

SWEDEN 2012 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom. The trend in the government's respect for religious freedom did not change significantly during the year.

There were reports of societal abuses and/or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice; however, prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

The U.S. embassy maintained regular contact with the government and representatives of religious groups to discuss religious freedom. Embassy officers increased outreach to several religious communities, including Jewish and Muslim minorities, to promote tolerance and to counter anti-Semitism and anti-Islamic sentiment. The embassy was actively involved with the commemorative efforts for the 100th Anniversary of Raoul Wallenberg's birth and worked extensively with the government on related projects and events centered on countering religious intolerance and anti-Semitism. The U.S. special envoy to monitor and combat anti-Semitism met with government and religious leaders.

Section I. Religious Demography

Statistics Sweden reports the population is 9.5 million. Religious membership or affiliation is concentrated in a few major religious groups. According to the Church of Sweden (Lutheran), approximately 68 percent of citizens are members; other Christian groups, including the Roman Catholic Church, the Pentecostal movement, the Missionary (or Missions) Church, Jehovah's Witnesses, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) total less than 5 percent of the population. Membership in the Church of Sweden has decreased steadily since it separated from the state in 2000. Researchers estimate that approximately 6 percent of the population is Muslim.

According to the Official Council of Swedish Jewish Communities, the number of Jews is approximately 20,000. The Swedish Commission for Government Support to Faith Communities estimates there are 9,000 practicing Jews in the country. Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform synagogues are found mostly in large cities.

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

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom.

In addition to the Church of Sweden, 22 recognized religious groups raise revenues through the Commission for State Grants to Religious Communities, a governmental body under the authority of the Ministry of Culture. Member contributions are made through the national taxation system. Among the religious groups receiving contributions are the Swedish Missionary Church, Roman Catholic Church, Swedish Alliance Mission, Baptist Union of Sweden, Salvation Army, Methodist Church in Sweden, Pentecostal Church, the Jewish Central Council, the Islamic Cooperation Council, and the Evangelical Church.

Recognition or registration is not required to carry out religious activity. Faith communities are taxed similarly to non-profit organizations. 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.

If a person believes he or she has been discriminated against for any reason in the private sector, in the government, or by a government agency or authority, that person can file a complaint with the Discrimination Ombudsman (DO). The DO will then represent the individual in the event of legal proceedings. The DO received 121 complaints related to religion and religious beliefs during 2011, the latest available figure.

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

According to law, animal slaughter must be preceded by stunning and/or the administration of anesthetics to minimize the animal's suffering. The Muslim community is split over whether certain anesthetic methods conflicted with halal requirements. The Jewish Community reports that the strict laws effectively

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prevent the production of kosher meat, and as a result, most halal and kosher meat is imported.

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

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

Religious education covering all world 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 curricula. The governmental Living History Forum promotes national educational programs on the Holocaust, anti-Semitism, and racism.

Law enforcement authorities maintain statistics on hate crimes, and police hate-crime units exist throughout the country. Authorities can add a hate crime classification to the initial reporting or to existing charges during an investigation, as well as to the trial and sentencing phase of a crime as appropriate. The Stockholm County police have a hate crime unit that trains police officers to detect, raise awareness of, and inform the public of hate crimes. A hate crime unit also exists in Malmo.

The government is a member of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Epiphany, Good Friday, Easter Sunday, Easter Monday, Ascension Day, All Saints' Day, Christmas Eve, Christmas, and the day after Christmas.

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Government Practices

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom.

In response to reports of hate crimes, such as Muslim women harassed for wearing a veil or a Jew wearing a kippah, the Malmo police installed a hot line for victims of hate crimes to contact relevant authorities. Several local police authorities provided training and carried out projects aimed at detecting hate crimes when complaints were filed. The police academy has detection and investigation of hate crimes in the regular training curriculum. Representatives from the hate crime unit visited high schools to raise awareness of hate crimes and how to report them, and encouraged more victims to report abuse. Information for victims of hate crimes was available in several languages, and local authorities provided interpreters to facilitate reporting. However, unit representatives noted that many victims chose not to report incidents due to privacy concerns.

The Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency cooperated with religious communities on a national level to promote dialogue and prevent conflicts leading to anti-Muslim and anti-Semitic incidents.

In March Malmo Mayor Ilmar Reepalu linked the Jewish community with the anti-immigrant political party, the Sweden Democrats. Reepalu was quoted in a magazine article saying that the “Sweden Democrats have infiltrated the Jewish community in order to push their hate of Muslims.” Two days later, however, Reepalu stated that he “had no basis” for his claims and that he “shouldn’t have said it that way.” In April, Minister for Integration Erik Ullenhag condemned Reepalu’s “recurring ignorant and bigoted statements.”

In August local officials in Forserum held a meeting with representatives from several Muslim organizations to address the harassment of Somali residents who were victims of assaults and subjected to anti-religious and racist remarks.

In October an appellate court granted approval to an Orthodox Jewish family to home-school their children. The decision was based on their social situation, as there are no exceptions in the law to allow home-schooling children based on religious or philosophical beliefs. The city district is appealing to the Supreme Court for guidance in similar cases.

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To mark the 100th anniversary of diplomat and Holocaust rescuer Raoul Wallenberg's birth, the government sponsored events aimed at fighting religious intolerance and anti-Semitism by teaching the lessons of the Holocaust and the importance of not being indifferent. The main agencies involved were the Swedish Institute, which managed the work abroad, and the Living History Forum, which carried out the work domestically. A range of other national and international actors were also involved in the project and offered a variety of activities. The parliament also passed the Raoul Wallenberg Centennial Celebration Act.

The Living History Forum, together with the Association for the Survivors of the Holocaust, continued its "Tell the Future" project, which aimed to carry on the memory of the Holocaust by having survivors tell their stories to people between the ages of 17 and 35. The Living History Forum prepared a memorial project for teachers to use in schools to recognize International Holocaust Remembrance Day.

Visiting Holocaust sites such as Auschwitz was a common educational tool in the school system. Students, regardless of their religious background, participated in these field trips. The Living History Forum estimated that 10 percent of all primary and secondary school students have visited a Holocaust site as part of their education.

The state does not favor the Church of Sweden financially over other religious groups. During the year 67 million Swedish kronor (SEK) (\$9.8 million) were distributed to religious communities, an increase of two million SEK (\$0.3 million) from the previous year. The extra funds support the activities of religious communities that contribute to greater understanding, and respect for different religious beliefs.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice; however, prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom. Because ethnicity and religion are often inextricably linked, it is difficult to categorize many incidents specifically as ethnic or religious intolerance. The Jewish communities in Stockholm and Malmo reported that youth of Middle Eastern origin and white supremacy groups perpetrated many of the anti-Semitic hate crimes.

In September the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance reported

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that despite the progress made in the country, there were still some points of concern. “Anti-Muslim political discourse has become more widespread and the tone has hardened. Online racism has continued to grow exponentially,” the report stated. Additionally, discrimination persisted in schools, health care, the legal system, and the labor market, affecting both new immigrants and those who have been settled in Sweden for a number of years, including Muslims.

The National Council for Crime Prevention (NCCP) reported that most crimes deemed to be anti-Islamic hate crimes were harassment and discrimination in the labor market against veiled women. The NCCP stated that crimes against persons and damage of property, including graffiti, were the most common offenses related to religion.

The NCCP hate crime report for 2011 counted 280 anti-Islamic hate crimes, or 43 percent of the total number of antireligious hate crimes reported during the year. In 2010, there were 272 anti-Islamic hate crimes reported, which accounted for 49 percent of hate crimes based on religion. Arab and Somali immigrants were the targets of anti-Islamic behavior.

The number of reported anti-Semitic crimes increased from 161 in 2010 to 194 in 2011, the latest year for which data is available. The NCCP did not see this as a rising trend; rather it considered the increase to be a normal fluctuation. Anti-Semitic incidents included threats, verbal abuse, vandalism, graffiti, and harassment in schools. Government officials recognized that anti-Semitism was a problem throughout the country, especially in Malmo. Anti-Semitic incidents were often associated with events in the Middle East and actions of the Israeli government, and local Jews were at times blamed for Israeli policies.

A Malmo rabbi was the target of numerous anti-Semitic incidents, mostly involving shouted insults from cars and occasionally thrown objects. The police made no arrests, citing a lack of evidence.

On September 28, vandals attacked the Jewish Community Center in Malmo in the early morning hours. The glass in the main door was smashed with cobblestones from the street, and there was a small explosion caused by a type of firecracker. No one was hurt. Two men were arrested under suspicion of “causing devastation and endangering the public.” Mayor Reepalu promptly condemned the attack and said it was “a horrific act that harms Malmo’s reputation and the city’s brand.” The attack followed a period of relative calm in Malmo, where efforts by

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authorities and religious communities have taken steps to improve understanding between various groups in the city. Local community leaders organized several demonstrations supporting the Jewish Community Center as a response to the incident, including one in which Mayor Reepalu took part.

The Simon Wiesenthal Center left in place its travel warning first issued in 2010 for Jews traveling in southern Sweden, stating that Jews in Malmo could be “subject to anti-Semitic taunts and harassment.” In March representatives from the center met with the local government and police in Malmo to discuss the situation but without significant result. Meanwhile, local authorities in Malmo set up a Forum for Dialogue to promote mutual understanding between the Jewish and Muslim communities and to take joint action to combat intolerance.

In November Siavosh Derakhti, founder of the group “Young Muslims Against Anti-Semitism” in Malmo, became the first recipient of a newly-instituted award by the Swedish Committee Against Anti-Semitism for young people working to counteract anti-Semitism and other forms of prejudice.

According to Swedish Television, Somalis have continued to leave Forserum in Southern Sweden due to anti-Muslim and racial harassment. During the year the Somali community decreased from 160 to fewer than 100. In August local officials held a meeting with representatives from several Muslim organizations to address the harassment of Somali residents who were victims of assaults and anti-Muslim and racist remarks. Also in August, Forserum residents organized a demonstration in support of the Somali community.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. embassy engaged regularly on religious freedom issues with government officials such as the Ministers of Integration, Democracy, and Faith Communities.

The U.S. embassy maintained regular contact with local religious leaders, and embassy officials participated in events promoting interfaith understanding and religious tolerance. The ambassador met with several high level religious leaders during the year. He also met with the Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe’s special envoy to monitor and combat anti-Semitism and with the chair of the Jewish Council.

In August the embassy hosted an interfaith iftar focusing on Muslims of Somali

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origin. The embassy also supported the Gothenburg Eid celebration, a multi-day music and cultural festival attended by thousands of Muslim youth and other residents of Gothenburg.

During the year, the ambassador and embassy staff visited Malmo to assess multicultural tensions, in particular the situation of the Jewish community. The U.S. special envoy to monitor and combat anti-Semitism followed with a visit to Malmo, Lund, and Stockholm. The special envoy raised anti-Semitism and intolerance with representatives of the Jewish and Muslim communities and members of the Interreligious Dialogue Forum and addressed anti-Semitic statements in a meeting with Mayor Reepalu. The special envoy also met with government officials, including several ministers.

The ambassador and embassy officers worked with the government and the family of Raoul Wallenberg to honor the 100th Anniversary of his birth and his rescue of thousands of Jews in Hungary during the Holocaust. Projects included airing in Stockholm the April Days of Remembrance Ceremony live from the U.S. Capitol Rotunda and a tree planting ceremony in Stockholm's Nobel Park with the participation of the U.S. deputy secretary of state and high level Swedish and UN officials. The ambassador, deputy chief of mission, and other embassy officials discussed Wallenberg's legacy with youth, academics, and students, encouraging them to apply Wallenberg's principles to combating hate and engaging in interfaith dialogue.

The U.S. secretary of state and Swedish foreign minister drafted a joint opinion piece on Raoul Wallenberg that appeared on January 17 in the *New York Times* and the *International Herald Tribune*.