

## **SWEDEN 2019 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. The government continued funding for a program aimed at combating racism and reducing hate crimes, including those motivated by religion, and provided additional funding for the upcoming two years for educational efforts aimed at combating prejudiced views, including anti-religious views, in schools. Christian organizations stated the Migration Agency denied asylum to refugees who converted to Christianity while in the country and feared religious persecution in their home countries. The Migration Agency announced in March it would grant refugee status to Uighur Muslims from China’s Xinjiang Autonomous Region as well as any other Muslim minority group members in response to “far-reaching state repression.” The government gave funding to 46 religious groups in 2018, compared with 44 in 2017, and facilitated revenue collection for 17 of them. The prime minister and other politicians condemned anti-Semitism and other religious intolerance. In May Prime Minister Stefan Lofven said, “Wherever anti-Semitism exists, and whatever form it takes, it must be exposed and combated.” Several political parties proposed prohibiting students and teachers from wearing a hijab in school and the nonmedical circumcision of boys. All of the political parties represented in parliament except the Christian Democrats proposed bans on establishing new independent religious schools. There were some reports of anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim remarks by members of the Sweden Democrats and other political parties. In July the Equality Ombudsman (DO) initiated an inquiry after Bromolla municipality banned prayer during working hours. In August the Moderate Party called for a government study to consider introducing a ban on headscarves in schools for students under 12. On August 27, during a speech at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs annual memorial lecture in honor of Raoul Wallenberg, the Swedish diplomat who saved thousands of Jews from the Holocaust in Hungary, Prime Minister Lofven said “[When] Jews, Muslims, and Christians are attacked for their beliefs, when politicians in Europe and Sweden try to score points by creating fear and separation between people – then, we regular people – must search for that inner compass that was so strong with Raoul Wallenberg.” Prime Minister Lofven announced in May Sweden will host a high-level international forum in October 2020 on remembrance of the Holocaust and addressing contemporary anti-Semitism. The announced goal of the forum, which comes 20 years after the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust and the establishment of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), is to

promote the IHRA and reaffirm the Declaration of the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust.

A Jewish doctor reported ongoing anti-Semitic harassment at the New Karolinska Hospital (NKS). The DO opened three inquiries into the hospital's actions concerning the doctor's claims; all were ongoing at year's end. In November a popular investigative news television program aired an episode on the NKS case that was largely dismissive of the doctor's allegations. In August an imam was convicted of hate speech made in Arabic during a 2017 demonstration in central Helsingborg in which he called Jews "the progeny of the monkeys and pigs." A web survey from the Inizio polling institute published in June with 1,001 respondents showed that over half of the respondents, who were not limited to Jewish individuals, felt anti-Semitism had increased over the past five years. Mosques were regularly vandalized, according to Muslim leaders. According to the findings of a European Commission on perceptions of discrimination in each European Union (EU) member state, 56 percent of respondents believed discrimination on the basis of religion or belief was widespread in the country, while 42 percent said it was rare; 80 percent would be comfortable with having a person of a different religion than the majority of the population occupy the highest elected political position in the country.

The Ambassador, the Charge d' Affaires, and other U.S. embassy representatives continued to meet with the Ministries of Justice and Culture, the Swedish Agency for Support to Faith Communities (SST), parliament, police, and local government on religious freedom issues, supporting government efforts to improve security for religious groups, and highlighting threats to members of some religious minorities, including immigrants. The Ambassador hosted a Thanksgiving dinner for religious freedom advocates and SST. Embassy officials spoke about religious tolerance with Christian, Jewish, and Muslim representatives, including Uighur Muslims, in Malmo, Gothenburg, and Stockholm. Social media highlighted visits by the Charge d' Affaires and other embassy representatives to a museum exhibit in Stockholm and Visby featuring portraits of Holocaust survivors. The embassy sponsored a priest from the Stockholm Cathedral for a September exchange program in the United States on advancing interfaith relations.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the population at 10.3 million (midyear 2019 estimate). According to the Church of Sweden (Lutheran), approximately 58 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 – together total less than 6 percent of the population. The Pew Research Center estimated in 2016 that 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, and members of the Church of Scientology, Word of Faith, International Society for Krishna Consciousness, Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (Unification Church), and Mandaism.

## **Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom**

### **Legal Framework**

The constitution provides “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.”

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 tax exemptions similar to those of nonprofit organizations and government funding. 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 that it 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 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 (\$8,100) and an annual fee of 21 kronor (\$2) per member per year. The Church of Sweden is exempted from the annual fee because it, unlike the other religious groups participating in the scheme, does not receive financial support from the SST. Only religious groups registered with the SST may participate in the scheme. 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 scheme, including the Church of Sweden, the Roman Catholic Church, four Muslim congregations, and two Syriac Orthodox churches.

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 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 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 government guidelines on core academic curricula.

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.

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

### **Government Practices**

The Center Party decided at its national convention in September to advocate a ban on nonmedical circumcision, including for religious reasons. The party leadership opposed the ban, stating that it would be perceived as religious discrimination against Jewish and Islamic practice, but a majority of party members supported it and overruled the leadership. Center Party Leader Annie Loof said afterward the party would not propose legislation to ban nonmedical circumcision. *Aftonbladet* reported on September 30 that Loof presented a bill in 2007 where she promoted a ban. “It is true that I presented a bill about this 12 years ago as a new member of

parliament, but I changed my mind just a year later,” she said. According to Chairman of the Official Council of Swedish Jewish Communities Aron Verstandig, this was seen by the Jewish community as an attack on Swedish Jews. “Circumcision is a central part of the Jewish religion,” he said. Mohamed Temsamani, president of the United Islamic Associations in Sweden, stated such a ban would be a restriction on religious freedom.

The Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare had no statistics on how many children are circumcised annually. In 2009, the board recommended the regional healthcare authorities provide circumcisions for religious reasons by certified doctors in state health clinics. All six healthcare regions offered this service during the year. In four regions, the service cost up to 14,000 Swedish kronor (\$1,500). There were certified private clinics where the cost was lower but the waiting times were long. On October 7, newspaper *Svenska Dagbladet* reported that uncertified individuals were performing illegal circumcisions on boys in the home beyond the control of state authorities. *Svenska Dagbladet* reported that an uncertified circumciser charged approximately 1,500 Swedish kronor (\$160) and waiting times were shorter than at private clinics.

In August the Moderate Party called for a government study to consider introducing a ban on headscarves in schools for students under 12. Christian, Jewish, and Muslim leaders expressed concern about the proposal, stating such a measure would constitute an infringement on religious freedom.

In July the DO initiated an inquiry after Bromolla municipality banned prayer during working hours. Representatives from the DO were investigating whether the decision disadvantaged certain workers and violated the law. The ban, which applied to all municipal employees, was passed by the local council at the end of May. Defending the ban, council Chairman Eric Berntsson stated its purpose was to ensure staff did not take time off to pray during working hours. “There is no general right to leave to pray during working hours.... This is a clarification of a regulation, just like a smoking ban,” Berntsson told *Swedish Radio*. Christian and Muslim representatives criticized the prayer ban.

The Sweden Democratic Party continued to advocate local and national bans on the Islamic call to prayer. After police in Vaxjo in 2018 granted a mosque permission to conduct a call to prayer on Fridays, the Sweden Democrats Vaxjo branch launched a petition for a referendum to ban the call to prayer in the municipality. Neighbors of the mosque appealed the police decision, stating they were disturbed by the noise; they also said their right under the European

Convention on Human Rights not to be exposed to a religious message was violated. In April the Administrative Court of Appeal decided the call to prayer could continue. The Vaxjo local authority determined the call to prayer may be broadcast once a week for three minutes and 45 seconds, with limits on the volume.

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 to conflict with their respective religious rituals. The Muslim community remained divided over whether the requirement conformed to halal procedures. The Jewish community reported the law effectively prevented the production of kosher meat. Most halal and all kosher meat continued to be imported.

The nongovernmental organization (NGO) Scandinavian Human Rights Lawyers, in partnership with five Christian organizations, issued a report in March 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 report researched 619 Afghan converts who applied for asylum in 2015-2018. According to the report, the Migration Agency denied 68 percent of the claims on the basis of their faith not being genuine. The authors of the report concluded the Migration Agency had a poor understanding of religion, and its decisions on converts were arbitrary. The Migration Agency responded in a press release that it was investigating why there were different outcomes in similar cases but stated each decision was based on a complex overall assessment in which an individual's religious knowledge was not considered but, rather, the intellectual reflections of belief. Following the critique, the government issued an addition to the Migration Agency's regulatory letter requesting the agency report how it worked with converts' cases and how it met the legal standards in matters where religion was stated as a factor in consideration for asylum. The report was not completed at year's end.

Deputy Secretary General of the Swedish Evangelical Alliance Jacob Rudenstrand again said Christian refugees, including but not limited to converts, faced persecution, particularly from Muslim refugees, they were not safe in the country, and the government needed to take measures to ensure their safety.

The Migration Agency announced in March it would grant refugee status to Uighur Muslims from China's Xinjiang Autonomous Region as well as any other Muslim minority group members in response to "far-reaching state repression." Uighurs in

the country were already shielded from deportation after the Migration Agency stopped all deportations of Uighurs in September 2018.

A government inquiry was tasked to present proposals on how to introduce a ban on new independent primary and secondary schools with a religious orientation. The results of the inquiry were still pending at year's end, but will be nonbinding on the government. Minister of Education Anna Ekstrom said in June, "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. Now, the government is taking the first steps towards stopping new religious schools." The government suggested existing schools with a religious focus would be allowed to remain, but the regulations would be clarified to allow for greater oversight by the School Inspectorate and the municipalities. 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.

There were reports that representatives of the Sweden Democrats – the country's second largest political party, which received 17.6 percent of the vote in the 2018 parliamentary elections – made denigrating comments about religious minorities. In January Karlskrona District Court acquitted the group leader of the Sweden Democrats in Karlskrona of charges of hate speech after a post on the party's local Facebook page described Muslims as terrorists and oppressors of women. The court ruled the post was made on a "current and ongoing political issue," the inauguration of a new minaret in Karlskrona, and it was therefore not reasonable to limit the politician's freedom of expression.

On September 25, the press reported that a local Sweden Democrat politician in Vallentuna posted white supremacist propaganda and Holocaust denial material on Facebook. *Dagens Nyheter* reported that among other items, she posted photos of human skeletons with captions stating 500,000 Germans were "exterminated" during one night of the Dresden bombings in 1945. The politician stepped down shortly after. The local Sweden Democrat leader said, "These are opinions that go directly against what the party stands for and is something we take very seriously.... This person leaves all political assignments and no longer represents the Sweden Democrats."

Christian Democrats party leader Ebba Busch Thor stated in an op-ed in the *Expressen* newspaper on April 20, "The suburbs would benefit from Christian values," arguing that Christian values were the basis for the country's democracy

and liberal society and implying Christian values were lacking in the suburbs, where many Muslim immigrants live. She said, “It is clear what happens when the traditional values disappear...there is no cultural Islamization, like the right-wing extremists cautioned about...I think it looks more like a lack of culture.”

Prominent media outlets, including *Dagens Nyheter* criticized Busch Thor, not only for arguing there was a lack of values and culture in immigrant dense areas, but also for her claim that Christian values were what create a liberal society.

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 anti-Semitic conspiracy theories. The council offered classroom and online material for students and suggestions on how to address these issues with children.

The government allocated five million kronor (\$538,000) annually for 2018-2020 to the Swedish Committee against Anti-Semitism and the Living History Forum to increase opportunities for student and teacher study visits to Holocaust memorial sites.

In February the Supreme Court overruled the appellate court’s decision not to expel a Palestinian man with “special refugee status” sentenced to two years in prison for attempting to firebomb the synagogue in Gothenburg in December 2017. The court ruled that the man would serve his sentence and then be expelled. He may not return to Sweden before 2028.

As part of its continuing “National Plan to Combat Racism, Similar Forms of Hostility, and Hate Crimes,” the government provided 22 million kronor (\$2.37 million) to religious organizations and civil society to improve their security, and is scheduled to provide 15 million kronor (\$1.61 million) annually thereafter. 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; for example, by purchasing security cameras and hiring security guards. In September Chairman of the Official Council of Swedish Jewish Communities Aron Verstandig stated he welcomed the government’s increased allocation of funds in support of religious organizations’ security measures.

In October the government announced it would provide an additional 14 million kronor (\$1.51 million) in 2020 for educational efforts to combat racism and support tolerance, including religious tolerance, in schools and increased support to

civil society, and another 10 million kronor (\$1.08 million) annually for 2021 and 2022.

The government allocated an additional 10 million kronor (\$1.08 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 that 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 knowledge about religion. During the year, SST cooperated 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. SST remained a partner to many government entities such as the law enforcement authorities, the Civil Contingencies Agency, the Defense Research Agency, the National Agency for Education, the Government Offices, the Crime Prevention Agency, the Migration Agency, and others, both in supporting ongoing government inquiries and facilitating meetings with different faith communities, including groups not registered with the SST. New course topics included NGO management and accountability, scriptural reasoning for female leaders, and leadership, religion and democracy. The SST also conducted courses in family law and movements within Islam. The agency continued to fund, publish, and promote publications aimed at educating the public about religious minorities. New publications included studies such as *The Religious Landscape of Sweden*, *Religious Freedom and Religious Communities in Sweden*, and *Religious Minorities from the Middle East in Sweden*.

The SST distributed 83 million kronor (\$8.92 million) in grants to 46 religious groups during 2018, up from 44 the previous year, for operating expenses, theological training, spiritual care in hospitals, building renovations, and refugee assistance. In addition, the SST distributed funds for specific projects in response to grant requests, which different religious groups often carried out jointly.

The Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society provided grants to civil society organizations working to combat religious intolerance. Grants included approximately two million kronor (\$215,000) to the NGO Expo to combat intolerance and racism, including religious intolerance.

The government continued to fund the Living History Forum (LHF), a public authority “commissioned to work with issues related to tolerance, democracy, and human rights, using the Holocaust and other crimes against humanity as its starting point.” The government allocated 46.5 million kronor (\$5 million) to LHF, which provided lesson plans, books, and other resources for teachers. Topics covered included anti-Semitism, Holocaust remembrance, ethnic and religious conflicts in the Balkans, and critical reading of history. On August 29, the government announced a 1 million kronor (\$108,000) increase to LHF’s budget to increase knowledge-based activities, including efforts to combat racism and anti-Semitism.

Schools continued to sponsor educational visits to Holocaust sites such as Auschwitz-Birkenau. Students participated in these trips regardless of religious background. According to a study released by LHF in June, 44,000 Swedes visited Auschwitz-Birkenau in 2017, the most on record. The study concluded most of these visitors were likely students and other young people. LHF provided educational materials and guidance for teachers to facilitate these visits.

Prime Minister Lofven commemorated the Holocaust in a speech at the Great Synagogue of Stockholm on January 27, Holocaust Remembrance Day. Lofven condemned the Holocaust and present-day anti-Semitism and spoke about his “profound anger” over “the raw and despicable anti-Semitism that we still see around the world, in Europe, and in Sweden.”

On August 27, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs hosted its annual memorial lecture in honor of Raoul Wallenberg, the Swedish diplomat who saved thousands of Jews from the Holocaust in Hungary. In his speech at the event, Prime Minister Lofven said, “[When] Jews, Muslims and Christians are attacked for their beliefs, when politicians in Europe and Sweden try to score points by creating fear and separation between people – then, we regular people – must search for that inner compass that was so strong with Raoul Wallenberg.” He also commended an exhibit in the Photography Museum displaying portraits of 23 Holocaust survivors and recounted memories of the Holocaust.

In May Prime Minister Lofven announced he was planning to host a high-level international forum in October 2020 on remembrance of the Holocaust and addressing contemporary anti-Semitism. This would take place 20 years after the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust and the establishment of the IHRA. The announced goal of the forum was to reaffirm the Declaration of the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust and to promote the IHRA, of which the country is a member.

### Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

In 2018, 7,090 hate crimes were reported, according to a report released in October 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.

During the year, a Jewish neurosurgeon at New Karolinska Hospital (NKS) reported continuing anti-Semitic harassment 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. An internal investigation reportedly concluded in March 2018 no harassment had taken place. Following widespread media condemnation, the NKS demoted the accused chief of neurosurgery in June for "violating the hospital's core values" but without acknowledging anti-Semitism. The DOJ undertook three inquiries into the hospital's actions concerning the Jewish doctor's claims, all of which were pending at year's end. On October 7, the daily *Svenska Dagbladet* reported the Simon Wiesenthal Center (SWC) criticized the Karolinska Institute (KI), a medical university that awards the Nobel Prize for Medicine but is not legally part of NKS, for failing to introduce zero tolerance against anti-Semitism and other forms of racism. Mikael Odenberg, chairman of the KI board of directors, called the criticism "expected, but unfounded." In November a popular investigative news television program aired an episode on the NKS case that was largely dismissive of the doctor's allegations.

The head of the Swedish Swimming Federation Ulla Gustavsson stepped down on February 14 following negative reactions to her comments criticizing an advertisement of the Swedish Sports Confederation that showed a boy and a Muslim girl wearing a veil participating in a shooting competition. Gustavsson said, "If they want to show girls with an immigrant background, it can be done without them wearing a veil... Now it looks like they like and encourage, [and] honor repression.... That upsets me.... The veil is a religious, political, and sexist garment.... The Swedish Sports Confederation values gender equality as important, and the veil stands for something else." The Swedish Swimming Federation said Gustavsson's comments contradicted the federation's basic view that all children should be welcome in sporting activities on equal terms," and that Gustavsson no longer could lead the association successfully. Gustavsson subsequently resigned.

At a May 1 demonstration in Malmo arranged by the Social Democratic Youth Association, demonstrators sang “Long live Palestine – destroy Zionism.” The demonstrators were reported for hate speech to the police, and the police initiated an investigation. An association representative said it understood the criticism and that members would stop singing the song.

In August Helsingborg District Court convicted an imam of hate speech following a demonstration in central Helsingborg in July 2017. The imam received a suspended sentence and fines. During a speech given in Arabic he called Jews “the progeny of the monkeys and pigs.”

In December 2018, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights published a report on the experience of Jews with hate crime, discrimination, and anti-Semitism which showed that over 80 percent of Jewish Swedes subjected to anti-Semitic harassment chose not to report the incidents to the police. The main reason cited was the belief that nothing would be done about it. Approximately one third of the 1,000 respondents said they avoided wearing Jewish symbols and were considering leaving the country for security reasons. Minister of Justice Morgan Johansson said, “It is completely unacceptable.... Everyone should feel safe.... Anti-Semitism is the basis of racist evils. We will not idly stand by, no matter what environment anti-Semitism comes from: Nazism, Islamism, or left-wing extremism.”

In May the European Commission carried out a study in each European Union (EU) member state on perceptions of discrimination and published the results in September. According to the findings, 56 percent of respondents believed discrimination on the basis of religion or belief was widespread in Sweden, while 42 percent said it was rare; 80 percent would be comfortable with having a person of a different religion than the majority of the population occupy the highest elected political position in the country. In addition, 97 percent said they would be comfortable working closely with a Christian, and 96 said they would be with an atheist, 95 percent with a Jew, 95 percent with a Buddhist, and 92 percent with a Muslim. Asked how they would feel if their child were in a “love relationship” with an individual belonging to various groups, 93 percent said they would be comfortable if the partner were Christian, 93 percent if atheist, 90 percent if Jewish, 91 percent if Buddhist, and 78 percent if Muslim.

In January the European Council published a Special Eurobarometer survey of perceptions of anti-Semitism based on interviews it conducted in December 2018

in each EU member state. According to the survey, 81 percent of residents believed anti-Semitism was a problem in Sweden, and 73 percent believed it had increased over the previous five years. The percentage who believed that anti-Semitism was a problem in nine different categories was as follows: Holocaust denial, 79 percent; on the internet, 78 percent; anti-Semitic graffiti or vandalism, 78 percent; expression of hostility or threats against Jews in public places, 75 percent; desecration of Jewish cemeteries, 73 percent; physical attacks against Jews, 73 percent; anti-Semitism in schools and universities, 57 percent; anti-Semitism in political life, 63 percent; and anti-Semitism in media, 52 percent.

A web survey from the Inizio polling institute published in June with 1,001 respondents showed that over half of the respondents, who were not limited to Jews, felt anti-Semitism had increased over the past five years. More than one-third had experienced/witnessed anti-Semitism in their everyday lives once or several times. More than two-thirds of respondents were worried about anti-Semitism. The survey also showed that over half of the respondents stated they knew a great deal about the Holocaust, and 40 percent said they know about it rather well. Only a small minority felt it is not important to remember the Holocaust.

In November the Anti-Defamation League released the results of a survey on anti-Semitic views of the country's residents. The survey cited stereotypical statements about Jews and asked respondents whether they believed such statements were "probably true" or "probably false." The proportion agreeing that various statements were "probably true" was: 25 percent that Jews are more loyal to Israel than to Sweden; 10 percent that Jews have too much power in the business world; and 15 percent that Jews talk too much about the Holocaust.

Chair of the Stockholm Mosque Jalal Darir told *Swedish Television* on August 12 that the Stockholm Mosque was vandalized regularly. Although the mosque installed camera surveillance after several incidents of vandalism, incidents continued, occurring at least two to three times a week. "We feel that Islamophobia is growing," Darir said.

The Nordic Resistance Movement (NMR), widely described as a small but vocal neo-Nazi group, split after NMR's failure to garner support in the 2018 election (receiving 0.03 percent of the vote). Eight members of NMR's top leadership formed a new group in August called Nordisk Styrka (Nordic Strength). The new group opposed NMR's "liberalization" and stated it wanted to focus more on "the

struggle.” The NGO Expo expressed concern Nordisk Styrka would try to distinguish itself from the NMR through more radical forms of violent activism.

On July 2, the NMR held a meeting with a small number of participants in Visby during an annual conference of political leaders. Later that day the NMR shouted denials of the Holocaust and briefly blocked the entrance to an exhibition featuring photographs of seven Holocaust survivors. Police dispersed the NMR demonstrators and initiated an investigation into hate speech.

On September 24, 16 supporters of the NMR faced trial for violence at the Gothenburg Book Fair in 2017. The indictment included acts of violence against journalists and police, as well as incitement of hatred by wearing matching attire and symbols, chanting Nazi slogans, and carrying placards with photos of prominent Swedes, many of Jewish descent, labeled as “criminals.” The suspects denied committing crimes.

In November, on the anniversary of Kristallnacht (“The Night of Broken Glass,” when Nazi Germany destroyed Jewish synagogues, schools, and businesses), neo-Nazis plastered stickers with Stars of David on the Great Synagogue and Bajit Jewish Center.

In the context of an interfaith 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 some funding for the project.

#### **Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement**

The Ambassador, the Charge d’Affaires, and other embassy representatives continued to engage regularly with the Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Culture, the SST, parliament, police, and local government officials on issues related to religious freedom.

The Ambassador hosted a Thanksgiving dinner for religious freedom advocates, human rights activists, civil society representatives, and the SST.

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

The U.S. Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism sent a letter to Chairwoman of the Stockholm County Executive Committee Irene Svenonius in June offering U.S. assistance to the region's council to help address charges of anti-Semitism at NKS. Embassy officials met with the individual who said he was subjected to anti-Semitism at NKS.

On July 3, the Charge d' Affaires and other embassy representatives visited the photography museum exhibit on Holocaust survivors in Visby to express support for Holocaust remembrance efforts the day following the NMR action at the exhibit. The embassy representatives' visit was highlighted in social media.

On May 6, the Jewish Culture in Sweden presented Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg the 2019 Gilel Storch Award for outstanding contributions to human rights and the equal value of all human beings. The embassy hosted Justice Ginsburg at a reception with guests from the government, civil society, religious groups, and media. The event was highlighted in the traditional press and on social media.

The embassy sponsored a priest from the Stockholm cathedral for a September exchange program in the U.S. on advancing interfaith relations. The program included studying the impact of religion and religious organizations on communities throughout the U.S. and the evolving roles of women and youth within faith communities.