

DENMARK 2017 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. In June parliament repealed a blasphemy law that, according to various media reports, citizens had largely seen as limiting freedom of speech. Prosecutors invoked the blasphemy law for the first time in 46 years when they charged a man for inciting mockery of religion after he burned a Quran and posted a video of it online. In October a proposal for a parliamentary resolution calling on the government to ban masks and full-body clothing generated significant public discussion and commentary. In May the government added six individuals to a “hate preachers” list that prevented those individuals from entering the country.

There were reports of anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim, and anti-Christian incidents in major cities and asylum centers, including assaults, threats, demonstrations, attacks against property, harassment, and language denigrating religious groups. In January the Muslim and Jewish communities expressed concern about public pressure to ban male circumcision. In March an imam gave a sermon at the Al-Faruq Mosque in which he called for the killing of Jews. In May a young woman was sentenced to six years in prison for planning a terrorist attack against a Jewish school in 2016; charges against her alleged accomplice were dropped. In November, after an appeals process, her sentence was increased to eight years in prison. In March five or six men attacked a couple for eating pork. In separate incidents, a woman was fined for insulting Muslims, and unknown individuals vandalized Muslim graves.

U.S. embassy officials regularly met with representatives from government, political parties, and nongovernmental organizations to stress the importance of religious tolerance and diversity and to share best practices and new ideas to promote religious freedom and interfaith dialogue, including identifying programs and objectives at the local level. After meeting with Jewish and Muslim religious leaders, the embassy met with government officials on several occasions to discuss the religious practice of male circumcision among other issues that affected those communities. The embassy met regularly with Muslim and Jewish religious communities to discuss interreligious dialogue and cooperation.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population is 5.6 million (July 2017 estimate). According to Statistics Denmark, the government statistical office, as of July 1, 76 percent of all citizens are members of the ELC.

According to the Aarhus University's Center for Contemporary Religion, Muslims constitute 5.1 percent of the population. Muslim groups are concentrated in the largest cities, particularly Copenhagen, Odense, and Aarhus. There has been an increase in Muslim immigrants in recent years. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs estimates that other religious groups, each 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, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Pentecostals, and nondenominational Christians. Academics and polling institutions estimate that up to 12-20 percent of the population, some of whom are classified as members of the ELC, identify as atheist. Although estimates vary, the Jewish Society, also known as Mosaiske, estimates the Jewish population at approximately 5,500 to 7,000, most of whom live in the Copenhagen metropolitan area.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution declares the ELC as 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 specifies that "rules for religious bodies dissenting from the Established Church shall be laid down by statute." 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 law prohibits hate speech, including religious hate speech that is directed at individuals or groups; the maximum penalty for hate speech is a fine or two years' imprisonment. On June 2, parliament repealed, effective June 9, a blasphemy law, which had prescribed a maximum of four months in prison and a fine for those who mocked or insulted a legally recognized religion.

The law permits the government to prevent religious figures who are foreign nationals and do not already have a residence permit from entering the country if the Ministry of Immigration determines their presence poses a threat to the public order. In such cases the ministry places the individuals on a national sanctions list and bars them from entry into the country for a two-year period, which may be renewed.

The ELC is the only religious group that receives funding through state grants and voluntary taxes paid via payroll deduction of its members. Members receive a tax credit for their donations to the ELC. The voluntary taxes account for an estimated 86 percent of the ELC's operating budget; the remaining 14 percent is provided through a combination of voluntary donations by congregants and grants from the government. Members of other recognized religious communities may donate to their own community voluntarily and receive a credit towards their personal income tax liability. The ELC and other state-sanctioned religious communities carry out registration of civil unions, births, and deaths for their members.

The Ministry of Culture and Ecclesiastic Affairs has responsibility for granting official status to other religious groups in addition to the ELC through recognition by historic royal decree or through official registration. According to the Ministry of Culture and Ecclesiastic Affairs, there are a total of 314 religious groups and congregations: 205 Christian groups, 66 Muslim groups, 15 Buddhist groups, nine Hindu groups, three Jewish groups, and 16 miscellaneous groups and congregations including the Bahai Faith, the Alevi Muslim community, and followers of the indigenous Norse belief system, Forn Sidr. Of this number, some groups are officially recognized while others are affiliated with recognized groups.

Recognized religious groups have the right to perform legal marriage ceremonies, name and baptize children with legal effect, issue legal death certificates, obtain residence permits for foreign clergy, establish cemeteries, and receive tax-deductible financial donations and various valued-added tax exemptions. For religious communities that do not perform baptisms, paper forms provided on the citizen services website are filled out and delivered to the clergy member or office of the religious community, who in turn registers the child in the population register. Individuals unaffiliated with a registered religious group may opt to have birth and death certificates issued by the health authority.

Groups not recognized by either royal decree or 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 they have some tax benefits; for example, contributions by members are tax-deductible.

In order for a religious community to be registered, it must have at least 150 members, while a congregation, which the Ministry of Culture and Ecclesiastic Affairs considers as a group within one of the major world religions (Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam), must consist of at least 50 adult members to be approved. For congregations located in sparsely populated regions, such as Greenland, a lower population threshold is used. The threshold number varies, depending on the total population of a given area. 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; information about the group's leadership; and a statement on the number of adult members permanently residing in the country. Groups must also have formal procedures for membership and make its teachings available to all members. The Ministry of Justice makes the final decision on registration applications after receiving recommendations from a group consisting of a lawyer, a religious historian, a sociologist of religion, and a nonordained theologian.

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; the instructors are public school teachers rather than provided by the ELC. The religion classes are compulsory in grades 1-9, although students may be exempted if a parent presents a request in writing. No alternative classes are offered. The curriculum in grades 1-6 focuses on life philosophies and ethics, biblical stories, and the history of Christianity. In grades 7-9, the curriculum adds a module on world religions. The course is optional in grade 10. If the student is 15 years old or older, the student and parent must jointly request the student's exemption. Private schools are also required to teach religion classes in grades 1-9, including world religion in grades 7-9. The religion classes taught in grades 1-9 need not be about ELC theology. 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.

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. The application must go to the Conscientious Objector Administration and must show that military service of any kind is incompatible with the individual'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.

A law that came into force on May 1 requires clergy members with legal authorization to officiate at marriages to complete a two-day course on family law and civil rights, administered by the Ministry of Culture and Ecclesiastic Affairs. The law also includes a requirement that religious workers "must not behave or act in a way that makes them unworthy to exercise public authority." Religious workers perceived as not complying with the new provisions may be stripped of their right to conduct marriage ceremonies.

According to European Union legislation, companies are allowed to fire employees for wearing religious symbols if their conditions of employment preclude employees from wearing such symbols.

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

Government Practices

Prosecutors invoked the country's blasphemy law on February 22 for the first time in 46 years over a 2015 incident in which a man burned a Quran and posted a video to a Facebook group called "Yes to Freedom – No to Islam." The individual's lawyer stated the burning was in "self-defense" of potential Muslim aggression and cited the precedent of individuals who were not prosecuted for burning Bibles. He was charged on the grounds of inciting "public scorn or mockery of religion." Prosecutors dropped the case as a result of the repeal of the blasphemy law in June.

The government continued to provide armed security for Jewish sites it considered to be at high risk of terrorist attack, including Copenhagen's synagogue, community center, and schools as it had since terrorist attacks in 2015. During the summer, the military began assisting the police in protecting Jewish sites in Copenhagen.

In October the Danish People's Party (DPP) proposed a resolution that parliament instruct the government to draft legislation making it illegal to wear masks or total body-covering clothing, for example, burqas and *niqabs*, in public. The resolution cited as possible penalties for wearing these items fines, jail, and/or an obligatory course on national values, drawing on similar legislation in Belgium and France. By year's end, the resolution had not passed, and no draft legislation had been produced, although parliamentarians from the governing coalition and the Social Democratic Party voiced support for the DPP resolution. Members of smaller political parties expressed concerns that if the ban were adopted, it would appear to target specific religious groups and make it harder to integrate immigrants belonging to those groups.

A Social Democratic Party councilman on the Ishoj Town Council, Seyit Ahmet Ozkan, resigned in August after he stated on Facebook that Zionists, and not radical Muslims, were behind ISIS. In a later interview, Ozkan said he did not equate Zionists with Jews. Local Social Democratic Party representatives insisted on having his name removed from the ballot for the November 21 local election. Another councilman in Ishoj, Niels Roskov from the Unity List Party, stated it was commonly known Zionists were heavily involved in ISIS. According to radio and television news reports, the Unity List Party leadership said there was nothing to substantiate Roskov's claim, but the Unity List Party declined to take any further action.

In May the government barred six religious figures, including a pastor and an imam who were U.S. citizens, from entry into the country for a two-year period.

The Ministry of Immigration and Integration deemed these individuals threats to the nation's values and public security.

In February Aarhus Municipality ended gender-segregated swimming at its pools, despite the popularity of the segregation policy within the Muslim community.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

In March a group of five or six men attacked a man and a woman outside a pizzeria. The couple said that the assailants had shouted, "You're not supposed to eat pork on your pizza" and physically assaulted them. Police were investigating the incident but had not identified any suspects by year's end.

In May a 17-year-old was sentenced to six years in prison by Holbaek District Court for her role in planning a terrorist attack in 2016 against two schools, including a Jewish private school in Copenhagen. After the defendant and prosecutor appealed, in November the Eastern Division of the High Court upheld a guilty verdict and raised the sentence to eight years in prison. Authorities dropped charges against her alleged accomplice, a 24-year-old who had recently returned from Syria.

In January the Jewish and Muslim communities worked together to engage society on the topic of ritual circumcision and counter public comments by the Danish Medical Board that the practice should be outlawed. Leaders from the two communities stated they believed the proposed ban was specifically targeted at their respective communities. Although opinion polls indicated public support for a ban on circumcision, no major party in parliament publicly expressed support for prohibiting the practice.

In May the Jewish community called on police to investigate a possible case of incitement to hatred after an imam at the Al-Faruq Mosque in a Copenhagen suburb appeared to call for the killing of Jews during a sermon in March that was posted on social media. According to a translation of the Arabic transcript of the sermon, the imam said, "Judgment Day will not come until the Muslims fight the Jews and kill them." Minister of Immigration and Integration Inger Stojberg described the imam's address as "horrible, antidemocratic, and abominable." Police investigated the incident but filed no charges.

In January a court in Glostrup ordered a woman to pay 20 fines of 250 Danish kroner (\$40) each for writing insulting content about Muslims on a closed

Facebook group for “like-minded” persons. The woman posted the content in 2014 and 2015. The group had a few hundred members but reportedly had earlier had more than 6,000.

In February unknown individuals vandalized eight Muslim graves in Vestre Kirkegard (Western Cemetery) in Copenhagen, breaking the tombstones on all eight graves. Police investigated the incident but identified no suspects.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

After meeting with Jewish and Muslim religious leaders, embassy officials, including the Ambassador, met several times with government officials, including cabinet members as well as foreign ministry officials, to raise Jewish and Muslim concerns over proposals to ban male circumcision and other issues of concern to those communities.

Embassy officials met with various religious leaders from the Muslim, Jewish, and Christian communities throughout the year. In January embassy officials met with Jewish community leaders from Mosaiske to discuss the community’s sense of safety after the government and the community implemented changes in security. Embassy officials also met with the Muslim Council to discuss circumcision, access to halal meat, and its general views regarding religious freedom and tolerance in the country.

In May embassy officials met with international representatives from the Jewish and Muslim communities in Aarhus to discuss tolerance and mutual cooperation there.

In September embassy officials met with the chief rabbi of Mosaiske to discuss religious freedom and collaboration between the Muslim and Jewish communities.