

DENMARK 2015 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution guarantees the right of individuals to worship according to their beliefs. It establishes the Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELC) as the national church, which has privileges not available to other religious groups. Other religious groups must register with the government to receive tax and other benefits. The criminal code prohibits blasphemy, and – after a public debate and a government review – the government decided to retain the law. The government increased its focus on issues of respect for religious freedom, as well as anti-Semitism, intolerance, and related violence following fatal shootings in February.

In February a 22-year-old Danish-born Muslim of Palestinian descent shot and killed a Danish film director at a free-speech forum and wounded four police officers; soon thereafter, he shot and killed a volunteer guard at the Copenhagen Synagogue. Police killed the shooter hours later. Public reaction to the shootings focused on tolerance and respect for diversity, although some manifested support for the shooter. There were reports of anti-Semitic, anti-Islamic, and anti-Christian incidents in major cities, including assaults, threats, demonstrations, attacks against property, harassment, and language denigrating religious groups.

President Obama and other senior U.S. government officials condemned the February shootings and offered assistance in the investigation, while the National Security Council (NSC) spokesperson expressed solidarity with the government and its citizens in efforts to defend free speech and combat anti-Semitism. U.S. embassy officials regularly met with representatives from government, political parties, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to stress the importance of religious tolerance and diversity, share best practices and new ideas to promote religious freedom, and connect U.S.-based religious practitioners with their local counterparts. In March the Department of State's Special Envoy to Combat Anti-Semitism visited and discussed challenges faced by the local Jewish community. The U.S. Ambassador spoke at community events following the February shooting and throughout the year, stressing the importance of shared values of freedom of religion and speech.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population is 5.6 million (July 2015 estimate). According to Statistics Denmark, the government statistical office, as of

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January 1, 77.8 percent of all Danes, 4.4 million people, were members of the ELC.

According to Statistics Denmark, there are 207,000 Muslims, constituting 3.8 percent of the population. Muslim groups are concentrated in the largest cities, particularly Copenhagen, Odense, and Aarhus. There has been an increase in immigrants in recent years, most of whom are Muslim. NGOs estimate that groups constituting less than 1 percent of the population include, in descending order of size: Roman Catholics, Jehovah's Witnesses, Serbian Orthodox Christians, Jews, Baptists, Buddhists, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Pentecostals, and non-denominational Christians. Although estimates vary, the Jewish Society of Denmark places the Jewish population at between 5,500 and 7,000, most of whom live in Copenhagen.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution declares the ELC is the established church, which shall receive state support and to which the reigning monarch must belong. The constitution also states individuals shall be free to form congregations to worship according to their beliefs, providing nothing "at variance with good morals or public order shall be taught or done." It stipulates that no person may be deprived of access to the full enjoyment of civil and political rights because of religious beliefs, and that these beliefs shall not be used to evade compliance with civic duty. It prohibits requiring individuals to make personal financial contributions to religious denominations to which they do not adhere.

The criminal code prohibits blasphemy, defined as public mockery of or insult to the doctrine or worship of a legally recognized religion, with a maximum penalty of up to four months in prison and a fine. The law also prohibits making a public statement in which persons are threatened, scorned, or degraded on the basis of their religion or belief. The maximum penalty is up to two years in prison and a fine. The law also prohibits hate speech, including religious hate speech.

The ELC is the only religious group receiving state subsidies or funds directly through the tax system. General revenues fund approximately 14 percent of the Church's budget; the balance comes from a church tax that only members pay.

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The ELC and other state-sanctioned religious communities carry out registration of civil unions, births, and deaths for their members.

The Ministry of Justice grants official status to other religious groups in addition to the ELC through recognition by royal decrees, known as registration. The Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs has registered a total of 170 religious groups: 110 Christian groups and congregations, 31 Muslim groups, 10 Hindu organizations, 15 Buddhist groups, four Jewish communities, the Bahai Faith, and five other religious groups, including followers of the indigenous Norse belief system, Forn Sidr. Registered religious groups have certain rights, including the right to perform marriage ceremonies with legal effect, baptize children, obtain residence permits for foreign clergy, establish cemeteries, and receive tax exemptions.

Religious groups not recognized by either royal decree or by a government registration process, such as the Church of Scientology, are entitled to engage in religious practices without any kind of public registration, but members of those groups must marry in a civil ceremony in addition to any religious ceremony. Unrecognized religious groups are not granted fully tax-exempt status, but do have some tax benefits; for example, contributions by members are tax deductible.

Religious groups seeking registration must submit a document on the group's central traditions; descriptions of its most important rituals; a copy of its rules, regulations, and organizational structure; an audited financial statement; and information about the group's leadership and each member with a permanent address in the country. Additionally, citizens exercising their right to worship must conform to the constitutional requirement that they behave in a manner consistent with "good morals and public order."

The law bans judges from wearing religious symbols such as headscarves, turbans, skullcaps, and large crucifixes while in court.

All public and private schools, including religious schools, receive government financial support. Public schools must teach Evangelical Lutheran theology; however, a student may withdraw from religion classes with parental consent by making a request in writing. Additionally, the law requires public schools to teach a world religions course. The course is compulsory in grades 7–9, although students may be exempted if a parent presents a request in writing. The course is optional in grade 10. If the student is 15 years old or older, the student and parent

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must jointly request the student's exemption. Noncompulsory collective prayer in schools is allowed if it does not include proselytizing. Prayers are optional at the discretion of each school. They may consist of ELC, other Christian, Muslim, or Jewish prayers, and students may opt out of participating in them.

Military service is compulsory, but there is an exemption for conscientious objectors, including for religious reasons. Those who do not want to serve in the military may apply for either alternative civilian service or not to serve at all. The period of alternative service for a conscientious objector is the same as the period required for military service. An individual must apply to perform service as a conscientious objector within eight weeks of receiving notice of military service from the armed forces or the Emergency Management Agency. The application must go to the Conscientious Objector Administration and must show that military service of any kind is incompatible with one's conscience. The alternative service may take place in various social and cultural institutions, peace movements, organizations related to the United Nations, churches and ecumenical organizations, and environmental organizations throughout the country.

The law prohibits ritual slaughter of animals without prior stunning, including kosher and halal slaughter. The law allows for slaughter according to religious rites with prior stunning and limits such slaughter to cattle, sheep, goats, and chickens. All slaughter must take place at a slaughterhouse. Slaughterhouses practicing ritual slaughter are obliged to register with the Veterinary and Food Administration. Violations of this law are punishable by fines or up to four months in prison. Halal and kosher meat may be imported.

Government Practices

In response to the February shootings at a free speech forum and synagogue, Danish Prime Minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt addressed an estimated 35,000 people at a vigil in honor of the victims, stating, "Tonight I want to tell all Danish Jews: you are not alone. An attack on the Jews of Denmark is an attack on Denmark, on all of us." In March the parliament passed legislation expanding law enforcement funding, including an earmark of 20 million Danish kroner (\$2.9 million) to enhance security at venues associated with the local Jewish community, such as the synagogue that was a target of the terror attack.

In March the government announced it would not repeal the anti-blasphemy law, following a highly publicized review led by the Ministry of Justice. The

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government's announcement stated that, although the blasphemy clause had not been invoked in court since 1946, it remained "legally important." Then-Justice Minister Mette Frederiksen stated that the blasphemy provision did not prevent criticism of religion and religious dogma, but instead protected against such acts as the public burnings of holy books such as the Bible or the Quran. There have been two convictions under the blasphemy law clause in its history, most recently in 1946. In 2005–2006, the prosecutor general investigated a Danish newspaper for publication of Muhammad cartoons under both provisions, but found no grounds for a case.

The Church of Scientology has applied for recognition several times in the past and the government has denied its application. The Church has yet to be evaluated under the current recognition approval criteria. Although the Church of Scientology remained unregistered with the government, it was able to proceed with plans to construct a place of worship in Copenhagen.

The platform of the current government that took office on June 28 included a section on the ELC, noting that "Denmark is a Christian country, and the Evangelical-Lutheran church has special status as the national church. The government wishes to preserve this special status. It is also vital for the government that people are free to have their own beliefs, provided these are practiced with full respect for the rights of others to do the same." The platform also stated, "In several of the world's hotspots, Christian minorities are being systematically persecuted. The government will have a special focus on strengthening international cooperation aimed at protecting these minorities."

Jewish and Muslim communities criticized the law prohibiting the slaughter of animals without stunning them, saying it interfered with religious freedom.

Collective, noncompulsory prayer in school remained legal but was rarely practiced.

Schools offered foods that satisfied different religious requirements. The options varied by school, but, for example, some schools offered halal meat or did not serve pork.

In September media and politicians discussed the meaning of the tenth anniversary of the global backlash touched off in 2005 by the publication in the *Jyllands-Posten* newspaper of cartoons that depicted the Prophet Muhammad. Much public

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dialogue focused on free speech values, with some politicians arguing that freedom of expression should include the right to criticize religions, and others stressing the importance of tolerance and respect for other faiths.

During media and public debates on whether asylum centers should be divided based on religion due to concerns about conflict and allegations of religious and ethnic intolerance among refugees, the immigration and integration spokesman from the ruling party stated, “In Denmark, the population is not divided by religion, and therefore Christian and Muslim asylum seekers also must be able to stay together in the country’s detention centers... so we try more to look at what are the problems in the reception centers, and we will solve them case by case.” The Danish People’s Party and other major ruling coalition parties also agreed not to separate asylum seekers in the centers based on religion.

The government is a member of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. The government held three events in coordination with the Alliance, locally cosponsored by the Danish Institute for International Studies, an independent research institution for international affairs financed by the state, including providing speakers and hosting conferences.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

In the late night and early morning hours of February 14–15, a 22-year-old Danish-born Muslim of Palestinian descent shot and killed a film director and wounded four police officers at a free speech forum entitled “Art, Blasphemy, and Freedom of Expression” in Copenhagen. Less than 24 hours later, he shot and killed a volunteer guard at the entrance of the Copenhagen Synagogue during a bat mitzvah celebration. In a post on his Facebook page, the shooter swore allegiance to the leader of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant before the attacks. Police killed the shooter hours later as he resisted arrest.

Newspapers reported thousands of citizens, including Muslims, formed a human ring around the Copenhagen synagogue in the wake of the attacks and voiced support for diversity. Media also reported some citizens left flowers at the spot where the shooter died and expressed support for his actions.

There were other reported incidents of anti-Semitic, anti-Islamic, and anti-Christian assaults, threats, harassment, and use of language denigrating religious

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groups. As of November the Jewish community had documented 18 anti-Semitic incidents.

In January media reported that Muslim asylum seekers assaulted and harassed Christian asylum seekers housed at the Danish Red Cross' Avnstrup center, and 14 Christian asylum seekers asked the Red Cross to be moved to another center; their request was denied. The Red Cross continued to operate 19 asylum centers, and its Director of the Asylum Department stated that, although it was aware of cases where Christian asylum seekers had felt threatened or harassed by Muslim asylum seekers, it did not believe there was a need to separate them.

In January several hundred people attended demonstrations organized by Pegida Denmark (a local branch of the German organization *Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes* (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the Occident)) and Stop Islamisering Af Danmark (Stop the Islamization of Denmark). Three counterdemonstrations in January drew larger crowds of up to 500.

In May a culinary school required a Muslim student to taste pork. A court ruled the school would have to pay 40,000 Danish kroner (\$5,800) to the student, who had been told that she would not be required to eat pork before enrolling.

In April vandals smashed the window of a kosher deli in Copenhagen and painted the word "Jodesvin" (Jewish pig) on its wall.

On June 5, vandals broke tomb stones, destroyed flowers, and upturned dirt at approximately 50 graves in a Muslim cemetery near Copenhagen. In response to the vandalism, approximately 150 people, including the Danish Boy Scouts, who are affiliated with the ELC, held an interfaith vigil. The leader of the Danish Islamic Burial Fund called for moderation and cautioned against using the event for political purposes. In October individuals vandalized 30–40 Muslim graves in Odense. The Islamic Burial Association's spokesman stated afterward, "We feel violated. Even when we are dead and buried, we are not left alone." Odense residents held a private voluntary fundraising drive to fund the necessary cemetery repairs. The Odense City Council contacted the family members of each person whose burial site was vandalized to offer condolences.

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In August vandals sprayed graffiti on an asylum center in Lyngbygaard and set a minivan on fire. The graffiti featured a swastika, the phrase “this is the first warning,” and “DSMB,” an abbreviation for the Nationalist Socialist Movement.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

President Obama, the U.S. Ambassador, and the Department of State’s spokesperson publicly condemned the February 14–15 shootings as a terrorist attack and offered condolences to the deceased and assistance in any investigation. The NSC Spokesperson at the White House stated that “the people of the United States stand united with the people of Denmark and all others who defend the universal right of freedom of speech and stand against anti-Semitism and bigotry in all its forms.” In a phone call with Prime Minister Thorning-Schmidt, President Obama conveyed the need to work together to confront attacks on freedom of expression, as well as anti-Semitic violence. On February 16, the U.S. Ambassador and the Lord Mayor of Copenhagen took a walk around a religiously and ethnically mixed neighborhood to show support to Danish communities of all faiths.

In mid-March the Department of State’s Special Envoy to Combat Anti-Semitism visited and discussed challenges faced by the local Jewish community. The Special Envoy hosted an interfaith dialogue, which secured a pledge from prominent religious leaders to work together more closely to fight radicalization and promote tolerance. The Special Envoy also urged government officials to work more closely with Jewish community leaders to address the community’s concerns.

The U.S. embassy met throughout the year with a variety of religious leaders, faith-based NGOs, and community and government leaders to discuss religious freedom and shared values of free speech and freedom of religion. Meetings following the February attacks furthered the embassy’s understanding of threats to the Jewish community. The Jewish community leadership raised concerns about anti-Semitic incidents. In November the embassy partnered with local governments and international NGOs to host a global “Strong Cities Network” conference in Aarhus where participants shared best practices on integration and counterradicalization in primarily Muslim immigrant communities.