



Stockholm 2023-09-11

UN Special Rapporteur FORB Secretariat

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Contribution to the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief from The Christian Council of Sweden and The Interfaith Council of Sweden

The Christian Council of Sweden (CCS) and The Interfaith Council of Sweden (ICS) would kindly like to submit the following issues to the special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief. We would like to meet you in October to further discuss these issues. CCS and ICS are well equipped to put together a meeting with broad representation from the religious communities in Sweden.

Summary

- CCS and ICS are concerned about the level of religious or faith-based hate crimes in Sweden.
- CCS and ICS approves the governments withdrawal of the proposal to stop establishing new confessional schools.
- CCS and ICS are continuously concerned about the treatment of asylum seekers in need for protection on religious grounds.
- CCS and ICS are concerned about the proposal that employees working in the public sector should be obliged to report individuals without residence permits to the authorities. This proposal risk to impact our members' children and youth activities as well as the diaconal/social work.
- CCS and ICS are concerned about restrictions on public funding to faith-based actors on a national, regional, and municipal level.
- CCS and ICS are worried about discrimination on faith-based grounds in education.
- CCS and ICS are concerned about the burning of Holy Books in Sweden.

Expansion of our issues for your consideration

CCS and ICS are concerned about the level of hate crimes based on religion or belief in Sweden. According to The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention there is a high prevalence of hate crime on religious grounds in Sweden. Especially Muslims and Jews are affected.¹ The Church of Sweden also asked about the prevalence of threats, hate and/or harassment in their congregations (2019), and the study showed that:

¹ <https://bra.se/statistik/statistiska-undersokningar/hatbrottsstatistik.html>

- 37.2 % of congregations in the Church of Sweden reported destruction of property against churches during the last 12 months. In many of the cases the motives were believed to be xenophobic, christianophobic or homophobic.
- 27.3 % of the responding congregations reported that they had received hate, threats, or harassment where the motives were believed to be xenophobic, christianophobic or homophobic.

This social climate forces many faith-based communities to invest in increased security measures. At the same time many faith-based communities also have difficulties in insuring their properties as these are increasingly evaluated as high-risk by insurance companies.

CCS and ICS approves the governments withdrawal of the proposal to stop establishing new confessional schools. The previous government proposed an end to establishing new confessional schools after the idea of banning them completely were deemed in contradiction to ECHR. The new government (2022-) has declared that they have no intention to proceed with the proposal. However, CCS and ICS are concerned that this might change because several parties in the parliament continue to argue for increased restrictions on confessional schools.

The CCS and ICS are continuously concerned about the treatment of asylum seekers in need for protection on religious grounds. The Swedish Migration Agency's internal reviews have found disparities between the different regions within the agency on how asylum claims based on conversion are handled. The Churches in Sweden have many members who have converted to Christianity, and they are witness to how converts are not believed and are facing deportation to countries where they are in risk of persecution. The Churches approve the steps the Swedish Migration Agency have taken in ratifying the situation of improving due process for converts, including joint education with The Christian Council of Sweden but see how further improvements are needed, not only regarding converts but also people belonging to the LGBTQ+ community.

The CCS and ICS are concerned about the proposal that employees working in the public sector should be obliged to report individuals without residence permits to the authorities. This may also include those employed in schools, social services, and health care. The CCS and ICS are concerned this is not in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. This proposal risk to impact our members' children and youth activities as well as diaconal/social work since a report on child abuse or child maltreatment to social services may result in a report to the Swedish Police Authority.

CCS and ICS are concerned about restrictions on public funding to faith-based actors on a national, regional, and municipal level. Scouts and faith-based organisations have lost funding in several municipalities during a process which is meant to develop democratic conditions on public funding. The reasons behind the removal of public funds have either been said to be due to democratic discrepancies within individual organisations, or solely motivated by the organisation being faith based. CCS and ICS are not against democratic conditions in general and are positive towards the government's withdrawal of the proposed conditions to rework the proposal and are hopeful that it will consider the concerns raised by civil society including faith-based organisations. We are however worried about the seemingly pre-emptive implementations from different public actors.


CCS and ICS are worried about discrimination on faith-based grounds in education. A study from the Christian Council of Churches (2020)² reported for example that every other Christian youth feel violated on religious grounds in Sweden. A study from the Discrimination Ombudsman (2022)

² <https://www.skr.org/ny-rapport-varannan-kristen-ungdom-upplever-sig-krankt-for-sin-tro/>

confirms the study in its results demonstrating that many young people feel harassed in school due to their belief or lack thereof. The report demonstrated that especially visible religious minorities were exposed to harassment and the study showed extensive discrimination of Muslim women that choose to wear religious clothing.³

CCS and ICS are concerned about the burning of Holy Books in Sweden as a form of protest. CCS and SIC are not in favor of any type of laws against blasphemy as it could be seen as a restriction of religious freedom of belief or freedom of speech. CCS and ICS are however worried about the increase of hate and polarization that has been seen growing primarily against Muslims and that the Quran burnings has been combined with what could be judged as hate speech. CCS and ICS are of the opinion that it is possible to unite freedom of speech and respect and space for what is holy.

For CCS and ICS, Stockholm 2023-09-11

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several loops and a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Sofia Camnerin

Secretary General, The Christian Council of Sweden

Vice-chairperson and board member, The Interfaith Council of Sweden

³ <https://www.do.se/download/18.71c46fcf184c78ffadd7b/1669877965291/regeringuppdrag-slutredovisning-diskriminering-religion-LED-2021-510.pdf>