

SWEDEN 2022 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 law provides a mechanism for registering complaints of discrimination based on religion. There are penalties for hate speech. Education on the major world religions is compulsory in public and private schools.

A social media campaign, which the government described as disinformation, accused the country’s Social Services of kidnapping Muslim children. Imams condemned the campaign but stated Muslims’ concerns needed to be heard. Riots ensued in April in six locations as police permitted a Danish-Swedish political activist to hold anti-Muslim demonstrations in several cities with the purpose of burning the Quran. The government held consultations with civil society and religious leaders on the proposed introduction of democracy criteria in order to be eligible to receive state funding. In December, the Supreme Administrative Court overturned two municipalities’ 2020 bans on hijabs, burqas, niqabs, and other face- and hair-covering garments for students and employees in preschools and elementary schools, stating the bans contravened the constitutional provision of freedom of expression. In June, parliament passed legislation that required private entities establishing independent schools to register if the schools had a religious orientation and for all schools to report denominational education elements to guardians. The government decided not to move forward with a proposed ban on establishment of new independent schools with religious orientations.

Some politicians from the Sweden Democrats (SDP), the second-largest political party in parliament, made denigrating comments about Jews and Muslims. Then prime minister Magdalena Andersson and other politicians condemned antisemitism and religious intolerance in response to such comments. In August, the Labor Court determined that New Karolinska Hospital had no grounds to fire a Jewish doctor after he made allegations of antisemitism. The Equality Ombudsman (DO) initiated separate inquiries into two elementary schools following allegations of antisemitic harassment against two 12-year-old students.

Media outlets reported several mosques and churches conducted conversion therapy on their lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) members, which was condemned by the then prime minister. In the spring, the Sveriges Television news outlet reported unknown persons vandalized 33 Orthodox Christian and Muslim graves in Malmö. In August, the Church of Sweden decided to temporarily close all its churches after repeated vandalism. Jewish leaders stated their community registered increased antisemitic messages on social media connected to the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's war against Ukraine. On January 26, the eve of International Holocaust Remembrance Day, the Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM) vandalized a government building with antisemitic messages. In June, authorities charged Malmö imam Basem Mahmoud with hate speech for spreading antisemitic messages via a sermon uploaded in 2020. A March report by the DO found that most discrimination based on religion took place in work settings, with 100 of 250 randomly selected cases affecting Muslims. During the year, courts convicted leading NRM members for hate speech directed against Jews. On October 23, the then archbishop of the Church of Sweden, Antje Jackelen, issued a second apology to the country's indigenous Sami community for what she said were centuries of mistreatment perpetrated by the Church of Sweden.

The Ambassador and other embassy representatives met with the Ministries of Justice and Foreign Affairs, the Swedish Agency for Support to Faith Communities (SST), parliament, police, and local government officials on religious freedom issues, supporting government efforts to improve security for religious groups and highlighting threats to members of some religious minorities, including Muslim immigrants. The Ambassador hosted an interfaith reception in May. The Ambassador met with leading members of the Jewish community in May and September to discuss the problems facing the community. In October, the Ambassador attended a ceremony in which the Church of Sweden delivered its second apology to the Sami people. Embassy officials underscored the importance of religious tolerance with Christian, Jewish, and Muslim representatives in Malmö, Gothenburg, Umeå, and Stockholm.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the population at 10.5 million (midyear 2022). According to the Church of Sweden (Lutheran), approximately 56 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 (Church of Jesus Christ), together total less than 6 percent of the population. The Finnish Orthodox Church and Georgian Orthodox Church are also present in the country. According to a 2016 Pew Research Center estimate (the most recent available), 8.1 percent of the population is Muslim, mainly located in the urban areas of Malmö, Stockholm, and Gothenburg. According to the Official Council of Swedish Jewish Communities, Jews number approximately 15,000, concentrated mainly in larger cities, including Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Malmö. Humanists Sweden is the largest humanist organization, and in 2016, it claimed to have 4,500 members.

Smaller religious communities include Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs, Zoroastrians, Mandeans, and members of the Church of Scientology, Word of Faith, International Society for Krishna Consciousness, and Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (Unification Church).

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution provides for "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 regarding discrimination for religious reasons in the private sector, in the government, or by a government agency or authority must be filed with the DO. The ombudsman investigates each case and issues a decision, which 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 DO may 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.”

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 prison sentence of up to four years, depending on the incident’s severity.

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.

There is no legal requirement for religious groups to register or otherwise seek recognition. Only those faith communities registered with the SST, however, are eligible to receive government funding and tax exemptions similar to those of nonprofit organizations. 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 has operated in the country for at least five years, has a clear and stable structure, is able to function independently, serves at least 3,000 persons, and has several locations in the country.

According to the law, animal slaughter must be preceded by stunning 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 circumcisers, including *mohels* (individuals who conduct ritual Jewish circumcisions), to perform the operations on boys younger than two months but also requires the presence of a medical doctor who must administer anesthesia to the infant.

The government facilitates fund raising 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 (\$7,000) 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 other religious groups participating in the program, does not receive financial support from the SST. Only religious groups registered with the SST may participate in the program. Religious groups 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. Nineteen religious organizations participate in the plan: Mission Covenant Church of Sweden, Swedish Alliance Mission, Roman Catholic Church, Baptist Union of Sweden, Evangelic Free Church in Sweden, The Salvation Army, United Methodist Church of Sweden, Pentecostal Movement, Syrian-Orthodox Church, Bosniak Islamic Association, Syrian Orthodox Archdiocese, Hungarian Protestant Church, Uniting Church in Sweden, Union of Islamic Cultural Centers, United Islamic Associations of Sweden, Swedish Muslim Federation, Islamic Shi'ite Association of Sweden, Islamic Fatwa Council of Sweden, and Swedish Islamic Society.

The government provides publicly funded grants to registered religious groups through the SST. 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 that are compliant with religious dietary restrictions. Each military district has a chaplain. According to the law, chaplains may be of any religious affiliation, but all current 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 members of Jehovah's Witnesses from national military service. Other conscientious objectors may apply for unarmed 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 designed by the National Agency for Education that encompasses lessons regarding 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 adherence to government guidelines on core academic curricula.

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

Government Practices

In late January, news sites and social media influencers located in the Middle East reported on YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram that the country's Social Services was kidnapping Muslim children and placing them with non-Muslim foster families who forced them to eat pork and drink alcohol. In light of the accusations, on February 7 and February 13, demonstrations urging politicians to review child-care laws occurred in Stockholm, Malmö, and Gothenburg. On February 11, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs posted a Twitter thread refuting the allegations and detailing the national legislation for social services and child care. The ministry stated the original videos were part of an online disinformation campaign with origins in radical Islam that falsely claimed Muslim children and families were subjected to abuse by the authorities. The Imam Council also condemned the social media campaign. The Imam Council, together with the United Islamic Associations of Sweden, urged imams to counter the disinformation by spreading correct information regarding the Social Services. The organizations also stated that Muslim parents' concerns needed to be considered and demanded an investigation into any suspected misconduct by the Social Services. On February 16, the political party Nuance accused the Social Services of discrimination against Muslim families and demanded actions against Social Services as part of the party's election campaign.

On April 14-17, riots took place in six cities in response to anti-Muslim demonstrations led by Rasmus Paludan, a Danish-Swedish far-right extremist. Paludan, leader of the Danish party Hard Line, had received permits to hold

several demonstrations that included burning the Quran as part of an “election tour” during Ramadan. On April 14, Paludan burned a Quran in Jönköping. Later that day, Paludan had planned a demonstration in Linköping, but officials cancelled it when police arrested Paludan for inciting riots. Despite the cancellations, riots ensued in Linköping and neighboring Norrköping as a reaction to the planned demonstrations. On April 15, riots broke out in the Stockholm suburb of Rinkeby and in Örebro as reactions to planned demonstrations. On April 16, police moved a Landskrona demonstration to Malmö as a safety precaution, but riots ensued in both Landskrona and Malmö. On April 17, riots again took place in Linköping and Norrköping as Paludan announced a new Quran burning, for which he never appeared. Police cited the constitutional rights of assembly and freedom of speech to justify their issuance of permits for the April 14-16 demonstrations.

Police reported that approximately 150-200 persons engaged in violent activities in each of Linköping, Norrköping, and Örebro during the April 14-17 events. Rioters reportedly threw stones and Molotov cocktails and set fire to vehicles and buildings. Police reported that the rioters injured at least 104 police officers and 14 civilians and damaged 20 police cars. Police arrested an estimated 50 persons for attempted murder, aggravated assault, inciting riots, and violence against an official. On April 18, Police Commissioner Anders Thornberg said in an interview with the *Expressen* newspaper that police had been the rioters’ target, not Paludan. On April 15, then prime minister Andersson condemned the violence, but she stated that persons could express their opinions, whether good or bad, since free expression was part of democracy.

Several governments, social media influencers, and nonstate actors in the Middle East condemned the country for granting Paludan demonstration permits. On April 21, then State Secretary for Foreign Affairs Robert Rydberg held a briefing on constitutional rights for approximately 30 ambassadors from Muslim-majority countries. Media outlets reported Rydberg also highlighted the constitutional right to hold peaceful counterdemonstrations against individuals like Paludan.

Muslim community and religious leaders condemned the burning of the Quran and the ensuing riots. In an interfaith effort, Church of Sweden and Muslim organizations organized an April 14 joint prayer in Jonkoping. The Imam Ali Center in Stockholm began collecting signatures on April 19 for a petition to

parliament to condemn the burning of Qurans and to consider legislation to prevent insults toward religious groups and holy scriptures. At year's end, the petition had not yet been submitted to parliament, pending additional signatures. Ammar Daoud, communication manager of one of Malmö's largest mosques, commented to the *Dagens Nyheter* newspaper on April 23 that the riots generated "enormous dissatisfaction" among many of the country's Muslims.

As of September 21, district courts in Linköping, Norrköping, Stockholm, and Örebro had convicted 15 persons for their involvement in the riots on charges of rioting, violence against public safety personnel, and violence against officials. The Malmö police initiated an investigation of Paludan for agitation against an ethnic group on April 20. On June 29, the nongovernmental organization (NGO) Civil Rights Defenders submitted four reports of hate speech to police in Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Malmö against Paludan for burning the Quran.

On November 15, the government recalled the previous government's proposed legislation that would require faith communities and civil society organizations to meet "democracy criteria" to be eligible for state grants. The Minister for Social Affairs Jakob Forssmed stated that the government had listened to critiques from civil society and religious leaders on the previous government's proposal. On December 13, Minister Forssmed convened 28 civil society and religious leaders to receive suggestions on democracy criteria for state grants. If adopted, the proposed legislation would permit the government or SST to deny or withdraw funding if a faith community's congregation members or representatives used violence, coercion, or threats against a person; violated children's or a congregation member's rights; discriminated against individuals or groups; otherwise violated the principle of the equal value of all human beings; or opposed the democratic system of government. Under the proposal, SST would assume government decision-making authority for state funding, enabling the appeal of grant decisions. The proposal also stated that the faith communities' main funding should come from domestic members to be eligible for government grants. Representatives of faith communities had affirmed the value of democracy criteria but expressed concern regarding how the criteria would be interpreted and how religious freedom should be safeguarded. Pentecostal leader Daniel Alm described the proposal as "another religion-critical move" but said communities also needed to confront antidemocratic movements within their organizations.

On December 8, the Supreme Administrative Court overturned the Staffanstorp and Skurup municipalities' bans on hijabs, burqas, niqabs, and other head- and face-covering garments for students and employees in preschool and elementary school, stating the bans contravened the constitutional provision on freedom of expression.

On June 7, the parliament held a debate on approximately 100 proposals from 2021 related to religious freedom and liberal rights. The Sweden Democrats and the Christian Democrats submitted several separate proposals on banning the Islamic call to prayer. The Moderate, Christian Democrat, and Sweden Democrat political parties submitted separate proposals on bans on wearing hijabs and niqabs. Parliament voted to reject all proposals, with the exception of one that stated the government should establish a committee to prevent foreign funding of religious activities aimed at spreading extremism and nondemocratic messages.

Jewish and Muslim representatives reported a continuing discussion with the National Board on Health and Welfare and the Health and Social Care Inspectorate on how the required use of anesthesia when conducting circumcisions complicated the procedures for the Jewish community. All six health care regions continued to offer circumcision, which was performed almost exclusively in religious communities, although the National Board of Health and Welfare had no statistics on how many children were circumcised during the year.

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 religious practices. The Muslim community remained divided over whether the requirement conformed to halal procedures. The Jewish community reported the law effectively prevented the domestic production of kosher meat. Most halal meat and all kosher meat continued to be imported.

On June 16, a broad majority in parliament passed a law to increase control of denominational elements in the education system, based on recommendations from a 2020 government inquiry. The law introduced a requirement for school principals to report denominational elements to guardians and students, and it stated such elements should be voluntary and separated from school lessons.

Private entities would be required to report if a new independent school had a religious orientation, without specifying which religious orientation. Principals of existing schools with religious orientation would have to report the school's religious orientation if they had not done so previously. The law was scheduled to come into force on January 2, 2023.

On December 28, Minister for Schools, Lotta Edholm, stated the government would not move forward with the previous government's proposed ban on establishing new independent schools with religious orientation. Instead, the government tasked the Swedish Schools Inspectorate to conduct more frequent, unannounced, and tougher inspections with respect to extremism and Islamism in all schools, according to a *Dagens Nyheter* interview. The minister said this would be a more efficient way to combat extremism and Islamism in schools than the previously proposed ban. The minister said the School Inspectorate would hand in an assessment by November 25, 2023, which the government would review to consider if other measures to combat extremism and Islamism would be necessary. In September, the Council of Legislation criticized the former government's proposed ban and proposed other measures such as increased inspections that it believed would be more effective than the proposed ban. The former government's proposal, based on a 2020 government inquiry, had proposed a ban on establishing such schools starting in 2024 and had recommended that no approvals be granted to private entities that wished to operate a faith-based preschool class, compulsory (elementary) school, compulsory special needs school, upper secondary school, upper secondary special needs school, or after-school center. Representatives from Jewish and Christian communities had said they continued to believe the ban to be an attempt by the government to fight radical Islam rather than a means of targeting their communities. They had also suggested that stricter controls from the School Inspectorate would be more efficient than a ban. The independent National Agency for Education estimated 9,400 students, or approximately one percent of all elementary and preschool students, were enrolled in the 72 registered schools having a religious orientation in 2020.

On May 27, the SDP government stated it wanted to review foreign funding of faith communities and investigate regulations to restrict foreign influence and extremism. On July 28, the government asked SST to investigate the prevalence of foreign funding to faith communities. Muslim leaders expressed concerns that

stricter legislation would complicate the process for their organizations to open and maintain bank accounts. Imams said several mosques experienced problems with opening bank accounts since money laundering laws required transparency on the origin of cash transactions, such as donations. The Moderate Party, the Christian Democrats, and the Sweden Democrats stated they wanted to ban foreign funding of faith communities. Jewish and Christian leaders stated they believed the proposal targeted the Muslims. An April 29 editorial in the *Barometer* newspaper stated of the proposed legislation: “As if it were a widespread problem that faith communities in general are radicalized by foreign financiers. Everyone understands, of course, that it is actually Islamism that they want to get at.” The April report, *Salafism and Salafistic Jihadism 2.0*, from the Swedish Defense University gave examples of funding to Muslim organizations and mosques stemming from Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain, revitalized the political debate and social media discussions.

On August 31, the Labor Court determined the Nya Karolinska University Hospital (NKS) had no grounds in 2021 to fire a Jewish neurosurgeon. Region Stockholm, which is responsible for the hospital, was ordered to pay damages and unpaid wages amounting to 1.2 million kronor (\$116,000) to the neurosurgeon, as well as trial costs. NKS said it would not appeal the decision and added that the surgeon’s dismissal had been based on work environment problems. NKS further informed the neurosurgeon and his union that it would not comply with the verdict. On September 1, the Official Council of Swedish Jewish Communities demanded a public response from Karolinska’s board on next steps. The neurosurgeon stated that the hospital’s admission that it “deliberately broke the law by firing a Jewish doctor who raised alarms about antisemitism is a gross antisemitic act that should not be tolerated in a democracy.” Hospital authorities dismissed the Jewish neurosurgeon in November 2021 after several agencies reported his allegation of continuing reprisals at NKS stemming from his 2017 complaint that the hospital’s chief of neurosurgery had subjected him and two other Jewish colleagues to antisemitic harassment and discrimination.

On August 22, the DO initiated two inquiries into reports by parents of two 12-year-old children in the Danderyd and Täby municipalities, respectively, that their children faced antisemitic harassment in school. The children reported they had, for several years, experienced antisemitic smears such as “Jew bastard,” heard threats such as “Gas the Jew,” and been met with Nazi salutes and Nazi fight

songs in school by fellow students. The parents reported the incidents to the respective schools. The Täby school replied to one such report by stating that the child also bore some responsibility since he had called the perpetrators “Nazis.” The Täby school submitted 23 of 143 incident reports received by the Municipal Education Board. Schools are obliged by law to report such incidents to the municipalities. The schools had replied to DO’s initial questions by stating they continuously worked to detect and fight antisemitism. The Official Council of Swedish Jewish Communities stated in September that it had contacted the municipalities.

On May 20, the DO announced the Kramfors municipality discriminated against a woman at an eldercare home when the home told the woman she would lose her employment if she continued to wear a hijab to work. The woman’s manager stated there had been a misunderstanding, as the manager believed the woman would wear a niqab, which would have been forbidden. The municipality offered the woman continued employment after public exposure and admitted wrongdoing. On May 25, the municipality paid the woman 70,000 kronor (\$7,000) in damages, as ordered by the DO.

SDP representatives continued to make discriminatory comments. Media and some citizens accused Rebecka Fallenkvist, a candidate for the party in the Stockholm city council, of using a Nazi slur when she said “Helg Seger” (Victory Weekend) in a September 11 interview with the Samnytt Television news site in response to her party’s strong election results. The phrase was regarded as very similar to “Hell Seger,” the Swedish version of the Nazi salute, “Sieg Heil.” On October 14, Fallenkvist posted an Instagram story in which she described Jewish diarist Anne Frank as “immoral” and made other derogatory comments. The Official Council of Swedish Jewish Communities and the Jewish Youth Association condemned the post, while Israel’s Ambassador to Sweden, Ziv Nevo Kulman, called the post “a despicable insult.” SDP leader Jimmie Akesson stated Fallenkvist’s post was “a reprehensible way” of expression. The SDP later suspended Fallenkvist from her position at the party’s media outlet but later reassigned her to an administrative position in the SDP parliamentary secretariat.

On June 20, Gabriel Kroon, the SDP’s candidate for the Stockholm municipal council, stated in an interview with the *Dagens Nyheter* newspaper that he wanted to implement a ban on head coverings for students younger than 18 and

for women working in health care and public transport. He also stated he wanted a nationwide stoppage on building mosques until the society had managed the issue of segregation. He further described Islamic ideology as “detestable.” On September 14, the head of the Swedish Committee against Antisemitism (SKMA), Willy Silberstein, stated his concern regarding the SDP’s high election result in a televised interview on the Sveriges Television news channel. “When the current leadership joined the Sweden Democrats, it was clearly a Nazi party. This is a party where there are constant scandals with candidates who are known Nazis, who express themselves in antisemitic and Islamophobic ways,” he said. SDP Members of Parliament Bjorn Soder and Marcus Weichel called the interview “propaganda.”

In its August report “Lowest Immigration in Europe,” the SDP proposed stricter asylum regulations for Christian converts and LGBTQI+ refugees, declaring, “It must be possible to deny asylum for those who themselves have created their reasons for asylum.” Christian representatives condemned the proposal and stated the report would further complicate asylum processes and erode the converts’ mental health. Christian Democratic party leader Ebba Busch stated in a September 1 interview that her party would take a stand for the converts’ rights.

In August, media reported that representatives of the political party Nuance (Nyans) spread hateful messages regarding Shia Muslims and antisemitic conspiracy theories via social media, including one that referred to “crushing the heads of Jews.” On August 11, the *Sydsvenskan* and *Helsingborgs Dagblad* newspapers published articles stating that five of the 25 Nuance Party candidates in the Skåne Region had spread antisemitism and hate against Shia Muslims on social media. The Nuance Party began activities in 2019 and attempted to garner support from the Turkish and Muslim communities by advocating for Muslims to receive national minority status and to criminalize expressions of anti-Muslim hatred. The party received 0.4 percent of the vote in the country’s September 11 elections, but in several suburbs of Stockholm, Gothenburg, Malmö, and Örebro, it received between 17 and 30 percent of the municipal vote. Supporters stated Hard Line Party leader Paludan’s Quran burnings and social media accusations of kidnappings of Muslim children by the Social Services were their reasons for voting for the party.

On January 27, then prime minister Magdalena Andersson commemorated Holocaust Remembrance Day by giving a keynote speech at the Great Synagogue in Stockholm at a ceremony hosted by the Jewish community. First-, second-, and third-generation Holocaust survivors testified at the ceremony. Speaker of Parliament Andreas Norlen and the parliamentarian network “Memory of the Holocaust” hosted the parliament’s annual Holocaust Remembrance ceremony on the same day.

On March 1, the country assumed the 12-month presidency of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), 20 years after the adoption of the Stockholm Declaration and nearly six months after the Malmö International Forum on Holocaust Remembrance and Combating Antisemitism. Chair of the Presidency, Ambassador Ann Bernes, stated the alliance’s priorities would be to follow up on pledges made at the Malmö Forum and to strengthen the IHRA as an institution. The country hosted two plenaries during the year.

On June 16, officials inaugurated the country’s first Holocaust Museum, in Stockholm. For the year, the government allocated 30 million kronor (\$3 million) to the National Historical Museum for the construction of Holocaust Museum exhibits in coordination with the Living History Forum. Of the funds, three million kronor (\$289,000) were earmarked for management, dissemination, and education about the Swedish-language version of the installation, “Dimensions in Testimony,” for schools and museums throughout the country during the period 2022–24.

On August 25, the government appointed an investigator to map and describe difficulties for religious communities and their affiliated organizations to insure their premises against attack or damage. “We have religious freedom, and it is a fundamental democratic right. Communities should not suffer further because their premises cannot be insured or can only be insured against such a high premium that the organizations are forced to give up,” said the then Minister for Civil Service Affairs, Ida Karkiainen. Representatives of the Jewish and Muslim communities welcomed the investigation, since insuring meeting assemblies had become increasingly difficult and more expensive for their communities.

As part of its continuing *National Plan to Combat Racism, Similar Forms of Hostility, and Hate Crimes* and as follow up to the government’s pledges ahead of

the Malmö International Forum on Holocaust Remembrance and Combating Antisemitism on July 12, the government announced five action programs against various forms of discrimination for 2022-24. These programs outlined measures aimed at combating Afrophobia, antisemitism, antigypsyism, anti-Muslim hatred, and racism against the Sami people. For example, the government allocated 2.3 million kronor (\$221,000) to the Swedish Committee against Antisemitism and the Living History Forum (LHF), a public agency that works with issues related to tolerance, democracy, and human rights, using the Holocaust and other crimes against humanity as its starting point, to increase opportunities for student and teacher study visits to Holocaust memorial sites during the year. The state gave the LHF responsibility to promote student trips to Norwegian memorial sites in dialogue with the Swedish-Norwegian organization Voksenasen AS. The LHF also continued the national educational effort tasked in connection with the Malmö International Forum, which aimed at broader target groups. The LHF further received five million kronor (\$481,000) for a joint project with the National Agency for Education to develop a playbook for strengthening democracy, countering antisemitism, and combatting other forms of racism within the education system. In June, the government established a commission to study how to strengthen Jewish life in the country.

During the year, the government adhered to its 2021 announcement to increase the annual grant for security measures to religious organizations and civil society to 44 million kronor for 2022 (\$4.2 million), compared with 34 million kronor (\$3.2 million) in 2021. A wide range of civil society organizations, including religiously oriented NGOs, remained eligible for funding from the Legal, Financial, and Administrative Services Agency to improve their security by, for example, purchasing security cameras and hiring security guards. Christian, Muslim, and Jewish leaders welcomed the increased funding but stated a needlessly complex and resource-demanding process to apply for and access the funding was frustrating. They complained that the long application process imposed significant administrative burdens – even for well-organized religious communities – ultimately resulting in some communities paying for security themselves to bypass the burdensome process. The state earmarked part of the funding for the police National Operations Department, which assisted the country's regional authorities with investigations of hate crimes.

The SST continued to collaborate with other government agencies and civil society to promote dialogue between the government and faith communities as well as to contribute to the public's knowledge about religion. During the year, the SST continued to cooperate with several municipalities and regions to set up interreligious dialogues with a focus on democracy promotion, countering violent extremism, and educating municipal employees on issues of religion and religious freedom. As part of the government's implementation of the *National Plan to Combat Racism, Similar Forms of Hostility, and Hate Crimes*, the SST continued to cooperate with Muslim congregations to increase knowledge of safety measures for mosques. The Jewish communities collaborated with the SST in this effort to share their best practices with the Muslim community on security measures.

In January, SST published a handbook on security measures for religious communities in cooperation with the Civil Contingencies Agency, police, and religious representatives. During the year, SST and six other agencies worked to prevent and combat genital mutilation of girls and women. SST mapped the prevalence of the custom within Swedish faith communities and conducted a leadership program for women; a webinar on female genital mutilation of girls and women addressed to denominations and authorities; a conference on honor-related violence and oppression; and study circles against genital mutilation.

The SST continued to partner with government entities, including law enforcement authorities, the Civil Contingencies Agency, the Defense Research Agency, the Public Health Agency, the National Agency for Education, the Government Offices (comprising the prime minister's office, government ministries, and the Office for Administrative Affairs), the Crime Prevention Agency, the Migration Agency, and others in supporting government inquiries, coordinating COVID-19 responses, and facilitating meetings with different faith communities, including groups not registered with the SST. The agency continued to fund, publish, and promote publications aimed at educating the public about religious minorities, such as the report, *The Faith Communities and COVID-19 Responses*, published in February.

The Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society provided grants with a total value of 14 million kronor (\$1.3 million) to civil society organizations working to combat religious intolerance and a special grant related to COVID-19 for organizations working with socially vulnerable persons. Examples of grants to religious

communities included 3.75 million kronor (\$361,000) to the Church of Sweden and 1.5 million kronor (\$144,000) to the Shia Community.

On August 27, the Raoul Wallenberg Academy hosted a memorial lecture in honor of its namesake, the Swedish diplomat who saved thousands of Jews from the Holocaust in Hungary. In his speech at the event, which livestreamed on the organization's Facebook page, former prime minister Stefan Lofven underscored the need to continue the fight for democracy and human values as demonstrated by Wallenberg.

The all-party parliamentary Committee on Criminalizing Holocaust Denial announced it would report to the government by April 2023, at the latest.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

In 2020, the most recent year for which statistics are available, a report released in December by the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention listed 3,709 hate crimes. Of those, 9 percent were anti-Muslim, 5 percent antisemitic, 2 percent anti-Christian, and other antireligious hate crimes accounted for 2 percent. Authorities said most victims of hate crimes did not report them to police.

On July 4, the *Dagens Nyheter* newspaper reported several churches and mosques conducted conversion therapy activities in an attempt to change LGBTQI+ members' sexual orientation. Examples of activities included prayers, bible school, Quran studies, religious camps abroad, medication, and exorcism. In a July 4 Instagram post, then prime minister Magdalena Andersson stated, "So-called conversion therapy has no place in our Sweden. Religious communities will not try to force young people to change their sexual orientation here." On July 11, SST Director General Isak Reichel commented that the agency had initiated dialogues on conversion therapy with religious communities. On July 8, the government decided to investigate whether existing legislation was extensive enough to protect LGBTQI+ individuals from conversion attempts or if such attempts should be criminalized. The findings of the investigation are expected in June 2023.

On May 4, the Sveriges Television news outlet reported that unknown persons vandalized 33 Orthodox Christian and Muslim graves in the Malmö Eastern Cemetery during the spring. Citizens reported 12 of the cases to police, who did not continue with investigations due to a lack of evidence. On August 23, the Church of Sweden decided to close its 25 churches in northern Gotland after several cases of vandalism. “It is an abuse of the openness we want,” said vicar Martina Akesson Wollbo to the *Hela Gotland* newspaper. During the year, citizens reported approximately 30 incidents on Gotland, despite increased security measures.

On January 19, the media outlet *Expo Foundation* reported that some demonstrators against COVID-19 restrictions compared themselves to Jewish victims of the Holocaust and wore yellow Stars of David. Local Moderate Party politician Susanne Landgren repeated the messaging on social media. Some demonstrators also linked COVID-19 restrictions, vaccinations, and COVID-19 certificates to conspiracy theories of “Jewish world domination” and the Rothschild family. The Official Council of Swedish Jewish Communities said antisemitism was a growing problem on social media and in connection with the antivaccine movement.

SKMA and the Official Council of Swedish Jewish Communities also noted increasing antisemitism on social media and online connected to Russia’s war against Ukraine. Leading members of the NRM, Nordic Unity, and The Free Sweden spread antisemitic conspiracy theories of the origins of the war. In March, the SDP excluded then Member of Parliament Roger Richtoff from the party after he shared antisemitic Facebook posts regarding the war.

On December 18, on the eve of the first night of Hanukkah, unknown persons damaged the Norrköping synagogue. Video cameras recorded two persons setting fire to the synagogue’s gates. The wind and rain extinguished the fire during the night. In a December 23 press statement, the Official Council of Swedish Jewish Communities called on decision-making bodies and responsible politicians in Norrköping to urgently take measures to prevent more incidents and to increase the security of the Jewish congregation and synagogue there.

On January 27, International Holocaust Remembrance Day, the NRM vandalized the office of the government agency Living History Forum. NRM plastered flyers

with Holocaust denial messages and references to “Europe’s greatest man of all time.” NRM also hung banners with the message “Stop the Holocaust of our people” and projected “The Holocaust is a hoax” on walls of schools and malls in the cities of Jonkoping and Borlange. Neither the agency nor the Jewish community publicly commented on the incidents.

In early May, the television program *Uppdrag Granskning* reported that 15 of 26 Shia Muslim clerics they contacted had agreed to set up so called “pleasure marriages” (*mut’ah*) when asked by undercover journalists. The journalists also received “pleasure marriage” offers from Shia clerics in Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Denmark, and the United Kingdom. The umbrella organization Islamic Shia Associations of Sweden condemned the actions of the clerics and froze memberships of the affected associations. SST paused state grants to the umbrella organization and its members. Police and judges stated that “pleasure marriages” could be equivalent to prostitution, trafficking, and procuring sex.

On June 15, the Sveriges Radio news outlet reported that authorities charged Imam Basem Mahmoud with agitation against an ethnic group for spreading antisemitic messages in a 2020 sermon that later appeared on YouTube. In the video, the imam calls Jews “offspring of monkeys and pigs.” The imam said he interpreted the Quran and had not referred to “all Jews, but the ones who had incited against Muslims earlier in history.”

A government-commissioned study released on March 1 and conducted by the DO, based on 1,293 reports during the 2015-21 period, showed that the majority of reports of religious- or belief-based discrimination involved discrimination against Muslims. A large proportion of those incidents occurred at work or in educational settings. Many of the reports also were about discrimination related to ethnic affiliation. The DO conducted a qualitative analysis of 250 randomly selected reports and found 100 were related to discrimination against Muslims. The DO noted a large number included reports from Muslim women wearing head coverings. A smaller percentage of reports included discrimination related to different denominations of Christianity. The report also noted a few reports concerning discrimination against Jews and discrimination related to Judaism.

In June, the Stockholm municipality published a report on antisemitism in schools in which 20 interviewed staff members and nine Jewish students described three main problems in Stockholm's schools related to antisemitism: staff members' knowledge gaps regarding differing expressions of antisemitism, deficient education on modern antisemitism's relation to the Holocaust, and a lack of understanding about the negative effects of antisemitic language in schools.

During the year, courts convicted NRM members of hate speech and convicted one member of threats against someone who had left the group. In June, the Office of the Chancellor of Justice submitted two cases to the Falun district court concerning agitation against ethnic groups that was spread on two sites linked to NRM. Courts convicted the publisher of NRM's online magazine *Northern Front* (Nordfront), Elin Reinhardt, on two counts of antisemitic hate speech and two counts of Afrophobia. Courts also convicted a former publisher of NRM's website on five counts of agitation against ethnic groups directed against Jews.

On October 23, then archbishop Antje Jackelen issued a second public apology to the country's indigenous Sami community for centuries of mistreatment that contributed to what the Sami described as "legitimized repression" conducted by the Church of Sweden. The Sami representatives were successful in their attempts to include a traditional Sami singing style, *joik*, in the service. The church had previously branded joik as sinful. The Church of Sweden and its Sami Council presented an action plan to increase Sami participation and influence, strengthen Sami religious life, and include Sami children and young people, as well as increase knowledge of indigenous rights.

In November, participants held several outdoor events and memorials in multiple cities in remembrance of Kristallnacht ("The Night of Broken Glass") on November 9-10, 1938, in Nazi Germany. The Swedish Committee against Antisemitism, the organization Holocaust Survivors in Sweden, the Jewish Community in Stockholm, and the Living History Forum held a memorial in the Great Synagogue in Stockholm.

As part of the Jewish-Muslim Amanah project in Malmö, Imam Salahuddin Barakat and Rabbi Moshe David HaCohen continued their joint efforts to speak to students during the year about religious tolerance, conducting several interfaith workshops, and receiving funding from the Swedish Heritage Fund to develop a

digital program for school students to learn about antisemitism and anti-Muslim hatred. The Malmö municipality and the SST provided partial funding for the project.

Interfaith groups continued to operate in the country, including the National Interfaith Council of Sweden, established as a meeting place for national religious leaders in Uppsala in 2010 with a mandate to address issues related to religion and religious freedom. Member groups included the Christian Council of Sweden, Muslim Council of Sweden, Official Council of Swedish Jewish Communities, and Swedish Buddhist Cooperation Council. Representatives from the Alevi Muslim, Baha'i, Church of Jesus Christ, Hindu, Mandaean, and Sikh communities also participated in the group. During the year, the council arranged a national study circle on interfaith cooperation, hosted several webinars on interfaith efforts against climate change, condemned Russia's war against Ukraine, and held several online lectures, among other projects.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

The Ambassador and other embassy representatives continued to engage regularly with the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the SST, parliament, police, and local government officials on issues related to religious freedom, including improving security for religious groups, and to highlight threats to members of some religious minorities, including Muslim immigrants, Christian converts, and Jews.

On April 2, the embassy posted on Instagram, "Ramadan Kareem to Muslim communities in the United States and around the world. As many celebrate this spiritual occasion, we wish you a bright, peaceful, and prosperous start to this blessed month. #RamadanMubarak." In May, the Ambassador hosted a reception for leaders of the country's interfaith community to celebrate interreligious dialogue and highlight the importance of interfaith efforts. The Ambassador tweeted, "Honored to host an interfaith reception to celebrate faith & values that unite us, while better understanding differing traditions & experiences. Always optimistic that religion & shared connections can serve as a foundation for positive change!"

Also in May, the Ambassador met with Jewish community leaders, government officials, and the director of the Holocaust Museum to hear about the country's IHRA presidency.

In October, the Ambassador attended the Church of Sweden's public apology to the Sami people and met with religious representatives from the Church and the Sami community. The Ambassador tweeted: "Honored to be part of the @svenskakyrkan apology ceremony to the #Sami people in Luleå. Raw and pained testimonies echoed so many I've heard from my own First Nation relatives. Inclusion of Sami languages & faith traditions are powerful signals of recognition and reconciliation."

Embassy officials spoke to Christian, Jewish, and Muslim representatives in Malmö, Gothenburg, Umeå, and Stockholm throughout the year regarding their security concerns and threats to religious freedom more broadly.

The embassy highlighted on social media a September Malmö visit by the Ambassador and other embassy representatives during which Jewish community leaders discussed religious freedom, interfaith cooperation, and the value of societal inclusion. The Ambassador tweeted, "A pleasure to tour the magnificent Malmö Synagogue after important discussions with Jewish leaders on combating antisemitism and celebrating the vibrancy and history of Jewish life in Malmö."