

NORWAY

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom. The government did not demonstrate a trend toward either improvement or deterioration in respect for and protection of the right to religious freedom. The Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELC), the state church, enjoys some benefits not available to other religious groups.

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

The U.S. government discussed religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights and conducted outreach to a diverse set of religious communities.

Section I. Religious Demography

Citizens are considered to be members of the state church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, unless they send a resignation letter to the church. For example, citizens may elect to associate themselves with another denomination, a nonreligious organization (for example, the Norwegian Humanist Association), or to have no religious affiliation. An estimated 79 percent of the population (3.9 million persons) nominally belongs to the state church; however, actual church attendance is low.

Other religious groups operate freely and include various Christian denominations (266,800 registered members), which make up 55 percent of all registered members of religious groups outside of the state church. Of the Christian denominations, the Roman Catholic Church is the largest and, because of recent immigration, has increased to an estimated 83,000 registered members (from 57,000 in 2010), while the Pentecostal Church has approximately 40,000 registered members. Membership in Muslim congregations (there are 126 mosques nationwide) has increased to 106,700 (from 93,000 in 2010), while membership in Jewish congregations has decreased to 818 (from 850 in 2009).

Buddhists, Orthodox Christians, Sikhs, and Hindus are also present in small numbers, together constituting less than 5 percent of the population. The Norwegian Humanist Association--the largest national organization for those who do not formally practice any religion--has 78,000 registered members.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom.

The constitution provides that “all inhabitants are free to have and express religion.” The law on religious freedom and affiliation further specifies the right of individuals to choose, change, and practice their religion. Any person over the age of 15 years has the right to join or leave a religious community. While parents have the right to decide their child’s religion before 15, the views of children over seven years must be taken into consideration and, when over 12 years, the child’s opinion must be given emphasis.

The constitution provides the right to practice religion in general, but there have been examples of existing law conflicting with practical lifestyle aspects of certain religious groups. For example, by law the slaughter of an animal must be preceded by stunning or administering anesthetics, which conflicts with kosher slaughter requirements and some interpretations of halal meat preparation requirements. The law effectively bans the production of kosher meat in the country, thus requiring the Jewish community to import kosher meat. The community’s ability to import kosher meat, and particularly kosher chicken, is regularly an issue of concern, due to the country’s strict regulations on import of agricultural products.

The penal code covers violations of the right to religious freedom. It specifies penalties for expressions of disrespect for religious standpoints or followers and for public discrimination on the basis of religion. A ban remains on wearing religious symbols, including headgear, with police uniforms.

The equality and anti-discrimination ombudsman is charged with enforcing the Anti-Discrimination Act of 2005, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion, ethnicity, national origin, ancestry, skin color, language, and ethical orientation. This is accomplished by publishing non-binding findings in response to complaints that a person or organization has violated a law or regulation within

the ombudsman's mandate. The ombudsman also provides advice and guidance on the Anti-Discrimination Act.

As the state church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church enjoys some benefits not available to other religious groups. The state supports the church financially, and there is a constitutional requirement that the king and at least one-half of the cabinet belong to this church. The king in council (the king jointly approving with the council of state, composed of the prime minister and other cabinet members), who heads the state church, formally nominates bishops, and the law regulates clerical salaries and pensions.

Other religious communities may register with the government to receive state financial support, which is provided to all registered denominations in proportion to their formally registered membership.

There was continued robust public debate about introducing greater separation between church and state.

Individuals citing conscientious or other objection to military service may apply to serve their duty time in a civilian capacity.

In March, parliament rejected a proposal by members of an opposition party to ban the hijab, niqab, burqa (women's head and body coverings), and other religious or political symbols in courtrooms.

Foreign religious workers are subject to the same visa and work permit requirements as other foreign workers.

The Christian Knowledge and Religious and Ethical Information (CKREE) course for grades one through 10 (generally ages six to 16) reviews world religions and philosophy while promoting tolerance and respect for all religious beliefs. Citing the country's Christian history (and the stated importance of Christianity to society), the CKREE course devotes an extensive amount of time to studying Christianity, but the course includes discussion of other religions. This course is mandatory; there are no exceptions for children of other religious groups. Students may be exempted from participating in or performing specific religious acts, such as church services or prayer.

The Worker Protection and Working Environment Act (WPWEA) and the Gender Equality Acts do not permit religious organizations to inquire about an applicant's

sexual orientation or discriminate on the basis of gender, unless the differential treatment is shown to have a legitimate purpose. Religious organizations retain the right to use discretion in their hiring processes, however, as “legitimate purpose” is broadly defined.

The government is a member of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research. Schools nationwide observe Holocaust Memorial Day on January 27 as part of a National Plan of Action to Combat Racism and Discrimination. In addition high school curriculums include learning about the deportation and extermination of Jewish citizens from 1942 to 1945.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Sunday, Easter Monday, Ascension Day, Pentecost, Whit Monday, Christmas Day, and Saint Stephen’s Day.

Government Practices

There were no reports of abuses of religious freedom.

The government permitted individual schools to determine independently whether to implement policies banning religious garb such as burqas or niqabs. There were no reports during the year of students asking to wear the niqab or burqa.

The government also continued to support The White Buses, an extracurricular program that takes some secondary school students to the Auschwitz extermination camp in Poland and other Nazi concentration camps to educate them about the Holocaust.

The government regularly spoke out against hate speech. On March 11, a deputy representative for the indigenous Sami parliament in the northern part of the country contended on Facebook that there was no evidence the Holocaust happened and that Jews were responsible for war crimes in Russia. Government leaders from across the political and geographic spectrum condemned his statements, although the law did not permit excluding him from serving as an independent deputy representative in the Sami parliament before his term as an elected official ended.

An opposition party member of parliament (MP), who was his party's immigration policy spokesperson at the time, stated in May that due to their religion and resulting culture, Muslim immigrants have the lowest participation in the work force. Politicians and others from across the political spectrum roundly criticized his comments, which he made after a government-appointed commission reported on the effects of immigration on the welfare state. The same MP had written on Facebook one month earlier that, "I fear that a new crusade ("korstog") will be necessary." Following strong criticism from the governing coalition and others, he deleted the offending post but stated that, "I am not responsible for [others'] political correctness... I think it is high time that Europe stands up against the mass immigration we see in our time. It is my crusade. It does not encourage violence." Following a routine rotation of positions, the MP is no longer his party's immigration policy spokesperson.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

In January the government pledged three million kroner (approximately \$500,000) to the Center for Studies of the Holocaust and Religious Minorities in Oslo to conduct a national survey on attitudes towards Jews and Judaism. The study was scheduled to be completed in mid-2012. The federal minister of education pledged six million kroner (approximately \$1 million) to train teachers to combat anti-Semitism in schools nationwide and to include anti-Semitism as a stand-alone topic in national and local school curricula. In the fall, the Oslo municipality began including anti-Semitism as a topic in its school curriculum.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were some reports of societal discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, and prominent societal leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom. Because ethnicity and religion were often inextricably linked, it was difficult to categorize many incidents specifically as ethnic or religious intolerance.

Police issued a hate crimes report in December 2010, which indicated that approximately 11 percent of the 240 hate crimes registered in 2009 were religiously motivated. More recent hate crime statistics were not available. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and an opposition political leader called on the government to ensure that hate crimes are registered and publicized to the same extent as other crime statistics.

On July 22, rightwing extremist Anders Behring Breivik detonated a large improvised explosive device (IED) next to government buildings that housed many ministries and the prime minister's office, killing eight persons and injuring scores. After detonating the IED, Breivik drove to a Labor Party youth camp on the island of Utoya outside of Oslo and shot and killed 69 persons (mostly youth) and injured many others. Shortly before the attack, Breivik posted a manifesto on the Internet in which he accused the Labor Party of treason for, among other things, encouraging Muslim immigration.

The Center Against Racism reported that, in the hours after the attack and before the perpetrator's identity was established, some Muslims in Oslo reported being harassed, spat upon, yelled at, or chased. The government responded to the July 22 attacks by calling for "more democracy, more openness, and more humanity." Commentators noted that, in the months following the attack, there was a greater feeling of inclusiveness towards all members of society.

On June 14-15, the Jewish community hosted a conference on anti-Semitism entitled, "Norway, Israel and the Jews: Myths and Realities." The conference consisted of roundtable discussions with editors, journalists, politicians, religious and minority leaders, and academics, and included a debate on when anti-Israel comments cross the line to anti-Semitism. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs supported the conference, both financially and through active participation.

Earlier in June the Oslo municipality reported that one out of three Jewish students had been subjected to anti-Semitism in Oslo secondary schools (grades 8-10), while more than half of the students surveyed said they had heard the word "Jew" used as an insult at school. The Oslo study determined that the extent of bullying correlated with the quality of the individual teacher's leadership and the learning environment. In response to the findings, the federal minister of education pledged six million kroner (approximately \$1 million) to train teachers to combat anti-Semitism in schools nationwide and to include anti-Semitism as a stand-alone topic in national and local school curricula. In the fall, the Oslo municipality began including anti-Semitism in its school curriculum.

On October 31, the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) invited Gilad Atzmon to lecture on, among other things, "his journey from hard core Zionism towards a humanist opposition to Zionism, racism and exclusiveness." The official university newspaper *Universitetsavis* published an article entitled "Jewish Identity is the Problem" about one of Atzmon's NTNU lectures. The article lacked countervailing facts to challenge the anti-Semitic view

that Jewish identity and Israel are to blame for inter-religious or political tensions in the Middle East.

In an April 20 op-ed in the country's leading newspaper, prominent Norwegian author Jostein Gaarder apologized for his controversial 2006 article entitled "God's Chosen People." He acknowledged the article could have been interpreted as anti-Semitic, although that had not been his intention. In his apology, Gaarder emphasized that "We must never express ourselves so that legitimate criticism of the government of Israel's policies can in any way be confused with an illegitimate and in every way intolerable hatred of Jews or Judaism." Before publishing the April piece, Gaarder engaged in a dialogue with Jewish community leaders, who said they welcomed his initiative and apology.

There were some reports of anti-Semitic conspiracy theories in mainstream newspapers, both in a feature article and in letters to the editor, either suggesting (the article) or alleging outright (the letters) that Jews control the U.S. government. An article in the daily newspaper *Aftenposten* was titled "Rich Jews Threaten Obama." *Aftenposten*, which frequently publishes articles in support of the Jewish community, quickly changed the title after a broad outcry. The paper also published an op-ed response from the U.S. ambassador.

KRIPOS (the national police unit for combating organized and other serious crime) maintained a Web page for the public to contact police regarding online hate speech.

Some commentators expressed concern that extremist views were increasing among a few second-generation Muslims.

The country has several civil organizations designed to combat anti-Semitism, including the Norwegian Center Against Racism and the Norwegian Association Against Anti-Semitism. The former organization receives financial support from the government.

The Council for Religious and Life Stance Communities includes the state church and 12 other religious and humanistic communities, among them the Jewish, Muslim, and Buddhist communities. The council seeks to prevent differences in belief from being used as a basis for prejudice and xenophobia and has received government support for its work since 1998. The council, acting as an umbrella organization, organized many events that furthered interreligious dialogue and debate.

The Oslo Coalition for Freedom of Religious Beliefs facilitated closer coordination and international cooperation on religious freedom problems both domestically and outside the country. The coalition continued to research new directions in Islamic thought and practice; how to facilitate freedom of religion, missionary activities, and human rights; and how to teach tolerance and religious freedom.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

During the year, the U.S. embassy regularly sponsored speakers and hosted events to highlight religious freedom, including an iftar (evening meal during Ramadan), an interreligious introduction to the Jewish holiday of Passover, and an interreligious Thanksgiving meal. Further, the ambassador engaged with the government, NGOs, and community leaders on the issue of religious freedom. The ambassador participated in memorial ceremonies hosted by various Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and Buddhist communities to honor victims of the July 22 attacks. The embassy took advantage of exchange programs such as the International Visitor Leadership Program in its outreach to a diverse set of religious communities and brought community organizers from the United States to provide training on organizing outreach events. The ambassador sponsored a discussion in honor of the Jewish community's conference "Norway, Israel and the Jews: Myths and Realities," and embassy representatives participated in conference seminars.