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Sweden

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

July-December, 2010 International Religious Freedom Report

Report

September 13, 2011

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally enforced these protections.

The government generally respected religious freedom in law and in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period.

There were some reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

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 9.4 million.

There are numerous religious groups. The government does not register the religion of citizens; rather it relies on statistics submitted by religious organizations when they apply for annual state funds.

Religious membership or affiliation is concentrated in a few major denominations. According to the Church of Sweden (Lutheran), an estimated 71.3 percent (6,664,000 persons) of citizens are members; other Protestant groups total approximately 4.4 percent (400,000) of the population. Membership in the Church of Sweden has decreased steadily since it separated from the state in 2000. During 2010, 55,771 members left the church. Church-led studies found that individuals left the church primarily for economic reasons; membership carries a tax on income, normally less than 1 percent (separated members can still attend services).

Researchers estimate that approximately 5 percent (450,000 to 500,000) of the population is Muslim, although the officially sanctioned Muslim Council of Sweden, for government funding purposes, reported only 110,000 active participants.

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

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 approximately 8,700 practicing members. Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform synagogues are found mostly in large cities.

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

Certain religions are closely tied to immigrant groups, including the large Finnish-speaking Lutheran denomination and the Orthodox Christian churches attended by 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 religious communities. The majority of immigrants from the Middle East and the Horn of Africa are Muslim and attend services in Arabic. Members of the more common religious communities tend to be concentrated in the three largest cities: Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Malmo. 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 Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

Please refer to Appendix C in the Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for the status of the government's acceptance of international legal standards <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/appendices/index.htm>.

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally enforced these protections.

Since the official separation of church and state in 2000, 22 recognized religious denominations, in addition to the Church of Sweden, raised revenues through member contributions made through the national tax system. Among these were 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 Evangelist Church. All recognized denominations were entitled to direct government financial support, contributions made through the national tax system, or both. The state does not favor the Church of Sweden over other religious groups.

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, he or she can file a complaint with the Discrimination Ombudsman (DO). The DO will then represent the individual in the event of legal proceedings.

Preliminary figures for 2010 from the DO showed 101 complaints related to religion and religious beliefs.

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

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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 Commission for State Grants to Religious Communities is a governmental body under the authority of the Ministry of Culture. Twenty-two registered religious groups (41 including subgroups) are entitled to government aid. In 2010 approximately 50 million kronor (\$7.4 million) was distributed to religious communities.

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. The forum started an educational campaign, "Anne Frank & I," in 2006 to target high school students. This campaign continued during the reporting period. The exhibit toured countrywide during 2009-10. Additionally, the Living History Forum, together with the Association for the Survivors of the Holocaust, continued their "Tell the Future" project, which aimed to carry on the memory of the Holocaust by having survivors tell their stories to 17-to-35-year-olds. On an annual basis, the Living History Forum prepared a memorial project for teachers to use in schools to recognize International Holocaust Remembrance Day.

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

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. Several local police authorities provide training and carry out projects aimed at detecting hate crimes when complaints are filed. Detecting and investigating hate crimes is included in the police academy training curriculum. Representatives from the hate crime unit visit high schools to raise awareness of hate crimes and how to report them, and, by their presence, encourage more victims to report abuse. Information for victims of hate crimes is available in several languages, and interpreters are provided to facilitate reporting. However, the unit noted that many victims, especially of anti-Semitic crimes, chose not to report incidents due to privacy concerns.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Epiphany, Good Friday, Easter Sunday, Easter Monday, Ascension Day, Whit Sunday, All Saints' Day, Christmas, and Boxing Day. Students from minority religious backgrounds may observe their respective religious holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The government generally respected religious freedom in law and in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period.

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 conflicted with halal requirements. The Jewish Community reported that strict Swedish laws prohibit the availability of kosher meat, and 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 ordained to carry out circumcision according to the Jewish faith) to perform the operations but

required that an anesthesiologist or other medical doctor accompany them. Some Jews and Muslims claimed the law interfered with their religious traditions.

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

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

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

On December 1, Minister for Public Administration and Housing Stefan Attefall met with representatives from religious communities to discuss the role of religion in the society, its development, and possibilities to improve the integration process.

On November 30, the DO stated that if a general ban prohibiting students from wearing a niqab (a veil covering the face, worn by some Muslim women) were implemented, it would violate existing discrimination laws.

Section III. Status of Societal Actions Affecting Enjoyment of Religious Freedom

There were some reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Citizens were generally tolerant of diverse religious practices. Law enforcement authorities maintained statistics on hate crimes. Some resident Muslims manifested anti-Semitic views. The total number of hate crimes in 2009 remained near the same level as in 2008 (600).

According to the Malmo Islamic Center, approximately 45,000 people of Muslim background reside in the city of Malmo, which constitutes some 16 percent of the city's population. The Jewish Community in Stockholm and Malmo report that many of the hate crimes are perpetrated by two groups: youth of Middle Eastern origin and white supremacy groups. While the Jewish Community Center does not keep total numbers on the Jewish population, around 700 members belong to the Center. One family told the press it moved from Malmo in recent years due to fear of anti-Semitism. Other Jews have left Malmo, according to the Jewish Community Center, in search of more active communities in Stockholm and abroad, including Israel. Jewish leaders and organizations report that the overall number of Jews in Malmo has declined, in part because those who came to Sweden during and after World War II are aging and many of their children are living in other cities. Anti-Semitism can also be a factor, according to sources.

In January, the regional newspaper Skanska Dagbladet published a series of articles on the Jewish community in Malmo. In response, Mayor Ilmar Reepalu reportedly asserted Malmo's Jews bore part of the responsibility for the attacks against the community since they failed to criticize Israel's action in Gaza in 2009 and added, "We accept neither anti-Semitism nor Zionism." Reepalu subsequently claimed he was deliberately misquoted. However, on February 21, the British Sunday Telegraph quoted Reepalu as saying, "There have been no attacks on Jews and, if Jews here [in Malmo] want to move to Israel, they are free to do so." Reepalu faced heavy criticism. After meeting with the Jewish community, Reepalu stated he realized the seriousness of the situation with hate crimes against Jews in Malmo.

During the year, the newspaper Dagens Nyheter reported that "furious" Swedish climbers were demanding changes to the names of rock-climbing routes in the Jarfalla area, some of which bore names related to Nazis and the Holocaust, such as "Himmler," "Kristallnacht," "Third Reich," "Crematorium," and "Swastika." Most of these nicknames were given between 1987 and 2001, but the press only picked up the story during the year. One of the climbers involved in the original naming told the press that he picked the name because he thought the route was "horrible" and had to be "defeated." Despite

general agreement—including from the Swedish climbing community—that the names were offensive, the private publishers of the climbing guide did not change them. By custom, climbers who blaze routes name them, and this has sometimes led to highly insensitive monikers across the world, including in North America.

The Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency cooperated with religious communities on a national level to promote dialogue and to prevent conflicts leading to anti-Islamic and anti-Semitic incidents. In June the National Council for Crime Prevention (NCCP) presented its annual study on hate crimes in 2009, including anti-Semitic, anti-Islamic, and other religion-related hate crimes. Unlike in 2008, in 2009 the number of anti-Semitic crimes outnumbered the anti-Islamic crimes, in large part in reaction to the Israeli military's incursion into Gaza and increased tensions in the Middle East. In 2009 there were 591 reports of hate crimes involving religion, of which 250 were anti-Semitic crimes (42 percent of religion-related hate crimes), up from 159 in 2008, and 194 were anti-Islamic crimes (33 percent of religion-related hate crimes), down from 272 in 2008. Of the hate crimes involving religion in 2009, 15 percent reportedly had a white-supremacist motive, an increase of 3 percent from 2008.

Although nation-wide statistics for 2010 were not available, police from Skane, the region in southern Sweden where much of the anti-Semitic and anti-Islamic incidents occurred, reported a 50 percent increase in hate crimes over 2009, from 298 to 446. Of these, anti-Islamic hate crimes increased more than 500 percent, from 7 in 2009 to 45 in 2010. Anti-Semitic hate crimes, however, dropped by 63 percent, from 86 in 2009 to 32 in 2010. Police explained the lack of major tensions in the Middle East as one reason for the drop in anti-Semitic hate crimes.

The NCCP's report stated crimes against persons and damage of property/graffiti were the most common offenses related to religion. The most frequent anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim crimes were crimes against persons, with 130 and 129 reported incidents in 2009 respectively; the second-most common crimes were agitation against an ethnic group, 75 and 31 cases respectively. According to the report, 28 percent of anti-Semitic crimes were ideologically motivated. Religious hate crimes more frequently occurred in religious places or at home. The victim rarely knew the perpetrator, and the majority of both suspects and victims were men. By March police completed investigation of 50 percent of the hate crimes involving religion that were reported during 2008. Approximately 2 percent of these hate crimes continued under investigation, and police dropped 48 percent for lack of evidence or failure to meet the standards of a hate crime.

Several anti-Semitic incidents were reported in Malmo and Stockholm, including rocks thrown at a Jewish community center, two phoned-in bomb threats, and ethnic/religious slander. In conjunction with the Gaza flotilla incident May 31, leaders of the Jewish community reported that several of its members received threats via e-mail, text messages, and telephone calls. Anti-Semitic statements increased in blogs and Internet forums.

On July 7, according to media reports, a rabbi was walking home from Stockholm's central train station when four young men of Arab descent yelled "you will die Israeli, killer--you will be beaten." The four men ran towards the rabbi, who escaped by jumping into a nearby taxi.

On July 7, a settlement was reached between a woman and a motel in Linköping. The woman was allegedly harassed during an employment interview in February and denied the job because she was married to a man born in a Muslim country. The DO sued the company in the Labor Court for religiously motivated harassment, and in the settlement the woman received 50,000 kronor (\$7,400) in compensation.

On July 23, a small early morning explosion blackened the entrance to a synagogue in Malmo and broke three windows. A note with a bomb threat had been put on the synagogue door the day before.

On October 5, the Malmo district court ruled that a sports center, which had prevented a woman wearing a headscarf from participating in the center's aerobic workout, was guilty of religious discrimination. The court ruled the woman should receive 5,000 kronor (\$740) in compensation.

On October 10, approximately 10 teenagers in Malmo threw eggs and trash cans at a building where a weekend retreat for Jewish children was taking place. The white teenagers reportedly shouted anti-Semitic slogans during the attack.

On November 15, approximately 10 persons were listening to a lecture at a mosque in southern Stockholm when rocks were thrown through the windows. One person was taken to the hospital; others were also hurt by glass shards. The police suspected the attack targeted Muslims. The Muslim community denounced the attack as a hate crime. There were no arrests made by the end of the reporting period.

On November 30, the DO issued a decision on a case from 2008, in which a training academy had tried to prevent a student wearing a niqab from attending classes. During the investigation, the student continued to attend classes and graduated; the DO decided that, since she graduated, it could not be proven that she suffered discrimination.

In December 2009, the "Arbeit Macht Frei" sign from the front gate of the Auschwitz concentration camp in Poland was stolen. Police suspected Anders Hogstrom, a former Swedish neo-Nazi, of ordering five Polish men to steal the sign, reportedly acting as an agent for a British Nazi sympathizer. Hogstrom was extradited to Poland in April, and on November 25, he was prosecuted for instigating theft, damage, and breaking the law against trade in cultural relics. Polish prosecutor Janusz Hnatko told the press that Hogstrom confessed to his involvement. On December 30, Hogstrom struck a plea bargain with the Polish court and agreed to serve a 32-month sentence in Sweden.

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 maintains regular contact with local religious leaders, and embassy officials participated in events promoting interfaith understanding and religious tolerance. In September, the embassy hosted an iftar (evening meal during Ramadan) for the local Muslim community to celebrate Ramadan.

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