that included "destroying all traces of Islam, mosques, etc.," "stopping all immigration of Muslims," and "using military force and expulsion of all Muslims who object to this." In response to reports of arson attacks against mosques in London, Bystedt stated, "Damn good work! Let us hope this spreads to Sweden like wildfire." The Sweden Democrats subsequently expelled Bystedt from the party, and he was not elected.

Chairman of the Official Council of Swedish Jewish Communities Verstandig said in September he was concerned by the gains the Sweden Democrats made in the September parliamentary elections. He also described the nationalist right in the country as an indirect but palpable threat to the Jewish community and called on politicians to rein in neo-Nazis and their activities.

Members of other political parties also made negative remarks about religious minorities. A Christian Democrats candidate for the local election in Sundbyberg, Erik Ivarsson, wrote on social media, "The Muslims are raping our nations. Time

to bring back the death sentence?” reported *Expressen* in July. The Christian Democrats subsequently expelled Ivarsson, and party leader Ebba Busch Thor called his statement “completely unacceptable.” Ivarsson was not elected.

Daniel Bystedt, a Liberal Party candidate for the local election in Linköping, made a number of denigrating statements about Muslims and Islam on social media, according to a report by *Expressen* in July. He wrote, “Islam is the greatest threat of our time. The only solution is to send back every Muslim. Our civilization will perish if we do not,” “Islam is a poison that is destroying our society,” “Any sound Swede dislikes everything connected to Islam,” and “I cannot understand how a woman can voluntarily become a Muslim. It must be caused by some psychological disorder.” Bystedt subsequently renounced his membership in the Liberal Party, and he was not elected.

*Expressen* reported in August there were ties between the Left Party and Grupp 194, an NGO based in the Skåne region the report said spread anti-Semitic images online. For example, the group posted a cartoon of a Jew drinking blood and eating a child. The leader of Grupp 194 ran unsuccessfully as a Left Party candidate for parliament in the September general election, and Left Party leader Jonas Sjöstedt spoke in at least two Grupp 194 events in 2012 and 2014. The Left Party’s Skåne branch responded to *Expressen* that “the party had no formal cooperation with Grupp 194, but some members of Grupp 194 were also active in the Left Party. We both support a free Palestine and oppose anti-Semitism.”

In August *Expressen* also reported the municipality of Malmö gave Grupp 194 and two other NGOs 132,000 kronor (\$14,800) from public funds in 2017 for a project to promote public safety on the city’s streets. A city councilman for the Sweden Democrats, Nima Gholam Ali Pour, stated the municipal government should not have funded Grupp 194 because, among other things, it had spread anti-Semitic images.

During the campaign for the September elections, the Social Democratic Party, the Left Party, and the Sweden Democrats Party campaigned for a proposal to ban independent religious schools. The Liberal Party advocated a prohibition on establishing new, or expanding existing, independent religious schools. “We consider it a given that no student should be impacted by religion at school. Every child should choose freely whether or not to have faith,” said Anna Ekström, Social Democratic Minister for High Schools on the party’s website. “I grew up in a country in which religious influence and gender segregation were part of every school. I will never accept that the oppression I and many others have fled finds its



way into Sweden’s schools,” said Iranian-born Minister for Civil Affairs Ardalan Shekarabi, a Social Democrat, also on the party website. Christian, Jewish, and Muslim leaders expressed concern about the proposals, arguing such measures would constitute an infringement on religious freedom.

On March 10, the government launched a nonbinding study to recommend, according to then-Minister of Education Gustaf Fridolin, new laws and regulations on religious activities in all schools, including independent religious schools. The government instructed the civil servant authors of the study to present their results by May 31, 2019.

The Sweden Democrats continued to advocate local and national bans on the Muslim call to prayer. After police in Vaxjo granted a mosque permission to conduct a call to prayer on Fridays, the party’s Vaxjo branch launched a petition for a referendum to ban the call to prayer in the municipality. By year’s end, Vaxjo had not held the referendum and the mosque continued its call to prayer. Sweden Democrats MP and Party Spokesperson for Justice Affairs Adam Marttinen stated in May “Not only will we appeal the decision to permit the call to prayer in Vaxjo, it should be made impossible in the entire country.” In October Sweden Democrats MPs Richard Jomshof, Robert Stenkvisst, and Carina Stahl Herrstedt introduced a bill in parliament to institute a national ban, which was defeated in committee.

Christian Democrats party leader Ebba Busch Thor and then-Member of the European Parliament Lars Adaktusson stated in an op-ed in *Expressen* on March 15 that “Regular and institutionalized [Islamic] calls to prayer are not compatible with our values. ... We can under no circumstances accept calls to prayer in Sweden.” Official Council of Swedish Jewish Communities Chairman Verstandig and Catholic Cardinal Anders Arborelius separately criticized the Christian Democrats for opposing the Islamic call to prayer.

Sweden Democrats MP and Party Secretary Richard Jomshof introduced a bill in parliament in October that would prohibit circumcision of boys for nonmedical purposes. “I ask myself how people can talk about freedom of religion while forcing a religious identity on the child, violating its integrity, and exposing the child to an irreversible procedure that causes lifelong harm,” Jomshof wrote in the bill. Parliament defeated the bill in committee.

Jomshof introduced another bill in parliament in October that would ban “the use of Muslim veils in Swedish schools up to ninth grade, applicable to both teachers

and students.” He wrote in the bill that “the Muslim veil is an Islamic symbol of religious subservience and forced separation of men and women ... [it] goes against everything our gender equal, democratic, and secular society stands for.” Parliament defeated the bill in committee.

On June 25, the Gothenburg District Court convicted three men of “serious unlawful threats” and “inflicting gross damage” for throwing Molotov cocktails at a local synagogue in December 2017. The court sentenced two of the men to two years in prison and the other one to 15 months. The three were part of a larger group that threw the incendiary weapons but were the only ones authorities were able to identify. The court ruled the incident a hate crime intended to “threaten, harm, and violate the Jewish people,” and handed down more severe sentences as a result. Chairman of the Jewish congregation of Gothenburg Allan Stutzinsky welcomed the verdict, stating, “It was important that the case was tried and that we have a verdict written down from which others can learn.”

The three perpetrators of the attack on the synagogue were asylum seekers, two from Syria and one from the Palestinian Territories. The district court ordered the Palestinian deported but judged Syria too unsafe to expel the two other men there. On September 12, the Court of Appeal for Western Sweden cancelled the deportation of the Palestinian, arguing that “given Israel’s possible interest in the case and the uncertain situation... there is good reason to believe the basic human rights of [the perpetrator] would not be guaranteed should he be deported to Palestine.” The Ambassador of Israel to Sweden, Ilan Ben-Dov, expressed his “deep concern” with the decision, arguing that it “excuses, and therefore legitimizes, the actions of a violent anti-Semite as acceptable political criticism by stating that his hostility is not towards Jews in general but due to his vengeful attitude towards Israel.” In October the prosecutor-general appealed the decision not to extradite the Palestinian to the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court agreed in late October to hear the case but had not done so by year’s end.

The SST continued to conduct a series of courses around the country open to all faiths, including religious groups not registered with the SST, aimed at strengthening the civil engagement capacity of minority religious communities and promoting interfaith cooperation. New course topics included family law for religious leaders, female empowerment for minority women, and NGO management and accountability. The SST also conducted interfaith scriptural reasoning courses, including sessions for women only, in which Jews, Christians, and Muslims read and discussed passages from their respective scriptures together.

The SST continued to fund, publish, and promote publications aimed at educating the public about religious minorities, including books on the history of Islam in the country and on the country's Alawite, Alevi, Druze, Mandaean, and Yazidi communities. In addition, the SST held lectures on denominations within Islam, targeted at academics and government officials.

The Media Council initiated a No Hate Speech Movement campaign, which included targeted efforts to stop anti-Semitic conspiracy theories by teaching youths to be critical of information posted online and by providing teachers with material to use in the classroom. The government allocated five million kronor (\$559,000) annually for 2018-20 to strengthen opportunities for study visits to Holocaust memorial sites, which allowed more students and teachers to visit them. The government also said it would invest 15 million kronor (\$1.68 million) on projects over three years to raise awareness about Nazi crimes against Jews and other groups. "Nazism and racism are growing and spreading. We are therefore launching this investment so that more youth can be equipped with knowledge to tackle the antidemocratic forces that are growing in Sweden," then-Culture Minister Alice Bah Kuhnke said in a statement.

The government continued to fund the Living History Forum, a public authority "commissioned to work with issues related to tolerance, democracy, and human rights, using the Holocaust and other crimes against humanity as its starting point." The government allocated 46 million kronor (\$5.15 million) to the forum, a more than threefold increase over the previous year, which provided lesson plans, books, and other resources for teachers. Topics covered included anti-Semitism, Holocaust remembrance, ethnic and religious conflicts in the Balkans, and critical reading of history.

Schools continued to sponsor visits to Holocaust sites such as Auschwitz-Birkenau as educational tools. Students participated in such trips regardless of religious background. According to a study the Living History Forum released in June, 44,000 Swedes visited Auschwitz-Birkenau in 2017, the most on record. The study concluded most of these visitors were likely students and other young people. The Living History Forum provided education material and guidance for teachers to facilitate visits to Auschwitz-Birkenau and similar locations.

The SST distributed 82 million kronor (\$9.17 million) in grants to 43 religious groups during the year for operating expenses, theological training, spiritual care in hospitals, building renovations, and refugee assistance. In addition, the SST

distributed funds for specific projects in response to grant requests, which different religious groups often carried out jointly.

The Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society (MUCF) provided grants to civil society organizations working to combat religious intolerance. Grants included 925,000 kronor (\$103,000) to the Jewish Youth Association for the project Ung Dialog, which fights anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim sentiments through interfaith dialogue. MUCF also gave 2,728,375 kronor (\$305,000) to the Expo Foundation to combat intolerance and racism, including religious intolerance.

Members of the Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM), widely described as a neo-Nazi group, ran as a political party in the general election in September. The organization received 2,106 votes, or 0.03 percent, in the parliamentary elections and failed to gain any seats in local elections. The organization carried out a large number of rallies and public meetings around the country.

Prime Minister Lofven commemorated the Holocaust in a speech in the Stockholm synagogue on January 27, Holocaust Remembrance Day. In addition to condemning the Holocaust and present-day anti-Semitism and paying tribute to those killed, Lofven stated, “I want each and every one of you to know this: Ensuring your safety – as well as your constitutional right to practice your religion, embrace your culture, be who you are, live openly, safely, and freely with your children and those you love – is the foremost task facing me and this country...Anti-Semitism will be fought using all the power of Swedish society.”

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

### **Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom**

Although the government continued to collect statistics on hate crimes, it had not released figures for 2017 or 2018 by year’s end. In past years authorities said most victims of hate crimes did not report them to police.

In February the online newspaper *Varlden Idag* reported two men attacked a man exiting a church service in Karlstad. According to the newspaper’s sources, the victim was an Afghan man who had received death threats from fellow asylum seekers for converting to Christianity. Police labeled the incident an assault and had made no arrests by year’s end.

Members of the NRM protested in front of the Sweden-Israel Friendship Association in Visby in July. The NRM members pushed to the ground a woman representing the association and attempted to cover the Israeli flag with a banner. The woman was not injured.

The Jewish community in Stockholm held a meeting in September that included an emergency briefing on the threats facing Jews in the country.

An imam based in Malmo reported in September that members of his congregation had been victims of verbal harassment, insults, and threats, including death threats, during the year. The imam did not know whether victims had reported the incidents to the police. He also stated unknown assailants broke windows at the congregation's place of worship during the year.

An imam based in the Stockholm region reported in October that some Muslim women avoided wearing the hijab in public for fear of harassment.

A study published in June by Professor Mattias Gardell of Uppsala University titled "The Safety and Vulnerability of Mosques and Muslim Congregations 2018," found many Muslim organizations had been subjected to threats and attacks against their property in 2017. Of 106 Muslim congregations that responded to the survey, 52 percent said they had received threats, 45 percent said they had experienced at least one physical attack or vandalism, including the writing of graffiti, against mosques or other buildings they used, and 15 percent had been targets of more than 10 incidents. For all years through the end of 2017, 60 percent of congregations reported being targeted at some point, and a quarter reported more than 10 incidents. Arson or attempted arson constituted 18 percent of incidents, rock throwing 19 percent, broken windows 28 percent, and graffiti 31 percent. In addition, two thirds of respondent organizations had received some form of threat, more than half of which involved threats of violence. Fifty-two percent of congregations had received threats in 2017 alone. The study concluded "the prevalence of attacks and threats against Muslim congregations may have contributed to the difficulties many of them face in finding a company willing to insure their buildings." A quarter of respondents, half of whom cited high prices and an unwillingness by insurance companies to provide them with services given the risk of arson and other types of attacks, stated their facilities lacked insurance. Eighty-one percent of respondents agreed that "mosques and Muslim associations in Sweden face some form of threat."

On two separate occasions, the first during the summer and the second on October 8, unknown assailants set on fire two houses in Lund belonging to Jewish residents, one of whom was a local politician. No one was injured in either incident. The politician reportedly had received threats in writing prior to the arson. In a statement issued on October 10, the Official Council of Swedish Jewish Communities said the victims had both been active “in various Jewish contexts” and suffered harassment before the attacks. The statement added, “There is a strong suspicion that these attacks are directed at these particular individuals because they are Jews.” Minister for Culture and Democracy Alice Bah Kuhnke condemned the attacks and said the government would “continue to do everything in our power to protect those who are threatened.”

The Jewish association in Umea officially disbanded in May. The association had closed its office in 2017 following repeated neo-Nazi threats and harassment and had failed to find a safe and suitable new location. The former chairman of the association, Carinne Sjoberg, told public television broadcaster *SVT*, “There are too many threats against Jews in Umea, and our members have to think about their safety.” Sjoberg said the association had reported several incidents to the police, but authorities had not made any arrests.

By year’s end police had arrested no suspects in the suspected 2017 arson of the Imam Ali Islamic Center in Jarfalla, the largest Shia mosque in the country. A Shia leader reported harassment directed at his congregation during the year came primarily from far-right groups.

In October the newspaper *Aftonbladet* reported a senior physician at the public Karolinska University Hospital made anti-Semitic comments at work, posted anti-Semitic images on social media, and discriminated against Jewish colleagues, for example, by denying them opportunities to participate in medical conferences and to perform research and surgery. The Simon Wiesenthal Center subsequently included the incidents and the hospital’s response on its list of the Top Ten Worst Anti-Semitic Incidents 2018. “We are shocked by the lethargic response of Karolinska to the cancer of anti-Semitism. So far, powerful bigots have been protected and life-saving Jewish physicians are left twisting in the winds of hate,” stated Rabbi Abraham Cooper of the Simon Wiesenthal Center. In response to the allegations, the hospital hired a law firm to conduct an investigation; its report was scheduled for publication in early 2019. The accused physician took a paid leave of absence and his supervisor resigned.

In December the European Union’s Agency for Fundamental Rights (EU-FRA) released its second survey of Jewish experiences and perceptions of anti-Semitism. EU-FRA targeted Jewish populations through community organizations, Jewish media, and social networks; 1,193 individuals who identified themselves as Jewish residents of Sweden responded to the online survey. Twenty-eight percent said they had witnessed other Jews being physically attacked, insulted, or harassed in the previous 12 months, and 30 percent reported being harassed over the same period. Seventeen percent of respondents said they had felt discriminated against because of their religion or belief; 91 percent thought anti-Semitism had increased over the previous five years.

According to a poll conducted by pollster Novus on June 7-13, 61 percent of voters supported a ban on the Islamic call to prayer, 28 percent opposed it, and 11 percent were undecided.

On January 19 and March 21, an unidentified person painted swastikas on the Stockholm Grand Mosque. On March 22, on its Facebook page, the congregation wrote, “We have been victim to these types of attacks, as well as more aggressive types of attacks, for many years. Our members and visitors are worried and wonder why the government does not adopt a stricter tone against Islamophobia and hate crimes directed at Muslims.” The youth wing of the Liberal Party arranged a demonstration of support for religious tolerance outside the mosque the day after the second attack.

In the context of an interfaith project in Malmo titled *Amanah*, Imam Salahuddin Barakat and Rabbi Moshe David HaCohen spoke to more than 1,000 students throughout the year about religious tolerance and conducted interfaith workshops to discuss religious texts and spiritual queries. The Malmo municipality and the SST provided some funding for the project.

#### **Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement**

The Charge d’Affaires and other U.S. embassy representatives continued to engage regularly with the Ministries of Justice and Culture, parliament, the SST, police, and local government officials on issues related to religious freedom. The embassy welcomed the government’s ongoing efforts to improve security for all religious groups and particularly highlighted the threats faced by some religious minorities and vulnerable groups such as immigrants.

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

The Charge d’Affaires visited the Stockholm Grand Mosque in January to express U.S. solidarity with, and support for, the Muslim community after someone painted swastikas on the building.

The Department of State Senior Advisor for Combating Anti-Semitism visited Malmo and Stockholm in October. She met Jewish and Muslim leaders in Malmo, the Official Council of Swedish Jewish Communities in Stockholm, representatives of the Ministry of Culture and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Living History Forum, the SST, and an MP. She called for greater protection of religious groups and increased efforts to promote and safeguard religious freedoms.

The embassy hosted a function in September at which a granddaughter of a Nazi SS officer and a granddaughter of a Holocaust survivor discussed their joint National Public Radio program series in the United States titled *Here and Now*. The speakers discussed how learning from the history of the Holocaust could promote religious tolerance. Guests included representatives of the government, civil society, religious groups, and the media.