

DENMARK 2016 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 February the public television network TV2 aired an investigative documentary series that depicted Islam in the country in an unflattering light, using hidden cameras to secretly record conversations with imams and others on such topics as abuse, rape, and bigamy. The series also depicted alleged cases of tax fraud and abuses of welfare benefits and public funds by Muslims and Muslim community organizations. The mayor of Aarhus cited the documentary in his decision to deny a request to grant municipal land for a grand mosque. The Copenhagen municipality opened an information center to educate teachers on the Jewish community in the country and combat anti-Semitism.

There were reports of anti-Semitic, anti-Islamic, and anti-Christian incidents in major cities and asylum centers, including assaults, threats, demonstrations, attacks against property, harassment, and language denigrating religious groups. In March authorities charged a 16-year-old girl with planning a terrorist attack against a Jewish school after police found bomb manuals and chemicals for making explosives at her residence. The TV2 documentary on Islam generated significant public debate on integration of Muslims. The Jewish community expressed concerns about public pressure to outlaw circumcision of male infants. In an open letter, a group of doctors asked the Danish Medical Association (DMA) to take a formal stance against the circumcision of minors. Both the DMA and the Danish Health Authority stated they would not pursue legislation against circumcision. In separate incidents, individuals vandalized a Muslim school and cemetery.

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 and to share best practices and new ideas promoting religious freedom such as interfaith dialogue and deeper engagement, including programs, at the local level. An officer from the Department of State Office of Religion and Global Affairs met in May with senior government officials and religious leaders. In May the U.S. Ambassador at Large for Global Women's Issues visited the country's first women-led mosque in

Copenhagen. The embassy hosted a film screening and roundtable to discuss the religious challenges faced by LGBT religious minorities.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population is 5.6 million (July 2016 estimate). According to Statistics Denmark, the government statistical office, as of January 1, 77 percent of all Danes were members of the ELC.

According to Statistics Denmark, Muslims constitute 5 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. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs estimates that religious 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, 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, while as many as 40 percent of the population identify as nonreligious. Although estimates vary, the Jewish Society places the Jewish population at between 5,500 and 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 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 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 maximum penalty for hate speech is a fine or two years' imprisonment.

The ELC is the only religious group that receives funding through state grants and voluntary taxes paid via payroll deduction of congregation members. 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.

In 2015 the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs assumed responsibility for granting official status to other religious groups in addition to the ELC through recognition by historic royal decree or through official registration; on November 28, the government announced the planned merger of the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs into a new Ministry of Cultural and Ecclesiastical Affairs. According to the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs, there are a total of 176 registered religious groups: 113 Christian groups and congregations, 30 Muslim groups, 8 Hindu organizations, 15 Buddhist groups, three Jewish communities, the Bahai Faith, the Alevi Muslim community, and five other religious groups, including followers of the indigenous Norse belief system, Forn Sidr.

Registered 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 pastor 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 Danish Health Authority.

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.

In order for a religious community to be registered, it must have at least 150 members, while a congregation, which the Ministry of Ecclesiastical 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.

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 from grades 1-6 focuses on life philosophies and ethics, biblical stories, and the history of Christianity. In grade 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 1-6 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, or 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 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.

A new law, which entered into force in January, 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.

On December 15, parliament passed legislation to be enacted on May 1, 2017 requiring 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 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 to not comply with the new provisions could be stripped of their ability to conduct marriage ceremonies.

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

Government Practices

In September Copenhagen City Court acquitted four citizens accused of aiding and abetting in terrorism by assisting Omar El-Hussein, the gunman who carried out deadly attacks at a free speech forum and a synagogue in Copenhagen in 2015. The Jewish community expressed regret at the acquittal. Two of the men were additionally charged and convicted of assisting in the disposal of the rifle used by El-Hussein and sentenced to three years and two-and-a-half years in prison, respectively. A third man was sentenced to 60 days in prison for drug possession and possessing ammunition similar to that used in the terrorist attack.

Jewish community leaders stated that the current and previous governments had provided state-funded security improvements which greatly increased the

perceived safety of the Jewish community following the February 2015 Copenhagen attacks.

In May the publicly funded Center for Adult Education in Lyngby prohibited six Muslim women from wearing the *niqab* in school and referred them to the center's e-learning service. School officials stated the *niqab* limited the interaction between teacher and student. Minister of Education Ellen Trane Noerby supported the school's decision, stating to the Danish Broadcasting Corporation that she fully supported the management's right to enforce the prohibition so that training could take place "in an orderly manner." She added that the education center was an independent entity and agreed with its argument that interaction between student and teacher was an important part of the learning experience, with which the *niqab* interfered.

Schools had the option to ban prayer during school hours. In June a Muslim student and teaching assistants at a publicly funded school for healthcare in Hilleroed were informed by the school director that prayer would no longer be possible during school hours. In a Facebook post, a student protested the decision, prompting hundreds of responses approving or denouncing the ban. The school's director stated that he was unable to grant religion-specific requests or accommodations. Member of Parliament (MP) Alex Ahrendtsen of the Danish People's Party gave his full support to the ban. A similar ban was put in place in an Aarhus region high school in September, where the majority of the students were Muslim.

Schools offered foods that satisfied different religious requirements. The options varied by school. Some schools offered halal meals while others did not serve pork. In January the Randers city council voted that traditional meals, including pork-based meals, would be mandatory in the municipality's public institutions, including schools and day care centers. The text of the bill stated that "nobody must be forced to eat anything that is against their attitude or religion," and alternative meal options continued to be provided. Martin Henriksen, a spokesman for the Danish People's Party that backed the measure, explained on his Facebook page that the bill would help uphold Danish culture, stating that his party was: "...fighting against Islamic rules and misguided considerations dictating what Danish children should eat." Some members of the Muslim community and migration advocates objected to the bill as stigmatizing Muslims.

In discussions in March with then-United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief Heiner Bielefeldt, members of the Jewish community

expressed concerns over the ban on slaughter of animals without prior stunning, which they said was enacted without prior consultation with the community.

In February national television network TV2, a publicly owned broadcaster with an independent editorial board, aired a four-part investigative documentary that depicted Islam in an unflattering light. The program used undercover videography that depicted imams at eight well known Sunni mosques encouraging members to carry out domestic abuse, including bigamy and rape.

Using hidden cameras, reporters posed as a married couple and secretly recorded conversations with imams and others at eight Sunni mosques in Aarhus, Odense, and Copenhagen. The imams were taped telling the undercover couple not to report spousal abuse to authorities, and stating that under Islam husbands were permitted to engage in domestic violence.

The series also depicted alleged abuses of welfare benefits and tax fraud by local Muslims. An imam in Odense was shown advising the couple on how to “trick” the municipality into paying for their apartment by misrepresenting their income; he was later reported to be under investigation by the National Police for potential tax and welfare fraud. The series also questioned whether public funds were truly being used for their intended purpose of better integrating Muslim communities into society. In several examples featured in the documentary, mosques founded an association to apply for a municipal grant, but never created any community organization.

Aarhus Mayor Jacob Bundsgaard cited his loss of confidence in the local Muslim community after broadcast of the negative TV2 television documentary series and withdrew a municipal commitment to provide land for a “grand mosque” project that had been under consideration for the previous 17 years.

In February a district court ruled that hate speech posted on Facebook may be prosecuted under hate speech laws and fined a citizen 1,600 kroner (\$227) for anti-Islamic postings from 2013. In February Danish People’s Party councilman Mogens Camre was fined 8,000 kroner (\$1,130) for tweeting anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim remarks. Also in February the state prosecutor said that Hajj Saeed, who gave a sermon inciting violence against Jews in the Masjid Al-Faru mosque in Copenhagen during 2015, would not be prosecuted for his statements. In response to those rulings, parliament reexamined the hate speech provisions within the penal code to assess whether the laws were working as intended. In response to a formal question asked by parliament, on March 9, the minister of justice read a statement

prepared by his ministry that the current provisions in the penal code were adequate and working as intended.

In November Sheikh Muhammad Al-Khaled Samha, an imam at a mosque run by the Islamic Society in Denmark in the Odense suburb of Vollsmose, was criminally indicted for a sermon he gave in September 2014 where he called Jews “the offspring of apes and pigs” and added “Oh Muslims, oh Servant of Allah, there is a Jew behind me, come and kill him.” Media reported that prosecutors indicted him for violating the penal code prohibition against threatening or scorning people on the basis of their religion, and he could face up to two years in prison or a fine. Samha was found guilty by the Odense city court on December 20 and received a 14-day suspended jail sentence.

On November 8, the municipality of Copenhagen and the Jewish community inaugurated an information center to educate teachers who would then visit schools, other educational institutions, and youth clubs to inform the general population about the Jewish minority. The municipality funded the Jewish community-run center. Copenhagen Mayor of Employment and Integration Anna Mee Allerslev told the media in February that “we have too many instances of anti-Semitism or hatred of Jews and we want to help break down prejudices and...eliminate discrimination and hate crimes.”

Prime Minister Rasmussen invited all political party leaders to a March 30 closed meeting on countering religious extremism, where he called for legislative action to counter religious hate speech that was contrary to the constitution and to bar entry to designated hate preachers before the summer parliamentary recess. Following the passage in December of legislation requiring additional coursework on family law and civil rights for clergy eligible to perform marriage ceremonies, non-Islamic religious minorities expressed concern about changes in legislation which could have a negative impact on their communities and threaten religious freedom.

The government observed International Holocaust Remembrance Day on January 27 with ceremonies, public speaking events, and educational events. Prime Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen released a statement on his social media page and the Copenhagen mayor of culture and leisure provided the opening speech on the year’s theme of inclusive citizenship. The speech cited the stripping of civil rights of European Jews during World War II and decried any government actions that could erode civil rights for minorities. Many observers interpreted the speech as alluding to the rights of recently arrived refugees, many of whom were Muslim.

Other locations throughout the country held talks and discussions throughout the year in remembrance of victims of the Holocaust. Under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, the private think tank Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS) offered lectures on the Holocaust from national and international experts for students in lower and upper secondary schools and provided teachers with materials on the Holocaust to use in their classes.

The government is a member of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. Throughout the year, several municipalities held events in coordination with the alliance, locally cosponsored by DIIS, including providing speakers and hosting local conferences.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were reported incidents of anti-Semitic, anti-Islamic, and anti-Christian harassment, demonstrations, propaganda, threats, and assaults throughout the year.

In January authorities arrested a 16-year-old girl after police found bomb manuals and chemicals for making explosives at her residence. In March the girl was charged with preparing a terrorist attack against the Jewish private school in Copenhagen as well as another school. In addition, a 24-year old friend of the girl who had recently returned from fighting in Syria was arrested for acquiring bomb-making materials and plotting attacks on two additional schools. Both individuals were in custody and awaiting trial at year's end.

In May three men at a bar in Odense yelled anti-Islamic slurs at two Muslim girls as they walked by and pulled off the headscarf of one of them. One of the girls told the press no onlookers attempted to stop the altercation.

According to an informal survey of 14 priests living near asylum centers conducted in July by the newspaper *Kristeligt Dagblad* and to reports by the Danish Institute for Human Rights, Christian asylum seekers were subjected to death threats, threats of violence, and epithets at asylum centers. The Ministry of Integration, Immigration, and Housing was investigating the reported incidents.

For Freedom, formerly known as PEGIDA (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the West) Denmark, and the Stop the Islamification of Denmark group organized anti-Islamic protests throughout the year. In September For Freedom organized a demonstration in Copenhagen attended by a several hundred participants, which was met with a larger counterprotest. There were reports of

minor episodes of violence. Police arrested 11 people from both groups of demonstrators.

In June MP Alex Ahrendtsen made remarks to TV2, stating “there is only one thing worse than devout Muslims, and that is converts” because they are “more extreme.” The NGO Report Hate filed a formal complaint against Ahrendtsen with the national police on June 13, stating that his remarks violated the penal code’s “racism section” (the colloquial name for the legal provisions barring hate speech, including against religion).

In May the Mariam Mosque, Scandinavia’s first women-led mosque, located in Copenhagen, opened to the public. Eight women (titled either: imam, khatibah, dhikr-facilitator, murshidat, or Islamic spiritual care persons) led religious services at the mosque. Friday prayers were for women only, but men could attend the mosque outside of Friday prayer hours. At year’s end, the mosque was awaiting a response to its application for status as an officially recognized religious congregation. The mosque performed one religious marriage and created its own six-page marriage charter focused on four key principles: polygamy is not an option; women have the right to divorce; a marriage will be annulled if psychological or physical violence is committed; and, in the event of divorce, women have equal rights over any children.

Leaders from 31 Islamic organizations, including the eight mosques featured in the investigative documentary series aired by TV2, issued a statement on March 12 condemning the documentary series, accusing the program of having set integration efforts back 30 years. In response to the condemnation, six other Islamic institutions, led by the Danish Islamic Center, issued a joint statement critical of the March 12 condemnation and stating that the investigative series highlighted many challenges facing Muslim communities, including gender-based violence, crime, and chronic unemployment. They called for openness and dialogue, and urged all parties to refrain from smear attacks.

Multiple daily national newspapers, academics from Copenhagen University, and immigrant and religious freedom advocates criticized the investigative series as oversimplifying and sensationalizing the attitudes of Muslims and further fueling national tensions over the integration of refugees and migrants. They said the series’ producers had oversimplified Islam and downplayed the challenges Muslims faced in achieving social and economic integration. The NGO Center for the Prevention of Exclusion stated that editing choices were tailored to sensationalize the series. Radio24Syv received and aired omitted audio clips that

said painted a more nuanced picture of many of the statements made by several of the filmed imams. Islamic scholars at Copenhagen University stated the undercover reporters focused only on communities with “extremist” imams, where controversial statements were “practically guaranteed.”

A spokesperson for Mosaiske, the largest Jewish community organization, expressed the Jewish community’s continued concern regarding a growing movement to ban male circumcision. Members of the Jewish community also told then-UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief Bielefeldt in March that their biggest worry was public demands for outlawing circumcision of male infants. On March 3, a group of 417 doctors sent an open letter to the DMA requesting that it take a formal stance against the circumcision of minors. The DMA adopted a stance against elective circumcision on December 6, stating that it was ethically wrong to circumcise a person without his consent as an adult but making clear that it would not pursue legislation on the matter. The Danish Health Authority and other government officials also indicated they did not intend to recommend changes to the existing rules and regulations on this issue. Organizations such as Intact Denmark and several MPs of the Danish People’s Party, Social Democrats Party, and Liberal Alliance Party, and members of the European Parliament continued to campaign to ban the practice.

In March an assailant threw a brick through the display window of a kosher butcher shop in Copenhagen. Police made no arrests.

On August 10, unknown perpetrators vandalized a Muslim school. They spray painted walls, woodwork, and windows with anti-Islamic epithets, such as “Islam out of Denmark.” They also painted targets on several of the windows. Police were investigating but had made no arrests by year’s end.

On September 15, individuals who said they belonged to an anti-Islamic group named The Resistance Group – Monoculture is Peaceful Culture vandalized a Muslim cemetery in Broenby. The men doused a grave with blood or a blood-like fluid and placed a severed pig head on top of the grave. According to photographs and an anonymous email to the media, the perpetrators stated that the vandalized grave belonged to Omar Hamid El-Hussein, who carried out terrorist attacks in 2015 in Copenhagen. The pictures of the grave showed that the surrounding ground was covered in small Danish flags and a handwritten sign saying: “Here lies the terrorist Omar Hamid El-Hussein. Allah never forgave you, neither does Denmark.” According to the individual who initially reported the vandalism, the grave did not belong to El-Hussein. Police did not confirm who was buried in the

grave and made no arrests. Following the incident, a group of volunteers watched over the cemetery to guard against further vandalism.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Ambassador and embassy officers met with cabinet members of the government as well as foreign ministry officials to raise concerns over access to circumcision and the safety of the Jewish community.

In April and May embassy officers visited the refugee arrival processing centers in Sandholm, Haderslev, and Sommersted where refugees from diverse religious backgrounds were screened upon entry into the country.

In May an officer from the Department of State Office of Religion and Global Affairs participated in the Danish-Arab Interfaith Dialogue conference that focused on promoting better understanding between Christians and Muslims through shared values. The individual discussed respecting the autonomy of leaders and members of religious minorities and also gave a radio interview outlining the role religious leaders could play in promoting deradicalization.

In May the Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues visited the women-led Mariam Mosque and participated in a roundtable discussion on the difficulties faced by Muslim women in Muslim and Danish society.

The U.S. embassy, together with other institutions, sponsored the 2016 Jewish Cultural Festival, an event showcasing Jewish culture that encouraged interfaith dialogue and understanding among religious groups in the country. In February on the one-year anniversary of a terrorist attack in Copenhagen, the ambassador attended a memorial event for the two victims. The embassy met regularly with leaders and representatives from Mosaiske, the largest Jewish community organization, on the growing concern in the Jewish community over a movement to ban male circumcision.

In August as part of Copenhagen Pride Week's theme of building bridges in the community, the U.S. embassy hosted a screening of *A Jihad for Love* and a follow-on discussion on how one can identify as both Muslim and gay. Attendees included leaders of the country's Muslim LGBT community and government officials. Additionally, the Ambassador hosted a round table discussion with leading Muslim and other minority LGBT members on the unique challenges they faced as "double" or "triple" minorities.

In September embassy staff conducted a workshop on countering extremism within religious communities at the annual *Youth Folkemoedet* political event in Copenhagen. More than 90 youth aged 15-20 took part.