



Denmark

International Religious Freedom Report 2007

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The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Evangelical Lutheran Church is the state church and enjoys some privileges not available to other faiths.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

There were occasional reports of anti-Semitic and anti-Islamic insults, reflecting tensions among increasing numbers of immigrants from Islamic countries, and young sympathizers of the far-right.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The Embassy promotes religious dialogue, particularly with the Muslim community. The Embassy sponsored Muslim leaders and young people to participate in activities and programs that promote diversity, multiculturalism, integration, and tolerance for ethnic and religious minorities, as one foundation of religious freedom.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has a total area of 16,639 square miles and a population of 5.4 million. As of January 2006, 83 percent of the population belonged to the official Evangelical Lutheran Church. Although only 3 percent of church members attend services regularly, most members utilize the church for weddings, funerals, baptisms, confirmations, and religious holidays.

As a result of immigration trends, the second largest religious community is Muslim, constituting 3.7 percent of the population (210,000 persons), followed by communities of Catholics (35,000), Jehovah's Witnesses (15,000), Jews (7,000), Baptists (5,500), Pentecostals (5,000), and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) (4,500). There are also many communities with fewer than 3,000 members, including Seventh-day Adventists, the Catholic Apostolic Church, the Salvation Army, Methodists, Anglicans, and Russian Orthodox. The German minority in southern Jutland and other non-Danish communities (particularly Scandinavian groups) have their own religious groups. Those describing themselves as not religious or as atheists are 5.4 percent and 1.5 percent, respectively, of the population.

Missionaries operate within the country. The country is experiencing the "reverse missionary" phenomenon, as increasing numbers of missionaries from the developing world return to Europe to preach in non-denominational churches that attract the country's citizens as well as its recent immigrants. A June 11, 2007, press report indicated that "a quarter to a third of all people in church in Copenhagen any given Sunday morning are attending a foreign-run service," according to a Lutheran bishop.

The European headquarters of the Church of Scientology is located in Copenhagen, although it is not officially approved as a religion.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Constitution stipulates that the Evangelical Lutheran Church is the national church, the reigning monarch shall be a member of the Church, and the state shall support it. The Evangelical Lutheran Church is the only religious organization that can receive state subsidies or funds directly through the tax system. Approximately 12 percent of the Church's revenue comes from state subsidies; most of the rest comes from the church tax that is paid only by members. No individual is compelled to pay church tax or provide direct financial support to the national church or any other religious organization. However, members of other faiths, notably Catholics, have argued that the system is unfair, and that the Government does not provide religious equality, despite providing religious freedom. Allowing other religious organizations to be given the same status and privileges as the Evangelical Lutheran Church would require changes to the Constitution.

Eleven Christian holy days are considered national holidays: Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter, Easter Monday, Common Prayer Day, Ascension, Pentecost, Whit Monday, Christmas Eve, Christmas, and Christmas Day 2 (December 26). National religious holidays do not have an evident negative effect on other religious groups.

Aside from the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Government grants official status to other religious groups. Prior to 1970, a total of 11 religious communities were approved in the form of recognition by royal decree, including the Roman Catholic, Methodist, Baptist, Russian Orthodox and Jewish communities. Since then, the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs has approved more than 100 religious communities and churches under the Marriage Act, including several Islamic groups, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Seventh-day Adventists, Sikhs, Buddhists, Christian Orthodox, Hindu, Baha'is, Hare Krishnas, and the indigenous Norse belief system known as Forn Sidr. These officially approved religions receive a number of special rights, including the right to perform marriage ceremonies with legal effect, the right to residence permits for foreign preachers, the right to establish cemeteries, and certain tax exemptions. The difference between religious groups recognized by royal decree and those approved under the Marriage Act is that ministers of those recognized under the act may name and baptize children with legal effect, keep church registers, and transcribe certificates on the basis of such registers.

Religious communities not recognized by royal decree or approved under the Marriage Act are entitled to practice their faith without any sort of licensing, but their marriage ceremonies are not recognized by the state and they are not granted tax-exempt status.

The 1999 Guidelines for approval of religious organizations established the following requirements for religious groups: a written text of the religion's central traditions, descriptions of its most important rituals, an organizational structure accessible to public control and approval, and constitutionally elected representatives who may be held responsible by the authorities. Additionally, the organization must "not teach or perform actions inconsistent with public morality or order."

The Church of Scientology did not seek official approval as a religious organization during the period covered by this report. Its first application for approval was made in the early 1970s and rejected; the second and third applications were made in 1976 and 1982, and both were denied. In mid-1997, the Church of Scientology filed a fourth application, which was suspended at their request in 2000. In suspending their application, the Church of Scientology asked the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs to clarify the approval procedure; however, the ministry told them they must first submit an application before the ministry could provide any feedback. Despite Scientology's unofficial status, the Church of Scientology maintained its European headquarters in Copenhagen.

There are no restrictions on proselytizing or missionary work as long as practitioners obey the law and do not act inconsistently with public morality or order. All schools, including religious schools, receive government financial support. While the Evangelical Lutheran faith is taught in the public schools, a student may withdraw from religious classes with parental consent. Section 76 of the Constitution protects the rights of parents to homeschool or educate their children in private schools.

During the period covered by the report, the Government expanded efforts to promote further social and economic integration of refugees and immigrants. These efforts emerged from widespread political and social debate on the integration of immigrants and refugees following the Muhammad cartoon crisis and included discussion of measures to address employment and education gaps between ethnic Danes and immigrants. On November 27, 2006, the European Monitoring Center on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) presented its Annual Report to the European Parliament. Among other things, the report noted that independent Muslim schools that teach religion as well as a broader curriculum have been operating in the country for years.

The law requires that "Christian studies" be taught in public schools. The course covers world religions and philosophy and promotes tolerance and respect for all religious beliefs; however, the course devotes the most time to Christianity. The course is compulsory, although students may be exempted from the course if a parent presents a request in writing. If the student is fifteen or older, the student and parent must jointly request the student's exemption from the course. According to the Ministry of Education, less than 2 percent of students in the greater Copenhagen area, the area with the highest concentration of other religious populations, "opt out" of the Christian studies course.

On April 19, 2007, the Government passed legislation that will require all foreign religious proselytizers to pass a Danish language test before being allowed to enter the country, although it has not yet been determined when that requirement will be implemented. Critics claim that the measure violates the European Convention on Human Rights and is aimed at restricting the entry of Muslim clerics, whose number is already restricted under a 2004 "Imam Law" which requires that the number of religious residence visas be reasonably proportioned to the size of the corresponding religious community. Additionally, the visa applicant must prove association with a recognized or approved religious community and possess a relevant background or education as a religious preacher, missionary, or member of a religious community.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Although government policy contributed to the free practice of religion for most religious groups, the Government restricts the issuance of clerical visas (see Legal/Policy Framework section). These requirements have a disproportionate effect on groups that depend on missionaries from abroad, such as Muslims.

In mid-April 2007 several members of parliament from the Danish People's Party (DF) made public statements disparaging Islam, with one equating the Muslim headscarf with the Nazi swastika as symbols of totalitarianism and a second referring to Islam as "a loser religion." The leader of the Danish People's Party subsequently denounced the anti-Muslim statements made by her party's members.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Anti-Semitism

There were isolated incidents of anti-Semitism, perpetrated primarily by immigrants. Both the members of the Jewish community and police sources attested to occasional friction between the Jewish and Muslim communities. Press reports of ethnic Danes and non-Muslims committing anti-Semitic acts were uncommon during the reporting period. Most anti-Semitic acts involved vandalism, graffiti, or verbal assaults. Data were difficult to determine because such reports were generally entered via a police hotline, or came from the Jewish community, and were rarely followed by an arrest.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

On September 22, 2006, the first Muslim cemetery in the country opened, in the Copenhagen suburb of Brøndby, following approval by the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs in April 2006. The opening marked the culmination of a 15-year effort by members of the Muslim community. Prior to the opening, Muslims were buried in separate Muslim sections of Danish cemeteries or were buried abroad.

During the period covered by this report, plans progressed for the construction of a grand mosque in Copenhagen, as well as in Aarhus, the country's second largest city.

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice, such as occasional reports of anti-Semitic and anti-Islamic insults, reflecting tensions among increasing numbers of immigrants from Islamic countries and young sympathizers of the far right. The country, nevertheless, has a long history of welcoming religious minorities and affording them equal treatment.

The November 27, 2006, EUMC report cited 22 racial/religious incidents of possible "Islamophobia" during the previous year and stated that a recent poll suggested that two out of three Danish citizens viewed Muslims living in Europe today with suspicion. Although a May 2006 International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights poll had suggested that the overall political climate for Danish Muslims had deteriorated, an opinion poll in early 2007 indicated that refugees and immigrants felt less discriminated against since the Muhammad cartoon crisis in early 2006, with the number of immigrants reporting some form of discrimination in 2006 dropping to 27 percent from 33 percent in 2005.

During the first week of October 2006, television videotape was broadcast repeatedly on a national TV station, TV2, which showed youths in the Danish People's Party drawing cartoons mocking Muhammad, including one depicting him as a

camel with beer bottle humps. The tape was made in early August 2006. The Prime Minister denounced the drawings and said the activists' behavior, "in no way represents the way the Danish people...view Muslims or Islam."

Unemployment figures, crime rates (especially among young adults), and education dropout rates tended to be significantly higher among minority groups and were sometimes alleged to be indicative of discrimination on the basis of religion. However, it was difficult to separate religious differences from differences in language and ethnicity, and the latter may be equally important in explaining unequal outcomes in access to well-paying jobs and social advancement. The integration of immigrant groups from Islamic countries was an important political and social topic of discussion.

There were isolated incidents of anti-immigrant sentiment, including graffiti, low-level assaults, denial of service, and employment discrimination on racial grounds. The Government criticized the incidents, investigated several, and brought some cases to trial.

The international Muslim organization Hizb ut-Tahrir continued to operate in the country despite periodic calls by several political parties to ban the group. In February 2007 the High Court sentenced Fadi Abdullatif, the Hizb-ut-Tahrir spokesman in the country, to two months in prison for inciting violence against Jews by calling on Muslims to "kill them all, wherever you find them."

As in the first half of 2006, reports continued of desecration of cemeteries, many of them Muslim graves. On July 24, 2006, the press reported that sites within the Muslim cemetery near Copenhagen and the Islamic community center in Copenhagen were defaced with painted swastikas.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The Embassy regularly engages in dialogue with religious leaders and groups from the country's diverse religious community. Embassy officers engaged in an active Muslim outreach program, which included numerous meetings with religious and community leaders of leading Muslim organizations in the country. Embassy officers had wide-ranging discussions with the Muslim leaders on topics including religious and cultural diversity, democracy and civil liberties, the importance of interfaith dialogue and its role in supporting religious freedom, and Muslim life in the United States. The U.S. Department of State sponsored Muslim leaders identified by the Embassy to participate in established International Visitors programs focusing on diversity and multiculturalism. The Embassy continued sports and summer internship programs targeting young people in religious and ethnic minority communities, and the Embassy also worked with Danish nongovernmental organizations to support arts and educational exchange programs for minority youths in programs aimed at promoting integration and tolerance for ethnic and religious minorities.

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