

SWEDEN

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom. The government did not demonstrate a trend toward either improvement or deterioration in respect for and protection of the right to religious freedom.

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

The U.S. government routinely discussed religious freedom issues with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The embassy conducted frequent outreach to the religious community, including Muslim and Jewish minorities, to promote tolerance and to counter anti-Semitism and anti-Islamic sentiment.

Section I. Religious Demography

Religious membership or affiliation is concentrated in a few major denominations. According to the Church of Sweden (Lutheran), approximately 70 percent of citizens are members; other Christian groups, such as 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 5 percent (450,000 to 500,000) 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 approximately 9,000 practicing Jews in the country. 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, the Church of Scientology, Word of Faith, and the Unification Church.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom.

Since the official separation of church and state in 2000, 22 recognized religious denominations, in addition to the Church of Sweden, 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 tax 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 Evangelist Church. The state does not favor the Church of Sweden over other religious groups. In 2010, the most recent year for which data is available, approximately 50 million kronor (\$7.4 million) was distributed to religious communities.

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.

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. The DO received 121 complaints related to religion and religious beliefs during the year.

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

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 effectively 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 stated that the law interfered 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 restrictions 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.

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 Living History Forum, together with the Association for the Survivors of the Holocaust, continued its "Tell the Future" project, which aims 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 prepares a memorial project for teachers to use in schools to recognize International Holocaust Remembrance Day.

The Stockholm County police has 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 chose not to report incidents due to privacy concerns.

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

Government Practices

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom.

In December the Swedish government launched the commemoration of the 100th anniversary of Raoul Wallenberg's birth. The government created an organizing committee earlier in the year and has used the anniversary events to fight religious intolerance and anti-Semitism by teaching the lessons of the Holocaust. The main agencies involved are the Swedish Institute, which is handling the work abroad, and the Living History Forum, which is handling the work in Sweden. A range of other national and international actors are also involved in the project and are offering a varied selection of activities.

In March the government tasked the Living History Forum to study anti-Semitic and anti-Islamic attitudes in the country and to summarize knowledge of Jewish and Muslim groups' vulnerability to these attitudes in order to identify methods to counteract anti-Islamic sentiment and anti-Semitism. The study, presented in August, found that racist and xenophobic views were increasingly propagated over the Internet, that Jews and Muslims faced discrimination for outwardly professing their faith, and that conspiracy theories targeted Jews for alleged attempts at global, political, and financial domination.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were some reports of societal abuses and discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice; however, prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom, and individuals were generally tolerant of diverse religious practices. Law enforcement authorities maintained statistics on hate crimes. Some Muslims expressed anti-Semitic views.

The Jewish communities in Stockholm and Malmo reported that many of the anti-Semitic hate crimes were perpetrated by two groups: youth of Middle Eastern origin and white supremacy groups. The National Council for Crime Prevention (NCCP) reported that most anti-Islamic hate crimes were harassment and discrimination in the labor market against veiled women.

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

According to the Jewish community in Malmo, Jews have left the city due mainly to cultural and economic reasons, but possibly also anti-Semitism. They usually search for more active Jewish communities in Stockholm and abroad, including Israel.

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 NCCP presented its annual study on hate crimes in 2010, including anti-Semitic, anti-Islamic, and other religion-related hate crimes. Nationwide, there was a decrease in anti-Semitic hate crimes, but an increase of 40 percent in anti-Islamic hate crimes. In 2010 there were 552 reports of hate crimes involving religion, of which 161 were anti-Semitic crimes (29 percent of religion-related hate crimes), down from 250 in 2009, and 272 were anti-Islamic crimes (49 percent of religion-related hate crimes), up from 159 in 2009. Of the hate crimes involving religion in 2010, 20 percent reportedly had a white supremacist motive, an increase of five percent from 2009. The police hate crime task force believed that incidents in the Middle East conflict, police resources, or fluctuations in the willingness to report could all be factors that influenced the statistical outcome.

The NCCP's report stated that 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 98 and 148 reported incidents in 2010, respectively; the second-most common crimes were agitation against an ethnic group, 34 and 80, respectively. According to the report, 19 percent of anti-Semitic crimes were ideologically motivated. Religious hate crimes more frequently occurred in religious locations or at an individual's

home. The victim rarely knew the perpetrator, and the majority of both suspects and victims were men. By March 2011, police had investigated 50 percent of the hate crimes involving religion reported during 2009. A small part of these continued to be under investigation, while police dropped 44 percent of them for lack of evidence or failure to meet the standards of a hate crime. The reason given for the high figure of unresolved crimes is that religious hate crimes often consisted of damage to property, e.g., graffiti, where there seldom were any leads for police to follow.

Although nationwide hate crime statistics for the year were not available, police from Skane, the region in southern Sweden where much of the anti-Semitic and anti-Islamic incidents occurred, reported an increase in anti-Semitic hate crimes for the year and a decrease of anti-Islamic hate crimes. Malmö police registered 67 anti-Semitic hate crimes for the year. The equivalent figures for 2010 were 34, and for 2009, 80. Anti-Islamic incidents decreased from 40 crimes in 2010 to 34 in 2011. The figure for 2009 was seven. Malmö police believed the fluctuations could be related to more police resources allocated to work on hate crimes, a rising tendency to report these types of crimes to the police, or an overall rise in hate crimes with anti-Semitic connections during the year. Anti-Semitic incidents included threats, verbal abuse, vandalism, graffiti, and harassment. Anti-Semitic and anti-Islamic statements in blogs and Internet fora also occurred. These incidents were often associated with events in and actions of Israel, and Swedish Jews were at times blamed for policies of the Israeli government. The government has taken the increase in anti-Semitic incidents in the southern part of the country very seriously.

The NCCP reported it did not see a rising trend in anti-Semitic or anti-Islamic hate crimes, but rather that these types of crimes increased in some years and decreased in other years without representing a broader trend in either direction. Swedish academic experts also claimed that reports of increased anti-Semitism in Malmö were not connected to religion but to ethnic conflicts and political tensions that stemmed from the Middle East conflict and xenophobic youths that have targeted Jewish symbols.

In August a man from Småland was fined for making Nazi salutes and shouting “Heil Hitler.” The 37-year-old man, who was under the influence of alcohol, admitted he made the gestures. He was found guilty of a hate crime and fined SEK 2,400 (\$340).

In July a 16-year-old boy from Vastra Frolunda in southwest Sweden was found guilty of making Nazi gestures in a McDonald's restaurant in early April. He admitted to the hate crime charges and was sentenced to pay a fine.

In April two Muslim men won a discrimination case against Western Union. The financial service company had refused to assist the two after confusing their Muslim names with names on international sanctions lists. The District Court sentenced Western Union for discrimination and the men received 10,000 SEK (\$1,400) and 5,000 SEK (\$700) in compensation.

In April a 17-year-old Muslim girl was refused an internship at a hair salon in Malmo because she was wearing a veil. The owner claimed the girl would have frightened off her customers. The owner was charged with discrimination and sentenced to a fine of 27,500 SEK (\$4,100).

In December 2010 the Simon Wiesenthal Center issued a travel warning for Jews traveling in southern Sweden based on its assessment that Jews in Malmo were "subject to anti-Semitic taunts and harassment." It also cited "the outrageous remarks of Malmo Mayor Ilmar Reepalu, who blamed the Jewish community for failing to denounce Israel." The Jewish congregations in Stockholm and Malmo reported they did not agree with the travel warning. In March the Simon Wiesenthal Center met with the local government and police in Malmo to discuss the situation but there was no significant result by year's end.

In July 2010 a small early morning explosion blackened the entrance to a synagogue in Malmo and broke three windows. According to media reports, a note with a bomb threat had been put on the synagogue door the day before. However, in 2011 the police investigation concluded that the explosion was not connected to the bomb threat reported by the media. The police bomb technicians found traces of firework-wrappers and classified the case as damage of property; no arrests were made due to lack of evidence.

In July 2010, according to media reports, a rabbi was walking home from Stockholm's central train station when four young men of apparent Middle Eastern 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. Police made no arrests due to lack of evidence and closed the case during the year.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government engaged in discussions on religious freedom as part of its foreign policy agenda both on the societal and governmental level. The U.S. government is a member of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research.

The embassy maintained regular contact with local religious leaders, and embassy officials participated in events promoting interfaith understanding and religious tolerance. In August the embassy hosted an iftar (evening meal during Ramadan) for the local Muslim community to celebrate Ramadan. In October embassy officials met with different religious communities in Malmo to discuss the situation for Jews in light of recent tensions. In November Ambassador Douglas Davidson, the Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues, visited the country and met with representatives from the Living History Forum, the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Swedish Committee Against Anti-Semitism.