

# **DENMARK 2014 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT**

## **Executive Summary**

The constitution guarantees the right of individuals to worship according to their beliefs. The Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELC), as the national church, continued to have privileges not available to other religious groups. Ritual slaughter of animals, including kosher and halal slaughter, was banned in February; the Danish Institute of Human Rights reportedly did not consider the ban to be a violation of religious freedom. In October police began investigation of an Odense-based imam for anti-Semitic statements.

There was an increased number of anti-Semitic incidents, coinciding with increased violence in the Middle East, which attracted media and political attention. Following statements by Muslim community leaders denouncing radical Islam and after the cease-fire in Gaza was announced, the number of incidents declined. The country's first grand mosque opened in Copenhagen to criticism it might be used to further the teaching of fundamentalist Islam. A mosque in Aarhus gained media attention over anti-Semitic statements made by one of the mosque's imams. A poll showing broad support for banning male circumcision and anti-Semitic commentary in the subsequent debate caused concern among Jewish community leaders.

U.S. embassy officials regularly met with government offices, political parties, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to stress the importance of religious tolerance and diversity, share best practices and new ideas, and connect U.S.-based religious practitioners with their local counterparts. Organizations participating in these meetings included the Ministry of Children, Gender Equality, Integration, and Social Affairs; integration councils from local governments; religious leaders and community groups representing Christian, Muslim, Jewish and other faiths; and community and social welfare groups.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the total population is 5.6 million (July 2014 estimate). According to Statistics Denmark, the government statistical office, 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.

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Groups constituting less than 1 percent each 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 non-denominational Christians. Although estimates vary, the Jewish Society of Denmark places the Jewish population at between 6,000 and 8,000.

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

#### Legal Framework

The constitution 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 also states no person can be deprived of access to the full enjoyment of civil and political rights because of religious beliefs, and these beliefs shall not be used to evade compliance with civic duty.

The constitution states 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 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 which only members pay. Among the activities the ELC carries out are 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. The law also prohibits hate speech and penalizes public statements threatening, insulting, or degrading individuals on the basis of their religion or belief.

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. In 1970, the law was changed to refer to recognition as registration, rather than as decree, with no change made to the functionality of official recognition. The Ministry of Social Affairs, Children, Integration, and Equality, responsible for the administrative work of registering religious groups, has registered a total of 170 religious groups. In addition to 109 Christian groups, there are 27 Muslim, 15 Buddhist, 10 Hindu,

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four 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.

Religious groups not recognized by either royal decree or registered by the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs, 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 a Christian studies course, also covering world religions, to be taught in public schools. 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. All schools offer foods which satisfy different religious requirements.

The law allows Muslim, Jewish, and other denominations of Christian prayers to be substituted for the ELC prayers. Collective prayer is noncompulsory and rarely practiced in such venues as school assemblies but remains legal as long as proselytizing is not also included.

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

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The country mandates compulsory military service, but provides an exemption for conscientious objectors, which includes conscientious objection for religious or ethical reasons. In lieu of military service, alternative civilian service may be required. The period of service for a conscientious objector is the same as the period required for military service with the Armed Forces or Emergency Management Agency. An individual should apply to perform service as a conscientious objector within eight weeks of receiving notice of military service from the Armed Forces or Emergency Management Agency. The application must be sent to the Conscientious Objector Administration and must show that military service of any kind is incompatible with one's conscience. The period of 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 spread across the country.

Ritual slaughter of animals without prior stunning, including kosher and halal slaughter, was banned in February. The law allows for slaughter according to religious rites with prior stunning and limits 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 Danish Veterinary and Food Administration. Violations of this law are punished with fines or up to four months in prison.

The law requires foreign religious workers (except citizens of Turkey, who are considered exempt because of Turkey's Association Agreement with the EU) 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.

### Government Practices

Although the criminal code prohibits blasphemy, the provision was generally not enforced. According to press reports, no one has been convicted under the provision since the 1940s.

In October the Fyn police district began investigation of a criminal offense report filed by a representative of the local Jewish community concerning anti-Semitic statements on a video recording made by an Odense-based imam. The video was first posted on a social media site by the Danish Islamic Faith Society. Among other comments, the imam reportedly said "Jews are descendants of apes and pigs."

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The government introduced a program to counteract extremist internet content, including religious posts on social media, and to offer members of extremist groups an “exit option” comparable to what is in place for criminal gang members. The exit program offers a range of significant social benefits including housing, job placement, and education contingent on a set of requirements tailored to each individual. The consulting company COWI evaluated the government’s criminal gang exit program, which it deemed to be adequate, but offered some suggestions which the government is utilizing in the implementation of the national plan to counter violent extremism by religious adherents.

In March the government recognized the 200th anniversary of the Royal Decree of 1814, which granted full civic rights and duties of citizenship to the country’s Jewish population.

Jewish community leaders reported the Danish Institute of Human Rights did not consider the ban on ritual slaughter of animals to be a violation of religious freedom because they could still import kosher meat. Prior to the ban, Jews imported kosher meat from other European countries and no kosher slaughterhouses existed in the country. Halal slaughter did occur occasionally before the ban, but rarely underwent the required registration process for religious exemption from previously existing slaughter laws.

The government is a member of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.

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

There were reported incidents of anti-Semitic, anti-Islamic, and anti-Christian harassment, propaganda (intentionally denigrating another’s religion), threats, and assaults, often by young Muslim males and by young persons of other faiths. Because religion and ethnicity are often closely linked, it is difficult to categorize many incidents as being based solely on religious identity.

There were 51 anti-Semitic incidents during the year according to the Jewish Society in Denmark. Twenty-five of these incidents occurred in July, coinciding with increased violence in the Middle East. The majority of the incidents involved verbal harassment, including six instances of abusive social media activity. The *Berlingske* newspaper reported the incidents had motivated the Copenhagen City

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Council's deputy mayor for integration to call a meeting to focus on the problem, inviting representatives from the Muslim Community, the Muslim Council, and the Jewish Society, which led to a call for a national action plan to address the situation. Reports of anti-Semitic incidents dropped significantly after the ceasefire in Gaza.

In August *Berlingske* ran several stories highlighting recent anti-Semitic activity. The stories focused on incidents such as a young Jew who refrained from wearing her Star of David necklace in public out of fear of being harassed, and a Jewish school in Copenhagen whose leadership had advised the students to not wear visible Jewish symbols when leaving the school. On August 21, Carolineskolen, a private Jewish school, was vandalized, with windows shattered and anti-Semitic graffiti spray painted on the walls. Political leaders condemned the incident. In early August a reporter from a national radio station wore a Jewish skullcap while walking through the heavily Muslim-populated Norrebro area in Copenhagen. He said he was removed from a café and told he was not welcome in Norrebro by a group of men who tore off his skullcap. This was followed by a protest on August 16, during which dozens of political leaders and ordinary citizens, most of whom were not Jewish, walked through the same Norrebro neighborhood wearing Jewish skullcaps. The protest was peaceful with no incidents reported.

Several Muslim leaders throughout the community made public statements denouncing the views of radical Islamists.

Denmark's first grand mosque opened in June in Copenhagen's Norrebro neighborhood. Critics said a contribution of funds from former Qatari Emir Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, who was reported to have ties to radical Islam, was meant to further the teaching of fundamentalist Islam. A spokesperson for the Danish Islamic Council denied the mosque would be indebted to external forces. The council requested that the minaret not be used for calls to prayer, out of respect to the surrounding community. Members of the group Stop Islamization of Denmark (SIAD) planned to protest outside of the mosque during its opening, but were banned by the police on the ground of possible incitement to violence.

In January the media reported the police in Aarhus had warned Muslim youth and their families against attending a particular mosque there following reports saying 22 out of 27 immigrants affiliated with it were known to have traveled to Syria to engage in possible terrorist activities. Police and city officials in January began meeting monthly with mosque leaders and members to open a dialogue on

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religious ideology to reintegrate those of the group who had returned to Aarhus. The media reported national debate and criticism of this approach as being too “soft” and there were calls for new laws to restrict Islamic religious and cultural practices and to limit immigration from predominantly Muslim countries. In July an imam from the same mosque gave a sermon in Berlin calling for the killing of all “Zionist Jews.” The sermon was filmed and posted on a social media site. The media, public opinion, and other Muslim organizations strongly condemned the imam’s comments. In October a spokesperson for the mosque referred to the government’s participation in the coalition against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) as a war against Islam.

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

U.S. embassy officers regularly held meetings with government officials, political parties, and NGOs to stress the importance of religious tolerance and diversity, share best practices and new ideas, and connect U.S.-based religious practitioners with their local counterparts. Organizations participating in these meetings included the Ministry of Children, Gender Equality, Integration, and Social Affairs; integration councils from local governments; religious leaders and community groups representing Christian, Muslim, Jewish and other faiths; and community and social welfare groups.

The embassy continued its bilateral exchange and study tour program focused on promoting religious tolerance and integration.

In August the embassy sponsored a trip by nine local city officials, NGO representatives, and community leaders to the United States to learn about counteracting negative Muslim stereotypes.

The embassy promoted interreligious 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 Ambassador focused on religious freedom and tolerance. The Ambassador also spoke with and listened to young adults and community leaders from different religious communities, including from the Jewish, Muslim, and Catholic communities, as well as other minority religious groups.