



Sweden

International Religious Freedom Report 2008

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

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 some reports of societal abuse or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Prominent social leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 173,732 square miles and a population of 9.1 million.

There are numerous religious groups. The Government does not register the religion of citizens--it relies on statistics submitted by religious organizations when these apply for state funds.

Religious membership or affiliation is concentrated in a few major denominations. According to the Church of Sweden (Lutheran), an estimated 75 percent of citizens are members; other Protestant groups total approximately 4.4 percent (400,000 persons) of the population. Membership in the Church of Sweden has decreased steadily since it separated from the state in 2000. During 2006, 56,537 members left the Church, 0.8 percent of its registered membership. Studies led by the Church found that individuals left primarily for economic reasons: membership carries a tax of 0.98 percent on income. (Separated members can still attend services.) In 2006 the Church baptized 65.1 percent of all children born in the country, a figure that has steadily declined over the past two decades. Less than 36 percent of 15-year-olds were confirmed in 2006; 80 percent were in 1970. The Church married 48.7 percent of all couples, compared to 61.1 percent in 2000.

Approximately 5 percent (450,000-500,000) of residents are Muslims (although the officially sanctioned Muslim Council of Sweden, for Swedish government funding purposes, only reported 100,000 active participants).

Religious communities representing less than 5 percent of the population include the Pentecostal movement and the Missionary (or Missions) Church, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons).

The number of Jews is estimated at 18,500 to 20,000. The Jewish community estimated there are 9,500 practicing members. There are Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform synagogues, found mostly in the cities. Large numbers of Jews attend High Holy Day services, but attendance at weekly services is low.

Smaller communities are concentrated in larger cities and include Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs, the Church of Scientology, Zoroastrians, Hare Krishna, Word of Faith, and the Unification Church.

It is against the law for the Government to register the faith of individuals, therefore there are no statistics on correlation between religious groups and socioeconomic status. However, large numbers of immigrants are found at the bottom of the socioeconomic scale.

Religions are closely tied to immigration, including the large Finnish-speaking Lutheran denomination and the Orthodox

Christian churches of Syrians, Serbs, Greeks, Romanians, and Macedonians. Nearly all Roman Catholics are first- or second-generation immigrants, from southern Europe, Latin America, and Poland. Within the Stockholm Catholic Diocese, the Armenian, Chaldean, Maronite, Melchite, and Syrian churches celebrate Mass in their respective languages, as do the Polish, Croatian, Spanish, Italian, Eritrean, Vietnamese, Korean, and Ukrainian communities.

While services in Christian churches generally are poorly attended, many persons observe major church festivals and prefer religious ceremonies to mark turning points in life such as weddings and funerals.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

Hate-speech laws prohibit threats or expressions of contempt for persons based on several factors, including religious belief.

Since the official separation of church and state in 2000, eight recognized religious denominations, in addition to the Church of Sweden, raise revenues through member contributions made through the national tax system. These include the Swedish Missionary Church, Roman Catholic Church, Swedish Alliance Mission, **Baptist Union of Sweden, Salvation Army, Methodist Church in Sweden, Pentecostal Church, and Evangelist Church**. All recognized denominations are entitled to direct government financial support, contributions made through the national tax system, or a mix of both. The state does not favor the Church of Sweden over other religious groups.

The Government observes the following holy days as national holidays: January 6 (Epiphany); March 21 (Good Friday); March 22 (Easter); March 23 (Easter Sunday); March 24 (Easter Monday); May 1 (May Day and Ascension Day); May 11 (Whit Sunday); November 1 (All Saints' Day); December 25 (Christmas); and December 26 (Boxing Day).

Students from minority religious backgrounds may observe their respective religious holidays.

Recognition or registration is not required to carry out religious activity. Religious groups that want to receive government aid may apply for it. In reviewing such applications, the Government considers the number of members in the group and its length of establishment but applies no other criteria. The Government promotes interfaith understanding and meets annually with representatives from various religious groups. The Commission for State Grants to Religious Communities is a government body under the authority of the Ministry of Culture. Twenty-two registered religious groups (39 including subgroups) are entitled to government aid. In 2007 approximately \$8,372,000 (SK 50,232,000) was distributed to religious communities in the country.

Religious education covering all major religions is compulsory in public schools. Parents may send their children to independent religious schools (all of which receive government subsidies through the school voucher system), which must adhere to government guidelines on core academic curriculum.

The Ombudsman against Ethnic Discrimination (DO) is an independent government authority. The mandate of the DO is to ensure that discrimination relating to ethnic origin, religion, or other belief does not occur. To that end, it has three principal duties: to educate against discrimination; assist individuals who have suffered discrimination; and supervise employers, institutes of higher education, and other schools to ensure that they fulfill relevant requirements of the law and combat discrimination through targeted and proactive measures.

The Living History Forum--a government authority established in 2003 to promote tolerance, democracy, and human rights using the Holocaust as a starting point--promotes national educational programs on the Holocaust, anti-Semitism, and racism. In 2006 the forum initiated an ongoing educational exhibition, "Sweden and the Holocaust," which tours nationwide. In 2006 the forum began an educational campaign entitled "Anne Frank & I," which targeted high school students. The campaign was continuing at the end of the reporting period. From December 2007 to May 2008 the forum also established a new project called "Sweden and the Holocaust," an art project set up in Norrköping.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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.

According to law, the slaughter of an animal must be preceded by stunning and/or the administration of anesthetics to minimize its suffering. The Muslim community was split over whether certain anesthetic methods conflict with halal requirements. In April 2006 the Animal Protection Authority issued a report on animal slaughter that recommended the current law be maintained.

The law stipulates that male circumcision may be performed only by a licensed doctor or, for boys under the age of 2 months, in the presence of a person certified by the National Board of Health and Welfare (NBHW). The NBHW has certified mohels (persons ordained to carry out circumcision according to the Jewish faith) to perform the operations but requires that a medical doctor or an anesthesiologist accompany them. Some Jews and Muslims claimed the law interferes with their religious traditions.

Individuals serving in the military are given the opportunity to fulfill religious requirements. The military offers food options complying with religious dietary requirements and allows time off for appropriate mourning periods. Some regiments have an imam to facilitate religious observance by Muslim soldiers. Jehovah's Witnesses are exempt from national military service. Armed forces guidelines allow religious headwear.

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.

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Citizens were generally tolerant of diverse religious practices. However, anti-Semitism existed, and Muslims were subject to societal discrimination. Law enforcement authorities maintained statistics on hate crimes but did not break the figures down by religious group, with the exception of anti-Semitic incidents. Anti-Muslim incidents appeared to have increased over the past few years. Strong anti-Semitic views among resident Muslims were common.

There were some reports of anti-Semitic incidents.

Since 2000 approximately 130 anti-Semitic crimes have been reported annually. In 2006 there were 134 reported cases.

The most frequent anti-Semitic crime was "agitation against an ethnic group," with 48 reported incidents in 2006, followed by 35 reported cases of "unlawful threat or molestation." Nazi symbols, such as Hitler salutes and swastikas, were associated with 32 percent of reported anti-Semitic cases.

The following anti-Semitic incidents reportedly occurred in Malmo during the reporting period: a car parked outside of the Jewish community center was vandalized; on Rosh Hashanah, verbal attacks were made on members of the Jewish community as they were arriving at the synagogue; and anti-Semitic remarks were made in a high school classroom. On May 6, 2008, a man threw a bag next to the front door of the synagogue while a guided tour of the synagogue was in process. The Jewish community of Malmo also received a written threat. On March 1, 2008 an estimated 150 anti-Jewish demonstrators circled the city with anti-Jewish paraphernalia. The demonstration ended in front of the synagogue where people shouted in Arabic and Swedish, "Israel equals Hitler." This is an annual march to commemorate the killing of an ethnic Swede by nonethnic Swedes in 2000.

In February 2008 a shop owned by a Jew in Solna was reportedly spray-painted with anti-Semitic graffiti.

In December 2007 a march by an estimated 900 persons took place in Salem. The march commemorated neo-Nazi activist Daniel Wrestrom. Anti-Nazi protesters staged a counter-march; often when there is a neo-Nazi rally, there is also an opposing anti-Nazi rally. Nazi rallies are protected under the law as free speech.

In April 2008 the Discrimination Ombudsman sued a sports center for denying a woman access to its aerobic facilities because she was wearing a head cloth and veil. The sports center asserted that she presented a security risk. The case was pending at the end of the reporting period.

In February 2008 the Appeals Court upheld the verdict in the 2005 case against the city of Gothenburg concerning two Muslim women who were turned away at a municipal swimming pool due to their clothing. Plaintiffs appealed to the

Supreme Court.

In August 2007 a regional newspaper published a cartoon showing the Prophet Muhammad's head on the body of a dog, together with an editorial on freedom of expression. The publication prompted demonstrations, vandalism, and threats against the artist and the editor. The Prime Minister commented on the event, emphasizing the importance of freedom of expression. He met representatives from the Swedish Muslim Council and ambassadors from Muslim countries. Although several complaints of inciting ethnic hatred were filed against the artist and editor, in September the Chancellor of Justice decided not to initiate legal proceedings, and Muslims, who had been planning further demonstrations, called them off. Facing threats against his life, in late September the artist went into hiding but continued to pursue provocative new art projects in the name of defending freedom of expression; these projects had not provoked reaction from the Muslim community by the end of the reporting period.

In May 2007 a supermarket in Frolunda (western region) denied employment to a Muslim woman because she wore a head scarf. The woman filed a complaint with the DO. In an out-of-court settlement in October 2007, the supermarket paid the woman approximately \$11,000 (SK77,000) in compensation and now allows employees to wear head scarves.

In April 2007 a woman wearing a veil was denied entrance onto a bus. In a legal settlement in September 2007, the company paid her \$4,000 (SK28,000).

In April 2007 the Scandic hotel chain (the largest hotel operator in the Nordic region) removed all Bibles from its hotel rooms after a guest complained that the presence of a Bible constituted religious discrimination. A media debate ensued, leading Scandic to reintroduce the Bible in June 2007 together with the Qur'an and the Tanach in all hotel rooms.

In February 2007 the city of Stockholm denied a Muslim woman employment as a nurse at a home for the elderly because she wore a head scarf. The woman filed a complaint with the DO. In an out-of-court settlement in May 2007, the city paid the woman approximately \$4,000 (SK28,000) in compensation.

In April 2005 an appeals court found Lief Liljestrom guilty of being an accomplice to hate speech for allowing third parties to post material offensive to homosexuals on his website and sentenced him to 1 month's imprisonment. He appealed, arguing that the online content reflected his Christian convictions. In November 2007 the Supreme Court acquitted him.

In March 2006 the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention and the Living History Forum presented a report on anti-Semitism in the country. Of those polled, 5 percent of all individuals, and 39 percent of those who identified themselves as Muslims, professed strong anti-Semitic views; 36 percent of all respondents indicated an ambivalent view toward Jews. In November 2006 the two organizations issued a report on Islamophobia. The report indicated an increased societal awareness of Islam and Muslims in the country. It found that public discussions on Islam were frequent and often involved questions such as female genital mutilation, male circumcision, ritual animal slaughter, religious private schools, the wearing of religious garments in public places, Shari'a, so-called "honor" violence, and government permission for the construction of mosques. The report stated that one-third of respondents exhibited a bias against Muslims.

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 U.S. Government is a member of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research.

The U.S. Embassy maintained regular contact with local religious leaders, and embassy officials participated in events promoting interfaith understanding and religious tolerance.

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