

Country Visit: Sweden
Report of the Personal Representative of the OSCE Chair-in-Office
on Combating Anti-Semitism, Rabbi Andrew Baker
June 13-16, 2010
(Prepared August 16, 2010)

Background

Jews have lived in Sweden since Medieval times, but until the mid 19th Century they were permitted in only four cities. Equality under the law was granted only in 1870 with some minor restrictions. Today the Swedish Jewish community numbers 18,000-20,000. It is a stable and well-integrated community largely centered in Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Malmö. Sweden's neutrality during the war spared its Jewish population the fate that befell most other European Jews. While the heroic measures of Swedish diplomat Raul Wallenberg in rescuing Jews from the Holocaust are well-known, Sweden itself turned away Jewish refugees from its borders until the German military advances began to fail. The postwar Jewish community came to include émigrés from Poland, Hungary, Romania and the Baltic States, which increased its small numbers.

A decade ago confronting a declining awareness of the Holocaust and increased anti-Semitic activity by "white power" groups, the Swedish Government launched an unprecedented program to bring the teaching of the Holocaust into every household. These efforts continue today through the state level public authority *Forum for Living History*. In 2000, Sweden convened an international forum in Stockholm which spawned the establishment of the International Task Force on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research which now numbers 27 countries.

During these last ten years the dangers and anxieties confronting the Swedish Jewish community as well as other Jewish communities in Western Europe have shifted. This was reflected in the OSCE Berlin Declaration (2004) which indicated that anti-Semitism had assumed "new forms and manifestations" and acknowledged that events in Israel and the Middle East had triggered anti-Semitic attacks in Europe. In the wake of the Gaza war in early 2009, Swedish Jews report that they are increasingly pressured to assume responsibility for the actions of the State of Israel. It is as though their acceptance in Swedish society is contingent on their publicly criticizing Israel for its misdeeds, something that many other Swedes are wont to do.

The charged public atmosphere as well as the increase in Muslim immigrants in Sweden has had a tangible, negative impact on its Jewish community. The Stockholm Jewish Community reports that it must spend ¼ of its annual revenues for security, and even this must be supplemented by dozens of

volunteers. In Malmö, where Muslims account for over twenty percent of the population, tensions run high. The chairman of the city's Jewish Community reports that over the last years about 10 to 15 young families have left Malmö, with two more families with young children leaving this summer for Stockholm. Many have cited the politically polarizing statements of Mayor Ilmar Reepalu as exacerbating the situation.

Government Authorities

Sweden has well-established and internationally-respected institutions designed to monitor and combat discrimination. **The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå)** collects hate crime data, where the motivation for such crime includes ethnic background, religious faith, sexual orientation or transgender identity or expression. Its 2008 report identified 159 anti-Semitic crimes, a surprisingly high number in light of the country's small Jewish population. Brå officials informed us that the data for 2009 (not yet published) will show a significant increase, due to the Gaza conflict. Although one of the stated goals of the Council is to raise awareness of hate crimes, its contacts with civil society are largely limited to an annual seminar coinciding with the release of its report. It relies on regional police reports for its data and indicates that not all police have a clear understanding of what constitutes a hate crime.

The State Secretary of the **Ministry of Integration and Gender Equality** and his colleagues repeated some of the concerns voiced by Jewish community representatives. Jews are "considered guilty by association," he said. In Malmö, we were told, the problem is "boiling under the surface." There has been violence, threats, harassment, and a general feeling of insecurity, which has led the Ministry to consider making a special assessment of the situation. Presumably this would be through a commissioned study focused on anti-Semitic and Islamophobic harassment. Officials told us it was time for a more targeted analysis of incidents affecting Swedish Jewry, and they took note of the extraordinary security burdens being shouldered by the Jewish community.

In 2009, following new anti-discrimination legislation the (restructured) office of the **Ombudsman for Discrimination**—or the "Equality Ombudsman"—was established. The office is charged with receiving individual complaints of discrimination, conducting investigations and, where the findings warrant, bringing suit in court on behalf of the victims. It receives around 2500 complaints of which some 30-40 result in court cases. No incident of anti-Semitic abuse has yet been reported to the Ombudsman, but we were told this could be due to a lack of knowledge about rights and remedies under the new law. At the same time the Ombudsman Office representative expressed familiarity with some of the problems facing Jews in Sweden, and by way of example cited the situation where schoolgirls would be harassed for wearing a Jewish star around their

necks. The Office has undertaken analyses of certain problems of discrimination, such as one focused on the housing market. It could also conduct a study on how the Jewish community is affected in day-to-day life, but it would require government funding to do so.

Justice Ministry authorities explained that the criminal code does include references to unlawful discrimination and defamatory behavior or agitation directed toward a national or ethnic group. Aggravated circumstances are considered in cases of hate crimes committed on the basis of race, religion or belief. Police authority is decentralized, with 21 independently-directed regions in the country, and not all are uniformly successful in dealing with these crimes. Stockholm maintains a special police unit focused on hate crimes, and consideration is being given to share its experience with the other regions in the country. Police attention to the Internet has primarily focused on child pornography, but it is now also beginning to address the problem of hate speech. Ministry officials also paid special attention to the difficulties confronting the Jews of Malmö, and they informed us that the Justice Minister met with the Jewish Community there on several occasions since 2007.

Jewish Community as National Minority

The Jewish Community has been designated as one of five national minorities in Sweden, a fact that was repeated at several meetings. In 2009 the Government presented a new minority rights strategy, with the goal of strengthening their participation in society, promoting opportunities and preserving their language and culture. These concerns may have more relevance for some of the other designated minorities (e.g., Roma and Sami) than they do for Jews. However, we were informed by the **Education Ministry** that there is an obligation to teach about the history and culture of national minorities to the general school population. Whether or how this is done is uncertain, since it is left to individual schools and teachers to implement, but this may provide one additional opportunity to address the problem of anti-Semitism and its origins in Sweden.

Civil Society

Representatives of civil society emphasized that the main problem today is the conflation of Israel with the Jewish community, which echoed the views of Jewish community leaders themselves. Experts who focus on the problem of anti-Semitism suggested that the subject has become a taboo in some circles, with people accusing them of raising the specter of anti-Semitism simply as a means of stifling criticism of Israel. Yet, these authorities feared that genuine anti-Jewish actions were being excused or ignored because of the political climate. By way of example, several cited the case of Radio Islam, a former radio

broadcaster and now an Internet site, which had broadcast incendiary language, calling for the death of "Jewish pigs and monkeys." Similar language also could be found on cassettes sold in some of the country's Mosques. However, an official investigation conducted by a State-level public authority concluded that this was not a case of incitement to ethnic hatred but rather a political "battle cry" from the Middle East, and thus it did not warrant prosecution.

There seems to be little debate among civil society representatives or Government authorities with whom we met that the primary sources of anti-Jewish attacks today stem from the country's Muslim population. Yet, there is a reluctance to identify this, perhaps as one of our interlocutors suggested, so as not to contribute still further to the anti-immigrant sentiment among the population.

Special issues

In the aftermath of the 2009 war in Gaza the Swedish tabloid *Aftonbladet* published an article that accused Israeli soldiers of killing Palestinians in order to harvest their organs. This updated "blood libel" charge was initially condemned by Sweden's Ambassador to Israel, but the Foreign Ministry upbraided her for an apparent violation of the constitutional protections of the media. **Foreign Ministry** officials with whom we met emphasized that these actions in no way were intended to countenance the newspaper charges but rather to underline their respect for the freedom of the press. Private commentators suggested to us that there were in fact ways in which criticism of the article could have been directly voiced by political leaders. Some also suggested that the matter was as much political as constitutional, once the Israeli Foreign Minister had publicly insisted on an apology. The entire affair placed the Jewish community in an awkward and uncomfortable situation. However, it also appeared to generate some useful public discussion about anti-Semitism, and other newspapers were quite critical of the tabloid.

Several well-publicized incidents drew attention to Malmö, and the problems present in this southern city were frequently repeated during our visit. At the time of the Gaza war peaceful pro-Israel demonstrators were physically attacked by violent counter-protesters. Police responded by forcing the original demonstrators to disband. Later in the year, when plans were announced for a Davis Cup tennis match in the city between Swedish and Israeli players, Mayor Ilmar Reepalu sought to have the game moved to Stockholm, and when that failed, he ordered that the match be closed to spectators. The chairman of the local Jewish community reports that Jewish students have been targets of harassment by their Muslim classmates and a number of families have relocated to other cities because of the oppressive environment. A recently-established Dialogue Forum organized by the city is bringing together Muslim and Jewish

leaders in an effort to ameliorate the tensions, but its long-term effectiveness is uncertain.

Recommendations

- Immediate attention should be given to the inordinate security costs now being shouldered by the Jewish Community.
- Government authorities and agencies responsible for addressing hate crimes should have more frequent contact with the Jewish Community so that they can be better apprised of the community's concerns and needs. Those responsible for monitoring hate crimes and pursuing investigations and prosecutions need to have a greater familiarity with current manifestations of anti-Semitism, and Jewish community members should have a better understanding of the potential avenues for redress.
- The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå) should revise its data collection categories with regard to anti-Semitic incidents so as to reflect the new sources of the problem.
- While Swedish police receive training on understanding and responding to hate crimes, by the Justice Ministry's own admission this training could be improved and enhanced, and it should include a special focus on the nature of anti-Semitic hate crimes.
- Increased attention should be given to educational efforts to combat anti-Semitism. This should go beyond the subject of the Holocaust and include material about the history and culture and contributions of Swedish Jewry. Perhaps the designation of the Jewish Community as one of the country's national minorities can provide an impetus for this expansion.
- Special efforts should be taken in Malmö to reverse the deteriorating situation of anti-Semitism and intolerance in that city both for the sake of its residents and for the unfortunate international symbol it has become. My own conversation with Mayor Ilmar Reepalu has convinced me that he recognizes he has become a lightning rod for much of this, and what he does—in word and deed—in the future can help repair things. The Ministry of Integration and Equality should carry through with its planned special analysis and report intended to focus on the Jewish community and the increase in anti-Semitism in order to raise public awareness and to help identify pragmatic steps that might be taken to address the problems.

Schedule of Meetings:

June 13

Representatives of the Stockholm Jewish Community

June 14

Ambassador Stig Elvemar, Director, Security Policy Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Representatives of the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå). Tove Sporre and Anna Molarin.

State Secretary Christer Hallerby, Ministry of Integration and Gender Equality; Cafer Uzunel, Senior Adviser

Barbara Spectre, Founding Director, Paideia (European Institute for Jewish Studies in Sweden); and Ambassador Olof Ehernkrona, Senior Advisor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs

State Secretary Bertil Östberg. Ministry of Education; Fredric Skälstad, Marie Johnsson, Kristina Cunningham

Forum for Living History. Participants: Eskil Frank, Birgitta Löwander, Anna-Karin Johansson, and Eva Fried.

The OSCE Network in Sweden: Rolf Ekeus, President; Urban Gibson; et al.

June 15

Peter Wolodarski, Editorial Page Editor, *Dagens Nyheter*

State Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Frank Belfrage; Head of Department for International Law, Human Rights and Treaty Law, Elinor Hammar skjöld

John Stauffer, Case Officer, The Equality Ombudsman (DO)

Luncheon hosted by Ambassador Stig Elvemar. Director, Security Policy Department; Elinor Hammar skjöld, Head of Department for International Law,

Human Rights and Treaty Law and Ambassador Robert Rydberg, Head of Middle East and North Africa Department

Anders Hall, Chief of Staff, and Stefan Johansson, Director-General for Legal Affairs, Ministry of Justice

Lars M Andersson, Senior Lecturer/Researcher, Uppsala University and CarlHenrik Carlsson, Researcher and Co-ordinator for the Research network "Judarna i Sverige. En minoritets historia"

Swedish Committee Against Anti-Semitism: Henrik Bachner and Jonathan Leman

June 16

(Phone Meeting) Fred Kahn, Chairperson, Jewish Community of Malmö

Ilmar Reepalu, City Mayor of Malmö