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**STATUS OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE KINGDOM OF SWEDEN
FOR THE 49TH SESSION OF THE
UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW**

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Introduction

1. The European Centre for Law and Justice (ECLJ) is an international, non-governmental organization dedicated to promoting and protecting human rights around the world. The ECLJ also holds Special Consultative status before the United Nations Economic and Social Council. This report discusses the status of human rights in the Kingdom of Sweden (Sweden) for the 49th session of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

Background

2. Sweden is a country located on the Scandinavian Peninsula in northern Europe and has a population of approximately 10.5 million people.¹ The majority of the population is Christian, with approximately 58% of the population identifying as Christian, 32.6% as nonreligious, and 8.2% as Muslim.²

3. Sweden's last review was held on January 27, 2020.³ As a result of the review, Sweden received 300 recommendations, 214 of which it accepted.⁴ It was recommended by Greece, and supported by Sweden, that the government “[e]nsure that cases of trafficking are promptly and thoroughly investigated, that perpetrators are brought to justice and that the victims have access to effective means of protection and assistance.”⁵ It was further recommended by Botswana, and supported by Sweden, that the government “[a]llocate adequate resources to implement the adopted national action plan to combat prostitution and human trafficking.”⁶ It was also recommended by the United States of America, and supported by Sweden, that the government “[s]trengthen efforts to combat antisemitism at all levels of government by engaging with civil society, and by instituting training for law enforcement and prosecutors.”⁷ There were no recommendations made regarding religious freedom.

¹ Jörgen Weibull & Susan Ruth Larson, *Sweden*, BRITANNICA (Oct. 7, 2024), <https://www.britannica.com/place/Sweden>.

² *Id.*

³ *Universal Periodic Review – Sweden*, OHCHR, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/se-index> (last visited Oct. 7, 2024).

⁴ *Infographic – Sweden*, OHCHR, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/lib-docs/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session35/SE/sweden_50754311.pdf (last visited Oct. 7, 2024).

⁵ OHCHR, UPR of Sweden (3rd Cycle – 35th Session): Thematic List of Recommendations, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/lib-docs/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session35/SE/MatriceRecommendations_Sweden_E.docx (last visited Oct. 7, 2024).

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Id.*

Legislative Framework

Human Trafficking

4. Under Article 8 of Sweden’s Constitution:

Everyone shall be protected in their relations with the public institutions against deprivations of personal liberty. All Swedish citizens shall also in other respects be guaranteed freedom of movement within the Realm and freedom to depart the Realm.⁸

5. Human trafficking is prohibited under Sweden’s Anti-Trafficking Law.⁹ Under this law, both sex trafficking and trafficking for forced labor are prohibited.¹⁰ Those found guilty shall be sentenced to prison between two and ten years.¹¹

6. Sweden is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).¹² Article 8 of the ICCPR states that “[n]o one shall be held in slavery; slavery and the slave-trade in all their forms shall be prohibited. No one shall be held in servitude.”¹³

7. Additionally, Sweden is a party to the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.¹⁴ Under Article 9 sec. 1 of this Protocol:

1. States Parties shall establish comprehensive policies, programmes and other measures:

(a) To prevent and combat trafficking in persons; and

(b) To protect victims of trafficking in persons, especially women and children, from revictimization.¹⁵

⁸ Regeringsformen [RF] [Constitution] Chapter 2, art. 8 (Swed.).

⁹ ANTI-TRAFFICKING LAW 2002 (Swed.) <https://antislaverylaw.ac.uk/country/sweden/>

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² *Ratification Status for Sweden*, OHCHR,

https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=168&Lang=EN (last visited Oct. 7, 2024).

¹³ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights art. 8, Dec. 16, 1966, 999 U.N.T.S. 171, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights>. [hereinafter ICCPR].

¹⁴ *Chapter XVIII Penal Matters: 12. A Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime*, UNITED NATIONS TREATY COLLECTION,

https://treaties.un.org/pages/viewdetails.aspx?src=ind&mtdsg_no=xviii-12-a&chapter=18 (last updated Oct. 7, 2024).

¹⁵ Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime art. 9 § 1, Nov. 15, 2000, 2237 U.N.T.S. 319, https://treaties.un.org/doc/Treaties/2000/11/20001115%2011-38%20AM/Ch_XVIII_12_ap.pdf.

Antisemitism

8. Under Article 2 of the Constitution of Sweden, “public institutions shall combat discrimination of persons on grounds of gender, colour, national or ethnic origin, linguistic or religious affiliation, functional disability, sexual orientation, age or other circumstance affecting the individual.”¹⁶

9. Chapter 16 sec. 8 of the Criminal Code of Sweden states:

Any person who in a statement or communication that is disseminated threatens or expresses contempt for a national or ethnic group or other such group of persons with allusion to race, skin colour, national or ethnic origin, creed or sexual orientation or gender identity, shall be sentenced for agitation against an ethnic group to imprisonment for at most two years or, if the offence is minor, to pay a fine.

If the offence is grave, a sentence of imprisonment for at least six months and at most four years shall be imposed.¹⁷

10. Sweden is also a party to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD),¹⁸ which calls for States Parties to “condemn racial discrimination and undertake to pursue by all appropriate means and without delay a policy of eliminating racial discrimination in all its forms....”¹⁹ Further, under the ICCPR, everyone has the right to “either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.”²⁰

Human Trafficking

11. Sex trafficking is the predominant form of trafficking affecting Sweden, although labor trafficking is also present in the country.²¹ Between 2020 and 2022, the government identified 1,185 victims of human trafficking.²² The majority of these victims were women being sexually exploited.²³ Most of the victims were trafficked from other countries with only twenty-seven victims being from Sweden.²⁴ During the same period, the government launched 476 investigations into human trafficking,²⁵ but prosecutions were only initiated in twenty-five cases that resulted in eight convictions.²⁵

12. The number of human trafficking victims is likely much higher than what has been reported. This is because victims are only officially designated as victims of human trafficking

¹⁶ Regeringsformen [RF] [Constitution] Chapter 1, art. 2 (Swed.).

¹⁷ Brottsbalken [BrB] [Penal Code] 16:8 (Swed.).

¹⁸ *Ratification Status for Sweden*, *supra* note 12.

¹⁹ International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, art. 12, Mar. 7, 1966, 660 U.N.T.S. 195, https://treaties.un.org/doc/Treaties/1969/03/19690312%2008-49%20AM/Ch_IV_2p.pdf.

²⁰ ICCPR art. 18, *supra* note 13.

²¹ *Sweden*, GLOBAL ORGANIZED CRIME INDEX, <https://ocindex.net/country/sweden> (last visited Oct. 7, 2024).

²² GRETA, *Evaluation Report Sweden*, COUNCIL OF EUROPE 9 (Oct. 19, 2023), <https://rm.coe.int/greta-evaluation-report-on-sweden-third-evaluation-round-thematic-focu/1680acf80b>.

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ *Id.* at 24.

following the conviction of a human trafficker.²⁶ Sweden’s low number of prosecutions means that few victims are being identified as victims of human trafficking. Linking victim identification to prosecutions is problematic especially given the fact that many victims are from foreign countries who are scared and not aware of their rights. Further, they may be afraid to co-operate with police out of fear that they may be deported or charged with a crime.²⁷

13. Contributing to Sweden’s inability to prosecute cases of human trafficking is the lack of personnel in both law enforcement agencies and in the judicial sector.²⁸ Human trafficking convictions have remained low, in part because prosecutors often opt for other offenses that are easier to prove.²⁹ Further, an understaffed police force presents difficulties and has led to police units not trained in human trafficking investigations. For example, in cases where massage parlors and brothels are raided, police often focus more on arresting those purchasing sex rather than trying to determine whether or not the women are trafficking victims.³⁰

14. Sweden has an obligation “[t]o prevent and combat trafficking in persons; and [t]o protect victims of trafficking in persons, especially women and children, from revictimization.”³¹ Sweden is inadequately protecting victims and combat human trafficking due to its inability to investigate and prosecute cases of human trafficking effectively.

Antisemitism

15. The Jewish people have faced hate and persecution throughout history. On October 7, 2023, Hamas attacked Israel, which resulted in the murders of over 1,200 Israelis and the taking of over 250 hostages.³² In just two weeks following this heinous attack, antisemitic attacks rose by almost 400% worldwide.³³

16. Sweden is not immune to the worldwide increase in antisemitic attacks. Between October 7, 2023, and the end of that year, more than 100 antisemitic hate crimes were carried out in Sweden.³⁴ This was five times the number of incidents that occurred during the same period in 2022.³⁵ An investigator for the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (BRA) shared that “[t]hese include antisemitic placards and statements in connection with demonstrations, but also threats and offenses against individuals who, based on their Jewish background, have been blamed for Israel’s actions in Gaza.”³⁶ In November 2023, the Official Council of Swedish Jewish Communities conducted a survey of Jews in Sweden and found that

²⁶ *Id.* at 39.

²⁷ *GRETA Publishes its Third Report on Sweden*, COUNCIL OF EUROPE (Oct. 19, 2023), <https://www.coe.int/en/web/anti-human-trafficking/-/sweden-more-efforts-needed-to-identify-victims-of-trafficking-including-amongst-children-and-to-prosecute-traffickers>.

²⁸ *Sweden*, *supra* note 21.

²⁹ *GRETA*, *supra* note 22.

³⁰ *Id.* at 40.

³¹ Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime art. 9 § 1, *supra* note 15.

³² *Israel Social Security Data Reveals True Picture of Oct. 7 Deaths*, FRANCE 24 (Dec. 15, 2023), <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20231215-israel-social-security-data-reveals-true-picture-of-oct-7-deaths>.

³³ *How the Surge in Antisemitism is Affecting Countries Around the World*, REUTERS (Oct. 31, 2023), <https://www.reuters.com/world/how-surge-antisemitism-is-affecting-countries-around-world-2023-10-31/>.

³⁴ *Sweden Reports Sharp Rise in Antisemitic Hate Crimes Since Hamas Attack on Israel*, TIMES OF ISRAEL (May 2, 2024), <https://www.timesofisrael.com/sweden-reports-sharp-rise-in-antisemitic-hate-crimes-since-hamas-attack-on-israel/>.

³⁵ *Id.*

³⁶ *Id.*

63% were afraid of being victims of a hate crime, and 82% were afraid to be openly Jewish.³⁷ Below, we have highlighted a few of the antisemitic incidents that have occurred in Sweden since October 7, 2023.

17. In July 2024, individuals wearing the Star of David were attacked by a group of individuals while attending a parade.³⁸

18. In May 2024, Israel’s National Security Council (NSC) increased the threat level for those traveling to Malmö, Sweden, for the 2024 Eurovision Song Contest.³⁹ The NSC was right to do so, as thousands of pro-Palestinian demonstrators gathered in Malmö to protest the inclusion of an Israeli singer in the contest.⁴⁰ Protestors were seen setting off smoke flairs and chanting slogans such as “Israel is a terror state”⁴¹ and “[f]rom the river to the sea, Palestine will be free.”⁴² The latter slogan is antisemitic as it calls for the complete annihilation of Israel.

19. In January 2024, a bomb squad was called to destroy a device that was located outside of the Israeli embassy in Stockholm.⁴³ The Prime Minister of Sweden, Ulf Kristersson condemned the attack saying that “[t]his is very serious. An attempted attack on an embassy is an attack both on those who work there and on Sweden.”⁴⁴

20. In November 2023, protestors set fire to an Israeli flag outside a synagogue in Malmö while chanting “bomb Israel” and waving Palestinian flags.⁴⁵

21. That same month, high school students in Malmö began making death threats against Jews and were performing the Nazi salute in the classroom.⁴⁶

22. On October 31, 2023, an individual painted the phrase “Kill Jews” on a wall in Gothenburg, Sweden.⁴⁷

³⁷ Suzan Quitaz, *The Uncomfortable Truth About Malmö, Sweden – The Host of the European Song Festival*, JERUSALEM CENTER FOR SECURITY AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS (May 26, 2024), <https://jcpa.org/the-uncomfortable-truth-about-malmo-sweden-the-host-of-the-eurovision-song-festival/>.

³⁸ Jacob Frankel, *Antisemitic Gang Attacks Participants of Pride Parade in Sweden Wearing Stars of David*, THE ALGEMEINER (July 9, 2024), <https://www.algemeiner.com/2024/07/09/antisemitic-gang-attacks-participants-pride-parade-sweden-wearing-stars-david/>.

³⁹ Shiryn Ghermezian, *Israel Increases Travel Threat for Swedish City Malmö Ahead of Eurovision Song Contest*, THE ALGEMEINER (May 2, 2024) <https://www.algemeiner.com/2024/05/02/israel-increases-travel-threat-swedish-city-malmo-ahead-eurovision-song-contest/>.

⁴⁰ *Eurovision 2024 Hit by Protests Over Israel Taking Part Amid Gaza War*, CBS NEWS (May 9, 2024), <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/eurovision-2024-hit-by-protests-over-israel-taking-part-amid-gaza-war/>.

⁴¹ *Id.*

⁴² Lars Avner Aqurtte & Amy Spiro, *Thousands of Anti-Israel Protestors March in Malmö Ahead of Eurovision Semifinal*, THE TIMES OF ISRAEL (May 9, 2024), <https://www.timesofisrael.com/thousands-of-anti-israel-protesters-march-in-malmo-ahead-of-eurovision-semifinal/>.

⁴³ *Police in Sweden Destroy “Live” Device Outside Israeli Embassy*, THE GUARDIAN (Jan. 31, 2024), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/feb/01/sweden-israel-embassy-police-attempted-attack-device-stockholm>.

⁴⁴ *Id.*

⁴⁵ Canaan Lidor, *Protestors Chant “Bomb Israel” and Burn Flag Outside Synagogue in Sweden*, THE TIMES OF ISRAEL (Nov. 6, 2023), <https://www.timesofisrael.com/protesters-chant-bomb-israel-and-burn-flag-outside-synagogue-in-sweden/>.

⁴⁶ Zvika Klein, *Malmö School Students Make Death Threats Against Jews, Perform Nazi Salutes*, THE JERUSALEM POST (Nov. 28, 2023), <https://www.jpost.com/diaspora/antisemitism/article-775442>.

⁴⁷ *Global Antisemitic Incidents in the Wake of Hamas’ War on Israel*, ANTI-DEFAMATION LEAGUE (May 20, 2024), <https://www.adl.org/resources/blog/global-antisemitic-incidents-wake-hamas-war-israel>.

Recommendations

23. We are concerned about Sweden's lack of investigations and convictions for human trafficking. This is especially problematic given that identifying victims of human trafficking is tied with criminal proceedings. This means there are likely many more victims who go unidentified every year. We urge Sweden to commit to combatting human trafficking by allocating training to authorities and hiring more personnel who are educated and equipped to identify, investigate, and prosecute cases of human trafficking.

24. We also urge Sweden to be proactive in combatting antisemitism and provide support for those affected by it. Further, we ask that those who are caught carrying out antisemitic attacks are punished to the fullest extent of the law.