

DENMARK 2013 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally respected religious freedom. The Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELC) is the national church and has some privileges not available to other religious groups.

There were some reports of societal discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice, such as anti-Semitic and anti-Islamic insults, harassment, and vandalism, primarily reflecting tensions between young Muslims and other young persons.

The U.S. embassy promoted religious dialogue, particularly with the Muslim community, and sponsored programs for public service officials, leaders, and citizens, to encourage religious tolerance. Embassy staff worked with government and civil society to address religious freedom issues and counteract anti-Muslim sentiment. This included public outreach events and embassy-sponsored initiatives with Muslim groups focused on the importance of religious diversity and tolerance.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population is 5.6 million (July 2013 estimate). An estimated 80 percent of the population belongs to the ELC.

Muslims constitute approximately 4 percent of the population. Muslim groups are concentrated in the largest cities, particularly Copenhagen, Odense, and Aarhus. Groups constituting less than 1 percent of the population include, in descending order: Roman Catholics, Jehovah's Witnesses, Serbian Orthodox Christians, Jews, Baptists, Buddhists, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Pentecostals, and other non-denominational Christians. Though estimates vary, the Center for Contemporary Religion at Aarhus University places the Jewish population at 2,300.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies generally protect religious freedom.

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The constitution states that “No person can, because of his religious belief or descent, be deprived of access to the full enjoyment of civil and political rights.”

The constitution states that the ELC is the national church, the state supports it, and the reigning monarch must be a member of the church. The ELC is the only religious group that receives state subsidies or funding 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. Among the activities the ELC carries out are the registration of civil unions, births, and deaths.

The criminal code prohibits blasphemy, defined as public mockery of or insult to the doctrine or worship of a legally recognized religion. The maximum penalty for a violation of this provision is a fine and up to four months in prison, but the provision is not enforced. Prosecutors routinely dismiss alleged blasphemy as protected free speech. The law also prohibits hate speech and penalizes public statements that threaten, insult, or degrade individuals on the basis of their religion or belief.

The country mandates compulsory military service, but provides an exemption for conscientious objectors, which would include conscientious objection for religious reasons. In lieu of military service, alternative civilian service may be required.

Religious symbols such as headscarves, turbans, skull caps, and large crucifixes, are banned from judicial attire.

The government, through the Ministry of Justice, grants official status to other religious groups in addition to the ELC. Before 1970, 11 religious groups received approval in the form of recognition by royal decree, including the Catholic, Methodist, Baptist, Russian Orthodox, and Jewish communities. Since 1970, the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs, responsible for the administrative work of registering religious groups, has registered 141 religious groups. In addition to 89 Christian groups, there are 23 Muslim, 13 Buddhist, eight Hindu, three Jewish, and five other groups, including Bahais and followers of the indigenous Norse belief system Forn Sidr. Registered religious groups have certain special 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.

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Religious groups not recognized by either royal decree or registered by the ecclesiastic ministry, such as the Church of Scientology, are entitled to engage in religious practices, but members of non-recognized religious groups must marry in a civil ceremony in addition to any religious ceremony. Unrecognized religious groups are not granted tax-exempt status.

The guidelines for approval of religious organizations require religious groups seeking registration to 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, the religious group must "not teach or perform actions inconsistent with public morality or order."

All public and private schools, including religious schools, receive government financial support. Evangelical Lutheran theology is taught in public schools in accordance with the law; however, a student may withdraw from religion classes with parental consent. Additionally, the law requires that a Christian studies course also covering world religions be taught in public school. The course is compulsory, although students may be exempted if a parent presents a request in writing. If the student is 15 years old or older, the student and parent must jointly request the student's exemption.

The law allows Muslim, Jewish, and Christian prayers to be substituted for collective prayer in such venues as school assemblies as long as proselytizing is not also included.

The law requires most foreign religious workers (except citizens of Turkey) to pass a Danish language test within six months of entering the country to be able to obtain an extension of their residence permits as religious workers.

The government is an active member of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, formerly the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research.

Government Practices

The Copenhagen City Council hosted a large town hall meeting in mid-February, where members of the Copenhagen Jewish community offered personal accounts of religion-based harassment, including their concerns over the increase in physical

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and verbal anti-Semitic incidents. According to victims' reports, the perpetrators were mainly immigrants, often from Arab and other Muslim countries. Most incidents involved vandalism, such as graffiti, and nonviolent verbal assaults. In mid-April, the minister of justice reported to parliament's legal affairs committee that the Copenhagen police found "a need in certain areas of the police district for special police precautions with a view to ensuring that certain groups can feel safe."

All schools offer foods that satisfy different religious requirements.

In January the Copenhagen deputy mayor for employment and integration announced the start of a series of dialogues to mobilize the public against hate crimes, including crimes based on religion, inviting representatives from the Jewish community, the Copenhagen Diocese of the Catholic Church of Denmark, and the largest Muslim umbrella organization.

In October the government honored the Jewish community, as well as non-Jewish Danes who risked their lives to save Jews, on the 70th anniversary of the evacuation of 7,500 Danish Jews to Sweden during the Holocaust.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. These included anti-Semitic, anti-Islamic, and anti-Christian harassment, propaganda (intentionally denigrating another's religion), threats, and assaults, often between young Muslim males and young persons of other faiths. Because ethnicity and religion were often inextricably linked, it was difficult to categorize many of the incidents specifically as ethnic or religious intolerance.

In January a public elementary school principal from the heavily immigrant-populated Copenhagen neighborhood of Noerrebro told a local radio station that she had advised Jewish parents not to enroll their children in her school, as they were likely to experience harassment from other students. Following a few days of debate, the principal insisted she was referring to incidents in the past and that there was no longer a problem. The Chief Rabbi stated that it was "unthinkable" that Jewish parents would consider putting their children in a public elementary school in that particular neighborhood, and several local politicians decided to pursue the issue further. In mid-February the Copenhagen City Council hosted a town hall meeting, where several members of the Copenhagen Jewish community

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After years of debate, the first freestanding grand mosque was scheduled to open in May 2014 with funding from a group based in Qatar. The mosque will be located in the heavily immigrant neighborhood of Noerrebro in Copenhagen. On September 3, the first minaret was erected at the mosque. The minaret will not, however, be used for the call to prayer.

Earlier in the year, the Danish Atheistic Society petitioned the government for burial areas without religious symbols. As a result, two large cemeteries in Copenhagen instituted areas designated as religion-free zones where markers cannot have any religious symbols displayed. The president of the Atheistic Society declared the areas suitable.

The Institute of Theology at the University of Aarhus announced in February that it would offer classes in “Christian and religious persecution” in the fall semester. These classes will focus on Christian history in Europe with a stated goal of presenting challenges facing European Christianity in a global world of multi-religiosity and secularity.

In May Dansk supermarket amended its policy regarding religious head coverings to allow employees to wear head coverings if they follow a recognized religion.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. embassy officers regularly worked with government and civil society to promote tolerance, counteract extremism, and advance religious diversity throughout all levels of society. Embassy officers regularly held meetings with different groups to stress the importance of religious tolerance and diversity, share best practices and new ideas, or connect U.S.-based religious practitioners with their local counterparts. Organizations participating in these meetings included the Ministry of Social Affairs and Integration; the minister for gender equality and ecclesiastical affairs; integration councils from local governments; religious leaders and community groups representing Christian, Muslim, Jewish and other faiths; and community and social welfare groups.

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The embassy continued its bilateral exchange and study tour program. In August the embassy sponsored a visit by a delegation of seven ethnic-Somali leaders and city officials (including the mayor and police chief of Kolding) to Seattle and Minneapolis. Faith and civic community leaders in both cities encouraged the visitors to work to counteract negative Muslim stereotypes. The group of city officials met with their counterparts in the Seattle and Minneapolis city governments as well as with a variety of Somali-American leaders. The visit allowed the Danes to observe how federal and local governments interact with the local Somali population and helped inspire similar coordination in Denmark.

The U.S. embassy promoted religious dialogue, particularly with the Muslim community, and sponsored a variety of programs promoting religious tolerance for public service employees, leaders, and citizens. In meetings with Muslim representatives throughout the country, the previous and current ambassadors focused on religious freedom and tolerance, speaking with and listening to young adults and older community leaders from different religious communities. In September the embassy organized a visit by three Somali-American imams and an experienced Somali-American community organizer from Minnesota who discussed religious tolerance and integration with members of the large Danish-Somali population. In September the embassy hosted a visit of an official from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Office of Civil Rights. The official, who was in charge of hosting roundtables between government and local Muslim communities in the U.S., met with government officials regarding the mechanics of hosting such roundtables, and with local Somali-Danes to promote ideas of integration.