

Institute on Religion and Public Policy Report

Religious Freedom in Sweden

Executive Summary

(1) The constitution instituted in 1975 for the Kingdom of Sweden allows freedom of religion. Furthermore, other laws and policies within the country allow the free practice of religion. The country has some reports of societal abuses or discrimination with the impetus of religious affiliation, practice, or belief. Many of these abuses are directed at the Muslim and Jewish communities within Sweden. The government of Sweden consistently prosecutes such actions.

The Institute on Religion and Public Policy

(2) The Institute on Religion and Public Policy is an international, inter-religious non-profit organization that strives to guarantee religious freedom worldwide. Twice nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, the Institute supports all fundamental rights with an emphasis on religious freedom. The Institute works with many influential individuals such as scholars, business executives, policy makers, religious leaders, and non-governmental organizations in order to encourage the furthering of religious freedom in a cooperative way across the globe.

Legal Status

(3) Sweden's constitution allows for the freedom of religion. Other laws and policies within the country provide for the free practice of religion. At all levels of the law, the right to freedom of religion is protected against abuse from both the government as well as private actors. The government of Sweden typically respects the free practice of religion. Also, the country's hate speech law does not allow threat or expressions of hate for persons whether it be for religious belief or other reasons.

(4) The Church of Sweden separated from the government in 2000. After this separation, there are eight major religious dominations recognized in addition to the Church of Sweden within the country. These religious groups include the Swedish Missionary Church, the Roman Catholic Church, Pentecostal Church, Evangelist Church, Salvation Army, Methodist Church of Sweden, Swedish Alliance Mission, and Baptist Union of Sweden. All of these religious denominations receive member contribution through the national tax system. Besides the national tax system, the statistics submitted by religious groups

when they apply for state funds are used to ascertain the number of people in various religious denominations throughout the country. This is done because the Kingdom of Sweden does not allow for the registration of the religion of each citizen.

(5) Registration or recognition of a religious group is not required for the religious group to have religious activity. All religious denominations that are recognized by the government can receive government financial support as well as the option to have contributions made to the religion through the national tax system. The religious groups that would like governmental aid must apply to the government for it. Sweden's government considers the number of members within the religious group as well as the length of time that the religious group has been established within the country. No other criteria are needed to apply for registration with Sweden's government. The Ministry of Culture directs the Commission for State Grants to Religious Communities which handles the dispersal of funds to religious communities within the country. Thirty-nine religious groups, including subgroups, receive government aid. Approximately \$8,372,000 was distributed to these registered religious communities in the year of 2007.

(6) According to Swedish law, it is necessary for animals to be stunned or receive anesthetic before slaughter in order to minimize suffering. There is a split between Muslims in Sweden on this law. They are not sure if this law for anesthesia is contrary to Halal requirements.

(7) The law on circumcision in Sweden mandates that all male circumcisions must be performed by licensed doctor. If the boy is under two months of age, the circumcision can be performed in the presence of an individual certified by the National Board of Health and Welfare. The National Board of Health and Welfare can also certify mohels to perform the circumcision. The circumcision done on boys under two months of age by a mohel certified by the National Board of Health and Welfare must be done under the supervision of a doctor or anesthesiologist. Some Muslims and Jews have stated that these regulations on circumcision impede their abilities to practice their religion properly.

Abuse of Religious Liberty

(8) Many Muslims are denied access to various facilities throughout Sweden. In April 2008, a Muslim woman was denied access to an aerobics studio because she was wearing a head cloth and veil. The sports center said that their reason for denying the woman access was because she posed a security threat. The Discrimination Ombudsman sued the sports facility for the actions. In January 2008, two Muslim women who were denied access to a pool facility on two separate occasions in April of 2004 were awarded \$3,100 each by the Gothenburg pool in compensation for the facility's actions. The facility's reasoning for denying the women access was that their clothing did not comply

with hygiene or safety regulations. When the women refused to change their clothing after the facility requested that they do so, the women were denied access to the pool. In February of 2008, the Appeals Court of Gothenburg upheld the verdict for the two women who were denied access to the pool. Eventually, the pool facility appealed to the Supreme Court of Sweden. In April 2007, another woman was denied access to a bus because she was wearing a veil. The transportation company paid the woman \$4,000 in compensation for their actions.

(9) There are also been occasions when Muslims are denied employment in Sweden due to discriminatory reasons. In February of 2007, a Muslim woman was not given employment as a nurse at an elderly home in Stockholm because the woman was wearing a headscarf. The woman filed a complaint with the Discrimination Ombudsman. In May of 2007, the city of Stockholm settled out of court with the Muslim woman. The woman received \$4,000 in compensation for the city's actions. In March of 2007, a Muslim was not given employment in a supermarket in Frolunda, Sweden because the woman was wearing a headscarf. This woman filed a complaint with the Discrimination Ombudsman due to the discriminatory actions of the supermarket. In October of 2007, the supermarket settled the dispute out of court with the Muslim woman. The supermarket gave the woman \$11,000 in compensation for the supermarket's actions. Furthermore, the supermarket now allows employees to wear headscarves if the employees choose to.

(10) In August 2007, a regional newspaper in Sweden published a cartoon of a dog with the head of Prophet Mohammad. Next to the cartoon was an editorial on the freedom of expression. Vandalism, demonstrations, and threats against the artist and editor resulted from this publication. The Prime Minister of Sweden commented on the situation stating that there is freedom of expression in Sweden. In September 2007, the Swedish Chancellor of Justice decided against having legal proceedings for the issue of the cartoon. After the Chancellor announced the decision, the Muslims proceeded to call off any further demonstrations against the cartoon. Eventually the artist went into hiding in late September due to the number of threats that he received for his actions.

(11) In September 2007, in response to the cartoon of the Prophet Mohammad, an artist created a sculpture of Christ as a dog. The artist proclaimed that he specifically did this to continue the discussion on the freedom of expression and religion in the country. After a few hours of being installed in a public area, the sculpture was removed.

(12) In April of 2007, after a guest complained about the presence of the Bible in hotel rooms, the Scandic hotel removed all Bibles from all the hotel rooms. The guest claimed that the presence of a Bible was religious discrimination. In June of 2007, the Scandic put back Bibles in all rooms and also included a copy of the Qur'an and Tanach in each room.

(13) In June of 2009, a government appointed investigator in Sweden suggested that the Swedish government should not begin a program for state-funded education for imams. After a year long probe, the investigator stated that state-funded education for imams would interfere with the state being neutral in its treatment of various religions within Sweden.

(14) In February of 2007, the integration minister denied allegations that she has Islamophobia. Furthermore, she continued to declare her intentions to defend the rights of women who are oppressed by religion. In her defense of women, the minister stated that all schools should ban Islamic headscarves for girls less than fifteen years of age. During her campaign, Sabuni, the integration minister, stated her opposition to arranged marriages, genital mutilation, and honor killings. In Sweden, fifty Muslim organizations signed a petition against Sabuni's appointment. These Muslim groups declared that they felt alienated by Sabuni's campaign because the customs the minister is so against are tribal traditions and not religious beliefs.

(15) In January of 2007, the Swedish National agency for Education declared its continued support for the right of students to wear religious headgear in schools. It was necessary for the agency to declare that students can wear head scarves after a school declared that a young Muslim girl was not allowed to wear her head covering. Despite the agency's decision, the school decided to stand behind its ban on scarves and asked the agency to reconsider their policy. The agency stated that a ban cannot be allowed for all head coverings as it would exclude students who wear head coverings for religious reasons from going to school. The agency concluded that a ban of that type would interfere with Swedish law for the freedom of religion.

(16) There have also been various cases of anti-Semitism in Sweden. Since 2000, about 130 anti-Semitic crimes have been committed each year. For example, in 2006, there were 134 cases of anti-Semitic crimes. The anti-Semitic crime that occurred the most was cases of agitation against an ethnic group. In 2006, forty-eight cases of agitation against an ethnic group occurred in reference to anti-Semitic cases. Also in 2006, there were thirty-five cases of unlawful threat or molestation in an anti-Semitic fashion. Furthermore, thirty-two percent of all anti-Semitic cases involved Nazi symbols.

(17) There are particularly strong anti-Semitic views within the Muslim community in Sweden. In a report from March 2006, the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention and the Living History Forum found that five percent of all individuals in Sweden have anti-Semitic opinions. Within the Muslim community, thirty-nine percent of Muslims claim that they have strong anti-Semitic views. Thirty-six percent of all individuals surveyed proclaimed that they hold an undecided view towards Jews.

(18) The city of Malmö can be pinpointed as one place where anti-Semitic events occur often. For example, cars parked outside Jewish community centers are often vandalized. Also, during Rosh Hashanah, Jews entering synagogues were verbally threatened by a number of individuals. Furthermore, many anti-Semitic statements are made in high school classrooms. On one particular occasion on March 1, 2008, anti-Jewish demonstrators, numbering 150 total, placed anti-Jewish items throughout the city. The demonstration in March 2008 ended in front of a synagogue with the protestors shouting that Israel is the equivalent of Hitler.

(19) A shop in the city of Solna was vandalized in February of 2008. The shop was owned by a Jew. The vandalism consisted of spray painting of anti-Semitic nature.

(20) In Salem, there was a march of nine hundred individuals. These individuals were commemorating the neo-Nazi activist named Daniel Wreström. On the same day of the march in December 2007, an anti-Nazi group held their own demonstration to counter the march of the neo-Nazis. The government proclaims that the Nazi demonstrations are protected under freedom of speech.

(21) Various discriminatory incidents have occurred which target the gay community in Sweden. In April of 2005, Liljeström was found guilty by an appeals court for having been an accomplice to hate speech. Liljeström allowed third parties to post material that was offensive to homosexuals on his website. Liljeström was sentenced to one month in prison. Liljeström had appealed to the court's judgment stating that the content of his website represented Christian opinions. The Swedish Supreme Court acquitted Liljeström.

Conclusion

(22) The Swedish constitution and laws uphold the right of religious freedom. Furthermore, the government of Sweden continually upholds these laws and punishes those who do not adhere to the policies set down by the government. Despite these truths, there have been many cases of discrimination and abuse based upon religious beliefs. More specifically, these cases have occurred much more frequently during the recent years. In 2000, the Church of Sweden separated from the government. From the many reports given, it seems that although the government and religious leaders have been able to handle this shift away from a state religion, the population has not been able to handle this shift. Furthermore, the high amounts of immigration into the country, specifically immigrants with religious beliefs that vary from the traditional Swedish beliefs, has caused many individuals in Swedish society to show animosity towards individuals from different religious and ethnic backgrounds than typically found in Sweden. With continued support by the government and a bit of time, the Swedish society may learn to accept the increase of different religions in the country.