

SWEDEN 2020 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution protects “the freedom to practice one’s religion alone or in the company of others” and prohibits discrimination based on religion. In March, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) declined to hear the case of two midwives who said the regional hospitals, and by extension the state, had infringed on their religious beliefs and freedom of choice by denying them employment due to their opposition to abortion, which is legal in the country. In September, the Malmo Administrative Court overturned the Bromolla Municipality’s ban on prayer during working hours. In November, the Malmo Administrative Court overturned the ban on hijabs, burqas, *niqabs*, and other face- and hair-covering garments for students and employees in preschools and elementary schools introduced by Skurup and Staffanstorp Municipalities. In January, a government inquiry proposed a ban on the establishment of new independent religious schools, beginning in 2023, and increased oversight on existing schools having a religious orientation. The Migration Agency’s annual report, released in February, reported large regional variations in the assessment of asylum cases of Christian converts from the Middle East and elsewhere. Some politicians from the Sweden Democrats, the country’s third largest political party, made denigrating comments about Jews and Muslims. Prime Minister Stefan Lofven and other politicians condemned anti-Semitism and religious intolerance. The Prime Minister announced his country’s endorsement of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of anti-Semitism, including its list of examples of anti-Semitism. The government continued funding programs aimed at combating racism and anti-Semitism and reducing hate crimes, including those motivated by religion. On September 20, the government allocated 10 million kronor (\$1.22 million) to start preparations connected to the establishment of the country’s first Holocaust museum.

Deputy Secretary General of the Swedish Evangelical Alliance Jacob Rudenstrand said cases of threats and violence due to the public display of religious symbols had increased during the year. In July, media reported unidentified individuals assaulted an 11-year-old boy, mocking him for his Christian beliefs and taking the cross he was wearing. In February, media reported three men assaulted a Jewish woman, taking her Star of David pendant and mocking her for being Jewish. In January, the Equality Ombudsman (DO) concluded the first of three inquiries into a Jewish doctor's allegations of anti-Semitism at New Karolinska Hospital (NKS) and found NKS had not complied with its duty under the Discrimination Act to

investigate alleged harassment. In November, the DO concluded the second inquiry and found that the doctor's union had been in breach of the Discrimination Act when it advised the doctor on remedies to pursue. In a related incident in December, the Health and Social Care Inspectorate rejected a 2019 claim by NKS that the same doctor posed a risk to patient safety and rebuked NKS for identifying the doctor's religion in its complaint. According to media, on August 28, supporters of the Danish right-wing political party Hard Line burned one Quran and kicked another Quran in Malmo. The individuals involved filmed and posted their actions online, leading to violent protests against the defilement of the Qurans. On the day his supporters defiled the Qurans, authorities issued a two-year entry ban on Hard Line's leader, but in October, they rescinded the ban after confirming he held Swedish citizenship. In September, individuals burned two Qurans, one each in Stockholm and Malmo, and posted videos of the burnings on social media. Christian and Jewish leaders condemned the actions and expressed solidarity with the Muslim population. In October, the Official Council of Swedish Jewish Communities and the country's chapter of the European Jewish Congress protested the Arab Book Fair in Malmo for making a book promoting anti-Semitism available online. Media reported that in September, the Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM) held a series of anti-Semitic demonstrations on Yom Kippur that the World Jewish Congress said were done in coordination with NRM in Norway, Denmark, and Iceland. NRM members stood outside a synagogue in Norrkoping holding anti-Semitic banners and spread anti-Semitic messages in several cities. In response, Justice Minister Morgan Johansson said the government condemned "all acts of anti-Semitism and any other expression of racism," and he joined the IHRA's condemnation of NRM's actions. In October, the Defense Research Agency published a study that found approximately 35 percent of online posts about Jews contained anti-Semitic stereotypes, and an additional 10 percent did not explicitly include a stereotype but still expressed hostility towards Jews. During the year, courts convicted several leading NRM members for hate speech and for death threats on social media directed against Jews. In February, producers of the television reality show *Big Brother* removed two contestants for making anti-Semitic remarks.

The Ambassador, Charge d'Affaires, and other U.S. embassy representatives continued to meet with the Ministries of Justice, Culture, and Foreign Affairs, the Swedish Agency for Support to Faith Communities (SST), parliament, police, and local government officials on religious freedom issues, supporting government efforts to improve security for religious groups, and highlighting threats to members of some religious minorities, including Muslim immigrants. The Ambassador hosted an event for four Swedish Holocaust survivors in February

with leading members of the Jewish, Catholic, and Muslim communities, and civil society representatives. Embassy officials underscored the importance of religious tolerance with Christian, Jewish, and Muslim representatives in Malmo, Gothenburg, and Stockholm. The Charge spoke to a leader of the Jewish community to express concern following the NRM's anti-Semitic activities on Yom Kippur.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the population at 10.2 million (midyear 2020 estimate). According to the Church of Sweden (Lutheran), approximately 56 percent of citizens are members. According to government statistics and estimates by religious groups, other Christian groups – including the Roman Catholic Church, Pentecostal Movement, Missionary (or Missions) Church, Jehovah's Witnesses, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Church of Jesus Christ) – together total less than 6 percent of the population. The Finnish Orthodox Church and Georgian Orthodox Church are also present in the country. According to a 2016 Pew Research Center estimate (the most recent available), 8.1 percent of the population is Muslim. According to the Official Council of Swedish Jewish Communities, Jews number approximately 20,000, concentrated mainly in larger cities including Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Malmo.

Smaller religious communities include Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs, Zoroastrians, Mandaeans, and members of the Church of Scientology, Word of Faith, International Society for Krishna Consciousness, and Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (Unification Church).

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution provides for “the freedom to practice one's religion alone or in the company of others.” The law mandates there be no limitation of rights or freedoms on the grounds of religious opinion.

The constitution instructs public institutions to combat discrimination based on religious affiliation. According to law, complaints about discrimination for religious reasons in the private sector, in the government, or by a government agency or authority must be filed with the DO. The ombudsman investigates each case and issues a decision that is not legally binding. The decision includes

recommendations to prevent future discrimination. The ombudsman takes some cases to court each year, in part to create legal precedent. The DO may represent the individual making a complaint in the event of legal proceedings if he or she requests it.

The constitution states, “The opportunities of religious minorities to preserve and develop a cultural and social life of their own shall be promoted.” No one is obliged to belong to a religious community or “divulge religious beliefs in relations with public institutions.”

Hate speech laws prohibit threats or expressions of contempt for persons based on several factors, including religious belief. Penalties for hate speech range from fines to a sentence of up to four years in prison, depending on the severity of the incident.

Law enforcement authorities maintain statistics on hate crimes, including religiously motivated hate crimes, issuing them every two years. Law enforcement authorities may add a hate crime classification to an initial crime report or to existing charges during an investigation. Prosecutors determine whether to bring hate crime charges as part of the prosecution, and the defense has an opportunity to rebut the classification. In cases where the criminal act involves a hate crime, the penalties increase.

There is no requirement in the law for religious groups to register or otherwise seek recognition. Only those faith communities registering with the SST, however, are eligible to receive government funding and tax exemptions similar to those of nonprofit organizations. To register with the SST, a religious group must submit an application to the Ministry of Culture demonstrating the group fulfills certain requirements, including that it has operated in the country for at least five years, has a clear and stable structure, is able to function independently, serves at least 3,000 persons, and has several locations in the country.

According to the law, animal slaughter must be preceded by stunning and/or the administration of anesthetics to minimize the animal’s suffering.

The law stipulates that male circumcision may be performed only by a licensed doctor or, for boys under the age of two months, by a person certified by the National Board of Health and Welfare. The board certifies circumcisers, including *mohels* (individuals who conduct ritual Jewish circumcisions), to perform the

operations on boys younger than two months but also requires the presence of a medical doctor who must administer anesthesia to the infant.

The government facilitates fundraising by religious groups by offering them the option of collecting contributions through the Tax Agency in exchange for a one-time fee of 75,000 Swedish kronor (\$9,200) and an annual fee of 21 kronor (\$3) per member per year. The Church of Sweden is exempted from the annual fee because it, unlike the other religious groups participating in the program, does not receive financial support from the SST. Only religious groups registered with the SST may participate in the program. Religious groups choose what percentage of members' annual taxable income to collect, with a median collection rate of 1 percent. The Tax Agency subtracts a percentage of the member's gross income and distributes it to the religious organization. The member's contribution is not deductible from income tax. Seventeen religious organizations participate in the plan: the Church of Sweden, Swedish Alliance Mission, Roman Catholic Church, Baptist Union of Sweden, Evangelic Free Church in Sweden, The Salvation Army, United Methodist Church of Sweden, Pentecostal Movement, Syrian-Orthodox Church, Bosniak Islamic Association, Syrian Orthodox Archdiocese, Hungarian Protestant Church, Uniting Church in Sweden, Union of Islamic Cultural Centers, United Islamic Associations of Sweden, Swedish Muslim Federation, and Islamic Shi'ite Association of Sweden.

The government provides publicly funded grants to registered religious groups through the SST. The grants are proportional to the size of a group's membership. Registered religious groups may also apply for separate grants for specific purposes, such as security expenses.

The military offers food options that are compliant with religious dietary restrictions. Each military district has a chaplain. According to the law, chaplains may be of any religious affiliation, but all chaplains seconded to the armed forces belong to the Church of Sweden. Regardless of religious denomination, chaplains are required to perform religious duties for other faiths or refer service members to spiritual leaders of other faiths if requested. The law specifically exempts Jehovah's Witnesses from national military service. Other conscientious objectors may apply for unarmed military service but are in practice not inducted into the military. Armed forces guidelines allow religious headwear. Individuals serving in the military may observe their particular religious holidays in exchange for not taking leave on public holidays.

Religious education is compulsory in public and private schools. Teachers use a curriculum designed by the National Agency for Education that encompasses lessons about the major world religions without preference for any particular religious group. Parents may send their children to independent religious schools, which the government supports through a voucher system and which must adhere to government guidelines on core academic curricula, including religious education. Such schools may host voluntary religious activities outside the classroom, but these activities may not interfere with adherence to government guidelines on core academic curricula.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

On March 12, the ECHR declined to hear the case of two midwives who said regional hospitals, and by extension the state, infringed on their rights to freedom of religion and conscience by rejecting them for employment as midwives due to their conscientious objection to abortion. Abortion is legal in the country. The ECHR found that authorities acted lawfully and declined to consider the case, stating, “While the Convention on Human Rights gives the right to freedom of conscience, it is not a human right to get a job in the health care sector.” There was no procedure for appealing the decision. On March 13, 77 Christian leaders wrote an opinion piece criticizing the ECHR’s decision.

In September, the administrative court in Malmo, the country’s third-largest city, overturned the Bromolla Municipality’s ban on prayer during working hours. The court stated the ban contravened rights of religious freedom granted by the constitution and the European Convention on Human Rights. The ban, which applied to all municipal employees, was passed by the local council in 2019 and was criticized by Christian and Muslim representatives.

The Sweden Democrats continued to advocate local and national bans on the Islamic call to prayer. On March 1, Tomas Tobe, a European Parliament Member for the Moderate Party, stated in an opinion piece that the Islamic call to prayer should be banned in residential areas because individuals have the right not to be exposed to a religious message. Tobe wrote the ringing of church bells should be continued due to the country’s historical ties to Christianity. In a response published in the *Aftonbladet* newspaper on March 5, the Liberal Party’s Youth Association wrote, “A secular state must have a neutral attitude to the role of

religion in society. The state should not dictate which religion is more right than another.”

On November 17, the Malmo Administrative Court found Skurup and Staffanstorp Municipalities’ ban on hijabs, burqas, niqabs, and other head- and face-covering garments for students and employees in preschool and elementary school was contrary to the constitutional provision on religious freedom and to the European Convention on Human Rights. The court thereby revoked the ban. Chief Councilor Peter Kristiansson stated, “A restriction of religious freedom requires legal support, something that is lacking in these cases.” He added that neither the Education Act nor any other law accorded a municipality the right to decide on such restrictions. The administrative court determined that parliament had rejected proposals to ban headscarves; therefore, there was no legal support for deciding on such bans at the municipal level. On November 13, the DO concluded its investigation of the ban and found it breached the Discrimination Act on religious grounds. On December 8, Skurup and Staffanstorp Municipalities appealed the verdict to the Gothenburg Court of Appeals. The appeal was pending at year’s end. Christian, Jewish, and Muslim leaders continued to state that the ban constituted an infringement on religious freedom.

All six healthcare regions continued to offer circumcision, although the National Board of Health and Welfare had no statistics on how many children were circumcised during the year.

Some Muslim groups and the Official Council of Swedish Jewish Communities continued to state they considered the law requiring stunning of and/or administration of anesthetics to animals prior to slaughter in conflict with their religious practices. The Muslim community remained divided over whether the requirement conformed to halal procedures. The Jewish community reported the law effectively prevented the domestic production of kosher meat. Most halal meat and all kosher meat continued to be imported. On December 17, the European Union Court of Justice ruled EU member states may impose a requirement that animals be stunned prior to slaughter and that such a requirement does not infringe on the rights of religious groups.

On January 8, a government inquiry committee presented its findings on how a ban on the creation of new independent schools with a religious orientation could be introduced. In June 2019, Minister of Education Anna Ekstrom said, “In recent years, we have seen examples of schools that in the name of religion, separate girls and boys, hardly teach about sexuality and coexistence, and equate evolution with

religious creation myths. This is totally unacceptable.” The committee proposed a ban on establishing such schools, starting in 2023. The committee recommended that no approvals be granted to private entities that wished to operate a faith-based preschool class, compulsory school, compulsory special school, upper secondary school, upper secondary special school, or after-school center. The independent National Agency for Education estimated 9,400 students, approximately 1 percent of all elementary and preschool students, were enrolled in the 72 registered schools having a religious orientation. Judicial experts commented on the inquiry committee’s recommendations, stating to media that according to the European Convention on Human Rights, it could be discriminatory to restrict families’ right to choose schools based on religious beliefs, and that the ban could interfere with the law of freedom of trade. Ekstrom said implementing the committee’s proposal would be “tricky” but would work, if handled correctly. The committee recommended existing schools with a religious orientation be allowed to remain, but it recommended there be greater oversight by the School Inspectorate and the municipalities. Existing schools would be required to report religious orientation and ensure that student participation in education with religious elements was voluntary.

During the year, seven of eight political parties represented in parliament, except for the Christian Democrats, supported banning the establishment of new religious independent schools. Representatives of several religious groups, including the Church of Sweden, the Official Council of Swedish Jewish Communities, the Christian Council of Sweden, and Sweden’s Young Catholics, opposed the proposed ban. The groups stated that schools with a religious orientation helped ground the students in their minority culture and that a ban could be contrary to legislation regarding minority rights. The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, the Swedish Teachers’ Association, and the municipalities of Stockholm, Malmo, Uppsala, and Gavle supported the proposed ban.

The Migration Agency’s annual report, released in February, indicated large regional variations in the assessment of asylum cases of Christian converts from the Middle East and elsewhere, with approval rates ranging between 18 and 33 percent. The report also stated that on average, 25 percent of converts received a residence permit. In 2019, the nongovernmental organization (NGO) Scandinavian Human Rights Lawyers, in partnership with five Christian organizations, issued a report criticizing the Migration Agency for rejecting asylum applications from Christians – primarily those who converted to Christianity while in the country – who said they risked religious persecution in their home countries. The authors of

the 2019 report concluded the Migration Agency had a poor understanding of religious conversion and its decisions on converts were arbitrary. Following the critique, the government requested the agency report how it handled converts' cases and how it met legal standards in matters where religion was stated as a factor in consideration for asylum.

In September, Deputy Secretary General of the Swedish Evangelical Alliance Rudenstrand again said Christian refugees, including but not limited to converts, faced persecution, particularly from Muslim refugees who were new to the country. Christian refugees said they were not safe in the country and the government should take measures to protect them.

There were reports that representatives of the Sweden Democrats – the country's third largest political party – made denigrating comments about Jews and Muslims.

On September 9, Expo, a nonpartisan NGO, reported in its magazine that Mari Herrey, a local Sweden Democrat politician in Molndal and lay judge on the Gothenburg District Court, posted anti-Semitic conspiracy theories and white supremacy symbols on Twitter. Herrey remained on the local Molndal council, and, following an investigation by the Gothenburg District Court, was allowed to remain as a lay judge (a politically appointed, nonprofessional individual serving at the local level who helps presiding judges, similar to a juror in the U.S. legal system). The court's chief judge, Johan Kvarn, stated to media that Herrey's posts were "disgraceful" but that she had acted out of naivety and ignorance, without ill intention.

On September 15, media reported that Dennis Askling, leader of the Sweden Democrats in Haninge, expressed Nazi sympathies and white supremacy theories in an online message to a fellow party member in 2017. Media reported that, among other things, he wrote Nazi phrases such as "Hell Seger" (Swedish for "Sieg Heil") and derogatory comments about synagogues and people of African descent. Askling also worked for the party's secretariat in parliament and was the Sweden Democrat's juror on the panel of political party representatives that gives out the Stockholm Region's annual award honoring antiracism and anti-xenophobic service. Askling stepped down from both the secretariat and panel positions shortly after the media reports were published. The Sweden Democrats' press officer stated the opinions expressed were "reprehensible" and did not comport with the party's politics and values.

In a January 22 opinion piece published in the Israeli media outlet *Yedioth Ahronoth*, Prime Minister Lofven called on the world to fight for the memory of the Holocaust and said he was concerned about anti-Semitism in “many parts of society in many countries, including in my home country.” Prime Minister Lofven endorsed the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism, including its list of examples of anti-Semitism. The World Jewish Congress and the Official Council of Swedish Jewish Communities welcomed the endorsement.

On January 27, Holocaust Remembrance Day, Prime Minister Lofven, Crown Princess Victoria, and Speaker of Parliament Andreas Norlen attended a memorial ceremony at Auschwitz-Birkenau in Poland to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the liberation of the camps. At the event, World Jewish Congress President Robert S. Lauder welcomed Prime Minister Lofven’s public pledge to combat anti-Semitism and his endorsement of the IHRA definition, with its list of illustrative examples of anti-Semitism.

The Media Council, a government agency whose primary task is to promote the empowerment of minors as conscious media users and to protect them from harmful media influences, continued its “No Hate Speech Movement,” which included efforts to stop the propagation of anti-Semitic conspiracy theories. The council offered classroom and online material for students and suggestions on how to address these issues with children.

The high-level Malmo International Forum on Holocaust Remembrance and Combating Antisemitism was postponed until October 13-14, 2021, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The government allocated five million kronor (\$612,000) annually for 2018-20 to the Swedish Committee against Anti-Semitism and the Living History Forum (LHF) (a public agency “commissioned to work with issues related to tolerance, democracy, and human rights, using the Holocaust and other crimes against humanity as its starting point”) to increase opportunities for student and teacher study visits to Holocaust memorial sites and signaled its intention to allocate six million kronor (\$734,000) for 2021-22.

As part of its continuing *National Plan to Combat Racism, Similar Forms of Hostility, and Hate Crimes*, the government provided 15 million kronor (\$1.84 million) to religious organizations and civil society to improve their security, compared with 22 million kronor (\$2.69 million) in 2019. A wide range of civil society organizations, including religiously oriented NGOs, remained eligible for

funding from the Legal, Financial, and Administrative Services Agency to improve their security by, for example, purchasing security cameras and hiring security guards.

The government provided 10 million kronor (\$1.22 million) during the year to fund educational efforts to combat racism and support tolerance, including religious tolerance, in schools, and increased support to civil society. It allocated an additional 10 million kronor (\$1.22 million) to the Police Authority to prevent and investigate hate crimes, including those related to religion. Part of the funding was earmarked for the Police National Operations Department, which assisted the country's regional authorities with investigations of hate crimes.

The SST continued to collaborate with other government agencies and civil society to promote dialogue between the government and faith communities as well as to contribute to the public's knowledge about religion. During the year, the SST continued to cooperate with several municipalities and regions to set up interreligious dialogues with a focus on democracy promotion, countering violent extremism, and educating municipal employees on issues of religion and religious freedom. As part of the government's implementation of the *National Plan to Combat Racism, Similar Forms of Hostility, and Hate Crimes*, SST cooperated with Muslim congregations to increase knowledge of safety measures for mosques.

The SST continued to partner with government entities such as law enforcement authorities, the Civil Contingencies Agency, Defense Research Agency, Public Health Agency, National Agency for Education, Government Offices (comprising the Prime Minister's Office, government ministries, and the Office for Administrative Affairs), Crime Prevention Agency, Migration Agency, and others in supporting ongoing government inquiries, coordinating COVID-19 responses, and facilitating meetings with different faith communities, including groups not registered with the SST. The SST cooperated with 15 religious leaders to make informational videos about COVID-19 for distribution on social media. The SST continued offering courses in family law and movements within Islam and started an interfaith mentorship course for female leaders. The agency continued to fund, publish, and promote publications aimed at educating the public about religious minorities, such as the report, *A multi-religious Sweden in Change*, published in September.

The Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society provided grants to civil society organizations working to combat religious intolerance. Grants included 320,000

kronor (\$39,200) to the Swedish Committee Against Anti-Semitism to educate members of political youth associations about anti-Semitism.

The government continued to fund the LHF. The government allocated 49.3 million kronor (\$6.03 million) to the LHF (compared with 46.5 million kronor [\$5.69 million] in 2019), which provided lesson plans, books, and other resources for teachers. Topics included anti-Semitism, Holocaust remembrance, ethnic and religious conflicts in the Balkans, and critical reading of history. On September 22, the LHF opened the public exhibition “Sweden and the Holocaust” at its showroom in Stockholm. At the opening, Minister for Education Ekstrom said, “By learning about our history we can strengthen and defend our open and democratic Swedish society today and in the future.”

On March 27, Prime Minister Lofven and Minister for Culture and Democracy Amanda Lind discussed the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic with leaders from the Pentecostal Movement, Stockholm Catholic Diocese, Syrian Orthodox Church, Church of Sweden, Christian Council of Sweden, Swedish Buddhist Community, United Islamic Associations of Sweden, and the Official Council of Swedish Jewish Communities. On September 10, the government announced an additional 50 million kronor (\$6.12 million) to faith communities for 2020 and 2021. The government said the additional funds were intended to mitigate the financial impact on faith communities, including declining revenues and increasing expenditures for funerals, during the COVID-19 pandemic. The funds were distributed to the state-subsidized faith communities and the Church of Sweden.

On February 27, the government allocated 10 million kronor (\$1.22 million) for a national initiative to strengthen Holocaust education. Of this amount, six million kronor (\$734,000) went to the LHF to implement an educational program that included the Holocaust and anti-Semitism. The National Historical Museums received 2.3 million kronor (\$281,000) to translate the English-language educational exhibition “Dimensions in Testimony” into Swedish and to add testimony from Swedish Holocaust survivors. The government provided 1.2 million kronor (\$147,000) to the University of Gothenburg to produce a research overview of the role of education within the school system in countering anti-Semitism and other forms of racism.

On September 20, the government allocated 10 million kronor (\$1.22 million) to the LHF to start preparations for the establishment of the country’s first Holocaust museum, including collecting documents and recording the stories of Swedish Holocaust survivors. In making the announcement, the Ministry of Culture said in

a statement, “The Holocaust is a crime against humanity that is unparalleled in our history. Its memory and lessons must continue to be preserved and communicated about. Never again must something similar to this happen.”

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

In 2018 (the most recent year for which statistics were available), 7,090 hate crimes were reported, according to a report released in October 2019 by the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention. Of those, 8 percent were anti-Muslim. Anti-Semitic, anti-Christian, and other antireligious hate crimes accounted for 4 percent each. Authorities said most victims of hate crimes did not report them to police.

In July, media reported that unidentified individuals assaulted an 11-year-old boy, mocking him for his Christian beliefs and taking the cross he was wearing. At year’s end, police were investigating the incident as a robbery with a hate crime motive. In February, media reported three men assaulted a Jewish woman, taking her Star of David pendant and mocking her for being Jewish. According to media, at year’s end, police were investigating the incident as a robbery with a hate crime motive. In September, Deputy Secretary General of the Swedish Evangelical Alliance Rudenstrand said cases of threats and violence against individuals wearing religious symbols, such as crosses or Star of David pendants, had increased during the year.

During the year, a Jewish neurosurgeon at NKS reported continuing reprisals stemming from his 2017 report that the hospital’s chief of neurosurgery subjected him and two other Jewish colleagues to anti-Semitic harassment and discrimination. In January, the DO concluded the first of three inquiries into the doctor’s allegations. The DO found NKS had not complied with its duty under the Discrimination Act to investigate alleged harassment. In November, the DO concluded the second inquiry and found the doctor’s union, the Swedish Medical Association, had violated the Discrimination Act. The union had advised the doctor to file a criminal case because it assessed a union complaint would be unsuccessful and risked harming the relationship between the union and the employer. The DO found that the union would not have advised a member in this way if the grounds for the complaint had been disability or gender and therefore had discriminated against the doctor on the basis of ethnicity. The third inquiry was underway at year’s end. In a related incident, in December, the Health and Social Care Inspectorate rejected a 2019 formal complaint by NKS that the doctor

posed a risk to patient safety and rebuked NKS for identifying the doctor's religion in its complaint.

According to media, in Malmo on August 28, supporters of the Danish right-wing party Hard Line (Stram Kurs) at an illegal demonstration burned a Quran and later in the day at another illegal demonstration kicked a second Quran. The group filmed and uploaded the incident to the internet. Subsequently, a group of Malmo teenagers and young men protested the actions of Hard Line supporters by burning tires and throwing rocks at police, resulting in minor injuries. Media reported several of the rioters chanted anti-Semitic slogans, including "Kill the Jews." Police arrested 10-20 persons on suspicion of inciting a violent riot and three of Hard Line's supporters on suspicion of inciting religious hatred. Police in Malmo had denied Hard Line party leader Rasmus Paludan's request to hold the anti-Muslim demonstration at which supporters burned the Quran, and on August 28, authorities banned him from entering the country for two years. In October, however, the Migration Agency confirmed Paludan was a Swedish citizen and therefore was not subject to the ban because the Swedish constitution states that no citizen may be denied entry. The Council of Swedish Jewish Communities wrote in a statement, "We view with disgust the burning of the Quran and other holy scriptures." The Malmo Muslim Network, an organization promoting the interests of Muslims in the city, sent a letter to Ann Katina, a leader of the Jewish community of Malmo, thanking the community for its support and saying, "[We] condemn the anti-Semitic words of hatred that some chanted during the riot."

On August 27, the Islamic Association in Malmo organized an interfaith assembly with leaders from the Christian and Jewish communities and local politicians to counter the anticipated Quran burning, which Hard Line had announced on social media it would carry out despite not having a demonstration permit. Rabbi Moshe David HaCohen of Malmo compared the Quran burning to the Nazi book bonfires in 1930s Germany.

On November 16, the prosecutor closed the preliminary investigation of hate crimes with regard to the Quran burning in Malmo, concluding the burning itself could not be judged as incitement against an ethnic group. The investigation into possible hate crimes with regard to the demonstration held later in the day, when a Quran was kicked and there were statements that could be perceived as threats or expressions of disrespect, including suspected incitement against ethnic group, was also closed. The prosecutor said in that instance it was not possible to identify any specific perpetrator. In December, the Malmo District Court sentenced seven

persons, six of whom were 16 and 17 years old, for inciting violent rioting in connection with the protest following the Quran burning incident.

The Hard Line party also claimed responsibility for two Quran burnings in Stockholm and Malmo in early September that were registered by police as hate crimes. On September 9, Stockholm Mayor Anna Konig Jerlmyr and her governing alliance party leaders published a statement condemning the planned Quran burnings in Stockholm. On September 12, the Swedish Christian Council called the acts “barbaric,” and the Jewish Community in Stockholm expressed support and solidarity with the Muslim population. Media reported on efforts by local politicians and Muslim community leaders to prevent the burnings from sparking violent responses in their communities. Tensta Mosque operations manager Abdulla Ali Abdi told mosque members to channel their anger into “chang[ing] politics instead of rioting.” Fifteen Muslim congregations submitted a petition to regional politicians on September 12, stating a desire to amend the constitution to prohibit the burning of sacred texts and mocking religions. As of year’s end, no action had been taken on the petition.

According to media, on January 27, International Holocaust Remembrance Day, a bag marked with a Star of David and containing soap and anti-Semitic literature was found outside the Norrkoping City Museum, where an exhibit entitled “Nazism and Norrkoping Now and Then” was on display. No suspects were detained.

Media reported that in October, the Official Council of Swedish Jewish Communities and the country’s chapter of the European Jewish Congress protested the Arab Book Fair in Malmo for making available online a book called *The Synagogue of Satan: The Secret History of Jewish World Domination*. Following the complaint, the fair organizers removed the book, which was published by a Syrian publisher, from the website. The fair organizers released a statement that selling the book “violates our principles of rejecting antisemitism and respecting all religions and beliefs. It was a mistake that should not have happened.” Media reported the Malmo city government suspended its partnership with the Arab Book Fair and was considering seeking reimbursement for the 150,000 kronor (\$18,400) it had contributed to it. In a statement, Malmo’s Cultural Director Pernilla Conde Hellman condemned the selling of the book, saying, “It goes against everything we stand for and we therefore choose to immediately terminate the cooperation.” The Official Council of Swedish Jewish Communities issued a statement welcoming the swift action taken by Malmo City government and the fair organizers’ condemnation of the sale.

In December 2019, the Church of Sweden released a document entitled “The Church of Sweden’s View on Male Circumcision” that stated, “Male circumcision in Judaism, Islam, and certain Christian traditions is a significant identity-creating act from a religious, ethnic, and cultural perspective. It falls under the right to religious freedom and the parents’ right to, on the basis of wanting the best interests of their child, incorporate the child into their own religious tradition and community. In the Church of Sweden’s view, circumcision of boys does not in itself contravene the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.” Media reported that on February 4, Rabbi HaCohen in a post on Facebook said the Church’s position paper was “an extremely important statement” and it was “very good to see that they [the Church] understand how beyond religious freedom, not allowing this would be subtracting from a child’s identity both in Judaism and Islam.”

According to an article published in Israeli newspaper *Haartez* on March 23, an 18-year-old man who joined the NRM when he was 15 decided to leave the neo-Nazi group and help a woman who directed a local Jewish cultural center in the town of Umea to combat anti-Semitism.

In September, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights published an overview of anti-Semitic incidents in the European Union between 2009 and 2019 that showed a rise of reported anti-Semitic cases in the country. On a scale of 1 to 7, with 7 being the most comfortable, the 1,000 respondents replied with a median 6.8 when asked if they would be comfortable having a Jewish neighbor, and 5.8 when asked if they would be comfortable with having a close family member marry a Jew. Both Muslim and Jewish groups in the country stated there had been an increase of anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim sentiments online during the COVID-19 outbreak.

The Swedish Defense Research Agency received 500,000 kronor (\$61,200) to produce a report on anti-Semitism in social media and other digital environments. The report, published on October 6, studied 2.5 million social media posts on Jewishness or Jews and found approximately 25 percent contained anti-Semitic stereotypes, and an additional 10 percent did not explicitly include a stereotype but nevertheless expressed hostility towards Jewish people. The study found that most prevalent were references to “Jewish power” and the role of Jews as a secret driving force behind many major political events. A large proportion of the stereotypes portrayed Jews as threatening and dangerous, therefore justifying violence against Jews. The study was based on English-language data obtained from Twitter, Reddit, Gab, and 4chan during a six-month period in 2019.

In February, the Pew Research Center published findings on attitudes toward democratic principles, such as regular elections, free speech, and free civil society, as well as religious freedom, in 34 countries, based on interviews it conducted in its *Spring 2019 Global Attitudes Survey*. According to the findings, 53 percent of Swedish respondents considered religious freedom to be “very important,” ranking it among the lowest of their priorities for democratic principles of the nine tested.

In September, the University of Gavle’s annual report and poll on the population’s attitudes toward ethnic diversity showed a deteriorating positive view of religious diversity over the last 15 years. According to the findings, 65 percent of the 1,035 respondents believed Muslim women to be more oppressed than other Swedish women. In addition, 73 percent of respondents said schools with an Islamic affiliation made integration of Muslims more difficult, an increase from 71 percent in 2018. A majority of the of the respondents expressed support for a ban on the use of burqas or niqabs, with 76 percent of respondents supporting a ban on these coverings in schools, and 73 percent supporting such a ban in workplaces.

In February, the Christian Council of Sweden presented a report, *Young Believers in Society*. The report was based on a survey of almost 400 respondents in Christian youth organizations. Nearly half of the respondents stated they had felt discriminated against or offended because of their religious beliefs. Twenty-two percent of respondents said teachers or youth-center leaders had insulted them because of their Christian faith. Minister of Education Ekstrom commented on the report, stating, “No student in Sweden should be questioned or challenged because of their Christian faith or religious beliefs.”

In November, five mosques in Malmo, Eskilstuna, Stockholm, and Gothenburg received envelopes containing threats and a white powder, which police determined was nontoxic. Local police initiated investigations and the Swedish Security Police was informed. Media reported that the Eskilstuna Grand Mosque had also previously received several threats via letters, text messages, and telephone calls. According to the mosque, messages stated mosque members should leave the country, did not “fit in,” and were murderers and terrorists.

In August, unidentified individuals vandalized the Christian church in Vastra Skravlinge in Malmo over the course of seven consecutive days. The Sweden Democrats in Malmo consequently asked the Church of Sweden to conduct a local survey on anti-Christian attitudes. The priest of the vandalized church, Mikael

Goth, expressed hesitation about the survey, stating “it would risk further increasing the already existing polarization between different groups.”

During the year, courts convicted several leading members of the neo-Nazi group NRM of hate speech and death threats on social media directed at Jews. In the largest hate speech trial in the country’s history, measured by the number of charges, the Solna District Court sentenced NRM member Anders Jonsson to 10 months in prison and fined him 10,000 kronor (\$1,200) for making 122 social media posts between January and April that were deemed hate speech. The posts included pictures of Nazi leaders, Nazi slogans, and incitements to violence against Jews. In a separate case in January, the Solna District Court convicted Jonsson of hate speech on social media and for sending hundreds of text messages with Nazi content to two journalists and a lawyer. On May 25, the Stockholm District Court convicted three NRM members for hate speech expressed during an annual conference of political leaders in Visby in 2017, when the three individuals chanted Nazi and white supremacy slogans.

Media reported that the NRM conducted a series of anti-Semitic actions on Yom Kippur (September 27-28) in coordination with NRM groups in Denmark, Norway, and Iceland. Approximately 10 NRM members demonstrated outside the synagogue in Norrköping. According to media, one poster at the demonstration described in graphic detail an unfounded theory as to why Jewish male circumcision takes place and stated the Talmud sanctioned rabbis having sex with children. The NRM also distributed flyers with anti-Semitic messages and plastered posters with anti-Semitic messages in several cities. The Official Council of Swedish Jewish Communities expressed disgust over the actions and called for the government to ban the organization. On October 1, in an opinion piece in *Dagens Nyheter*, the Swedish Committee against Anti-Semitism requested increased action and awareness from police and judicial agencies regarding anti-Semitic crimes. On October 5, Ambassador-at-Large for Human Rights, Democracy, and the Rule of Law Annika Ben David wrote on Twitter, “When antisemitism and incitement to hatred or violence occur, all of society is affected. This is unacceptable.” She joined the IHRA in condemning the demonstrations. In an interview with *The Jerusalem Post* on October 5, Justice Minister Morgan Johansson stated, “The Swedish government condemns all acts of anti-Semitism and any other expression of racism. Such acts are threats not only to individuals but to us all and to our open and democratic societies.” In 2019, the government appointed a nonpartisan 25-member committee to consider the introduction of specific criminal liability for participation in a racist organization and a ban on

racist organizations, such as the NRM. The committee's activities were ongoing at year's end.

On February 13, producers of the television reality show *Big Brother* removed two contestants after one of them, complaining of his boss, said, "She was a Jew, so I get it." The other contestant responded, "I hate Jews." The incident received wide media coverage in the country and internationally. A third contestant had previously expressed support for neo-Nazi ideas on social media, although he said he no longer held those views. Producers did not remove him from the show. According to media, Jewish community leaders said, "When a person on such a popular show among youth as *Big Brother* said something like this, it legitimized anti-Semitism."

In November, the Jewish Community in Malmo and the Jewish Cultural Association 1945 held a virtual event in remembrance of Kristallnacht ("The Night of Broken Glass," when in 1938 Nazi Germany destroyed Jewish synagogues, schools, and businesses). Imam Salahuddin Barakat of the Islamakademin participated and stated, "We as a Muslim congregation in Malmo are determined and dedicated to bear this pain with you and fight anti-Semitism no matter where it takes place." The organization Holocaust Survivors in Sweden organized a virtual lecture with Holocaust survivor Livia Frankel in remembrance of Kristallnacht. The lecture was also broadcast at the town square of Umea, accompanied by a light show.

As part of the Jewish-Muslim Amanah project in Malmo, Imam Salahuddin Barakat and Rabbi Moshe David HaCohen continued to speak to students during the year about religious tolerance and conducted interfaith workshops to discuss religious texts and spiritual queries. The Malmo municipality and the SST provided partial funding for the project.

In January, Archbishop of the Church of Sweden Antje Jackelen organized an interfaith conference in Malmo on migration and integration of refugees and asylum seekers with 72 participants from 15 European countries. The conference inaugurated a European interfaith network called A World of Neighbors. On October 22, the Malmo NGO Diversity Index awarded the network a Diversity Index Award in the category "Faith and Religion" for its interfaith and intercultural efforts to increase knowledge on integration of refugees and migration.

Interfaith groups continued to operate in the country, including the National Interfaith Council of Sweden, established as a meeting place for national religious

leaders in Uppsala in 2010 with a mandate to address issues related to religion and religious freedom. Member groups included the Christian Council of Sweden, Muslim Council of Sweden, Official Council of Swedish Jewish Communities, and Swedish Buddhist Cooperation Council. Representatives from the Alevite, Baha'i, Church of Jesus Christ, Hindu, Mandaean, and Sikh communities also participated in the group. The Interreligious Council of Stockholm, established in 2017, included the Baha'i Congregation, Bosnian Islamic Congregation, Church of Sweden, Evangelical Congregation, Finnish-Orthodox Church, Georgian-Orthodox Church, Hindu Mandir, International Society for Krishna Consciousness, Islamic Ahmadiyya Congregation, Islamic Shia Congregation, Jewish Community in Stockholm, Pentecostal Movement, Roman Catholic Church, Sikh Gurdwara Sangat Sahib, Stockholm Mosque, Swedish Buddhist Cooperation Council, and Uniting Church of Sweden. The interreligious council's efforts included promoting respect for religious diversity and addressing violence associated with religion. Together for Sweden, an interfaith group working with youth, included the Church of Sweden, Sofia Congregation (Christian), Jewish Community in Stockholm, Islamic Association, Ibn Rushd (Muslim), and Young Dharabdmis och Ashavans (Zoroastrian).

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

The Ambassador, Charge d'Affaires, and other embassy representatives continued to engage regularly with the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the SST, parliament, police, and local government officials on issues related to religious freedom, including improving security for religious groups, and to highlight threats to members of some religious minorities, including Muslim immigrants.

The Ambassador hosted an event honoring four Swedish Holocaust survivors in February to which he invited leading members of the country's Jewish, Catholic, and Muslim communities and civil society representatives. The Ambassador delivered remarks on the unwavering U.S. commitment to Holocaust remembrance, countering anti-Semitism, and promoting religious freedom. The 40 guests heard from the grandchildren of Holocaust survivors, who had formed the group called Zikaron (Remembrance) to tell their grandparents' stories to their fellow citizens, especially schoolchildren.

In an August meeting with the Karolinska Institute chancellor, the Ambassador raised claims of anti-Semitic harassment of a Jewish doctor at the NKS. Embassy

officials met with the individual who said he was subjected to anti-Semitism at the NKS.

Embassy officials spoke to Christian, Jewish, and Muslim representatives in Malmo, Gothenburg, and Stockholm throughout the year about their security concerns and about threats to religious freedom more broadly.

The Charge d’Affaires spoke to a leader of the Jewish community to express concern following the NRM’s anti-Semitic activities on Yom Kippur.

The embassy highlighted on social media an October visit by the Ambassador and other embassy representatives to Malmo, during which the Ambassador met with Muslim and Jewish faith leaders to discuss religious freedom and the value of societal inclusion. On October 20, the Ambassador wrote on Twitter, “Honored to visit the stunning Synagogue in Malmo and underscore to the Jewish Community the strong U.S. support for their work to build a stronger community. There is no place for antisemitism in society!” The Ambassador described the meeting with, and work of, the members of the Jewish and Muslim interfaith project Amanah as inspiring.