



Denmark

International Religious Freedom Report 2008

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The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The Evangelical Lutheran Church is the state church and enjoys some privileges not available to other religious groups.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report.

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 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 persons 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 an area of 16,639 square miles and a population of 5.4 million. Based on official statistics from January 2008, 82 percent of the population belongs 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). Danish Muslim communities tend to concentrate in certain neighborhoods such as Norrebro in Copenhagen. Groups that constitute less than 1 percent of the population include 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.

Official attendance figures indicate a shift from the Evangelical Lutheran Church to other denominations, with Evangelical Lutheran membership falling from more than 90 percent of the Danish population in the 1980s to a record-low level of 82 percent in 2008. Additionally, attendance figures among members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church have fallen to record-low levels as well, especially among young persons. A February 2008 Gallup poll concluded that more than 45 percent of Evangelical Lutheran church members had not attended a religious service in the last year, compared to only 31 percent of members polled in the first year of the survey in 2003. 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 an Evangelical Lutheran bishop.

The European headquarters of the Church of Scientology is located in Copenhagen, although it has not officially applied to the Government for recognition as a religion.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against 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 religious groups, notably Catholics, have argued that the system is unfair and that the Government does not provide religious equality, despite providing religious freedom. A November 5, 2007 ruling from the Supreme Court denied a request by nonmembers of the Evangelical Lutheran Church for reimbursement of subsidies to the Church from general tax payments. The Supreme Court held that indirect financing of the Evangelical Lutheran Church does not constitute religious discrimination because the Church also engages in nonreligious activities such as civil registration and management of secular cemeteries. The ruling also upheld the Church's official role in registering births and deaths in the country. Allowing other religious organizations to be given the same status and privileges as the Evangelical Lutheran Church would require changes to the Constitution.

The Criminal Code prohibits the public mockery or insults of the doctrine or worship of a legally recognized religion. The maximum penalty for a violation of this provision is a fine and up to 4 months in prison. Since 1938, the Government has not prosecuted cases under the blasphemy provision. Prosecutors have dismissed accusations of blasphemy as protected free speech.

The Government observes Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Sunday, Easter Monday, Common Prayer Day, Ascension, Pentecost, Whit Monday, Christmas Eve, Christmas, and the Day After Christmas (December 26) as national holidays.

The country mandates compulsory military service but provides a conscientious objection exemption. In lieu of military service, conscientious objectors may be required to serve in a civilian capacity.

On May 16, 2008, the Government announced its plan that judicial attire may no longer include religious or political symbols, such as headscarves, turbans, Jewish skull caps, and crucifixes. The proposed ban was discussed in the press as being the result of pressure from the Danish People's Party and primarily directed at Muslims. Legislation enacting the ban was scheduled to be debated in the fall of 2008.

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 Muslim 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. Only ministers of religious groups approved under the Marriage Act may name and baptize children with legal effect, keep church registers, and transcribe certificates on the basis of such registers. On November 1, 2007, the Justice Ministry assumed responsibility for administering the Marriage Act and the recognition of religious communities.

Religious communities not recognized by either royal decree or the Marriage Act are entitled to practice their faith without any sort of licensing requirement, but their marriage ceremonies are not recognized by the state. Unrecognized religious communities, of which there were more than one hundred at the end of the reporting period, are not granted tax-exempt status.

The 2002 Guidelines for approval of religious organizations requires religious groups to submit the following items: a written text of the religion's central traditions, descriptions of its most important rituals, a copy of the rules and regulations of the organization, a copy of the organizational structure, and an audited financial statement, as well as background information about the religion's leadership and each member with a permanent address in the country. Additionally, the organization must "not teach or perform actions inconsistent with public morality or order."

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. 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 15 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 non-Christians, "opt out" of the Christian studies course. Section 76 of the Constitution protects the rights of parents to educate their children in private schools or home 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 2006 Muhammad cartoon crisis. The February 13, 2008 republication of the Muhammad cartoons by the country's newspapers triggered additional demonstrations and revived the debate about integration of Muslim immigrants in the country.

On April 19, 2007, the Government passed legislation that will require all foreign religious workers to pass a Danish language test within 6 months of entering the country or risk losing their residency permits, although it has not yet been determined when that requirement will be implemented. Critics claimed 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" that 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 religious worker visas (see Legal/Policy Framework section). These requirements have a disproportionate effect on groups that depend on missionaries from abroad, such as Muslims.

The Church of Scientology did not seek official approval as a religious organization during the period covered by this report. Although free to meet and practice, Scientologists are restricted from legal recognition as a religion, having been turned down three times and unable to seek clarification of the requirements without resubmitting the registration application for a fourth time. Despite Scientology's unofficial status, the Church of Scientology maintained its European headquarters in Copenhagen.

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.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

As of September 2007, 80 persons were buried in the Brøndby cemetery, which opened in 2006 after a 15-year effort by members of the Muslim community. Plans for another Islamic cemetery were underway in Herning.

During the period covered by this report, plans progressed for the construction of a grand mosque 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 affiliation, belief, or practice, such as occasional reports of anti-Semitic and anti-Islamic insults, and isolated incidents of anti-Semitism, 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.

Both the members of the Jewish community and police sources attested to occasional friction between the Jewish and Muslim communities. The tensions were exacerbated by a May 4, 2008 rally in Copenhagen by thousands of Muslims claiming to be Palestinians residing in Europe, whose leaders called for the return of Jerusalem and the saving of it from Judaization, and by a September 2, 2007 interview in *Jyllands-Posten* of Qasem Ahmed, a Muslim leader, who said all Jews in Israel should go back to their countries of origin.

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. After investigating the January 21, 2007 breaking of the windows of the Copenhagen synagogue on Krystalgade, police made no arrests and have closed the case.

In November 2007 cartoonist Kurt Westergaard, whose 2006 rendering of the caricature of Mohammed wearing a bomb as a turban was considered the most controversial of the 12 cartoons, was forced into hiding with his wife and moved by police from location to location after they received credible death threats. On February 13, 2008, following a foiled plot by three Muslims (one citizen of the country having immigrated from Morocco and two Tunisian immigrants) to kill Westergaard, every major newspaper in the country (17) republished the 2006 cartoon. Some in the Islamic community saw the republication as offensive and unnecessarily provocative. The head of the largest Muslim association in the country condemned the assassination plot. The republication was followed by youth riots in immigrant neighborhoods across the country and demonstrations and embassy closings in several other Muslim majority countries as well as a March 20, 2008 threat by Bin Laden. Press reports suggested that the majority of citizens saw the issue as one of freedom of speech being more important than the defamation of a religious icon. Members of Parliament refused to apologize and cancelled a planned trip to Iran after Iranian MPs demanded an apology from them for the republication of the cartoon.

Also in February 2008, youths in immigrant neighborhoods engaged in seven consecutive nights of rioting, which began the night after an alleged beating of an immigrant man by Copenhagen police on February 9, 2008, and continued after the February 13 republication of the Mohammed cartoon. The riots began in the immigrant neighborhood of Nørrebro and spread to immigrant communities around the country. Immigrant youths expressed their frustrations about the alleged beating and perceived police harassment of immigrants. Copenhagen police denied the allegations. In connection with the riots, Copenhagen police increased their presence in the immigrant neighborhoods and arrested 11 young men, who were later released without being charged.

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.

Reports continued of desecration of cemeteries, many of them Muslim graves. The number of cemeteries vandalized in the country increased from previous reporting periods. An unofficial statistic compiled by the newspaper *Kristeligt-Dagblad* reported 45 vandalized cemeteries in 2007, compared to the annual average of 29 vandalized cemeteries from 2001 to 2005. On April 5, 2008, the Parliament complex and an adjacent church were defaced with painted swastikas, something observed in the past perpetuated on Islamic cemetery sites and buildings as well. Although the perpetrators were not apprehended, authorities removed the graffiti within 24 hours.

The international Muslim organization Hizb ut-Tahrir continued to operate in the country despite periodic calls by several political parties to ban the group.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom 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 Islamic 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, and which included introducing American Muslims to Muslims in the country. The Embassy continued sports and summer internship programs targeting young persons in religious and ethnic minority communities, and the Embassy also worked with local 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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