



THE EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF
JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

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From The European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses

Submission to the United Nations Human Rights Committee

Prior to the Adoption of the List of Issues

144th session (23 Jun–25 Jul 2025)

Sweden

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

SUMMARY OF THE SUBMISSION2

I. INTRODUCTION2

II. VIOLATIONS OF THE PROVISIONS OF THE COVENANT3

III. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....3

SUMMARY OF THE SUBMISSION

This submission to the Human Rights Committee (CCPR) on Sweden highlights violations of the provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (the Covenant) prior to the adoption of the list of issues to be taken up in connection with the consideration of the 144th report of Sweden.

Jehovah's Witnesses in Sweden and as a worldwide organization respectfully request the Government of Sweden to:

- (1) Ensure that misinformation and unverified media reports do not serve as a basis for drafting legislation related to State grants for religious communities;
- (2) Ensure that such legislation abides by international standards and reject deliberately vague wording aimed at stigmatizing religious groups or beliefs;
- (3) Ensure that freedom of religion is protected by increasing efforts to reduce threats, physical attacks, verbal abuse and acts of vandalism against Jehovah's Witnesses and their properties;
- (4) Ensure that media outlets and organizations who oppose religious minorities are held accountable for hate speech comprising false, misleading, inflammatory and potentially damaging reports about Jehovah's Witnesses;
- (5) Abide by its commitment to uphold the fundamental freedoms guaranteed by the Covenant for all citizens, including Jehovah's Witnesses.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses is a charity registered in the United Kingdom. It provides support to Jehovah's Witnesses facing fundamental human rights violations in various parts of the world.
2. Jehovah's Witnesses have been present in Sweden for more than 120 years. There are currently more than 22,000 active adherents in the country, and over 36,000 attend religious worship services. On 13 March 2000, Jehovah's Witnesses were registered as a religious community.
3. Despite the long-established history of Jehovah's Witnesses and their legal status, hate speech and biased misinformation against them have been widely circulated by the media. This has led to legislation that threatens their basic right to receive State grants as a religious community on the same terms as other such communities.
4. On **18 June 2024**, Sweden's Parliament enacted a new law on State grants for religious communities that took effect **1 January 2025**. On 17 June 2024, during a parliamentary debate on the then-draft bill, Member of Parliament Ms. Vasiliki Tsouplaki commented: "There are still question marks about some of the wording, which we think leaves room for arbitrariness. For example, it will be difficult for the person who will assess the applications when it comes to some concepts. We therefore think that the bill needs to be evaluated fairly soon."

5. From certain details in the Official Report “Government support for religious communities in a multi-religious Sweden” (*Statens stöd till trossamfund i ett mångreligiöst Sverige*) (the explanatory report) it appears that the new law, with its imprecise criteria that allow for effectively unfettered arbitrary interpretation, has been drafted specifically to inhibit Jehovah's Witnesses from receiving State grants in future. Annually, more than 40 other religious communities receive such grants. Ulf Bjereld, who is a professor of political science, chaired the working group that drafted the explanatory report. He has gone on record as saying that the legislation was contemplated because politicians want to prevent Jehovah's Witnesses from receiving government subsidies. The newspaper *Dagen* quoted Professor Bjereld: “It was not about Muslims or LGBTQ issues initially, but the question was whether Jehovah's Witnesses would have access to tax money. We will have to see whether this legislation is enough to prevent them from receiving subsidies.”
6. Some Members of Parliament have expressed concern over vaguely formulated concepts in the new legislation that enable arbitrariness.
7. The new law follows more than 12 years in which Jehovah's Witnesses were discriminatorily denied State grants. On **24 October 2019**, the Administrative Supreme Court finally upheld their right to receive these. Following prolonged further litigation, in December 2021 the Chancellor of Justice awarded Jehovah's Witnesses 8,510,000 Krona (SEK) (USD 886,000) in damages as an acknowledgement that the matter had been unjustifiably protracted and that Sweden had violated article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights. This litigation was highlighted by UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief Nazila Ghanea, who reported: “The Rapporteur notes that Jehovah's Witnesses were only registered [for State grants] in 2019 after an extensive 12-year litigation and subsequently awarded compensation by the Chancellor of Justice in 2021.”
8. Subsequently, a series of slanderous news articles and reports about Jehovah's Witnesses were published by State-controlled national broadcaster *Sveriges Television* (SVT). This hate speech coincided with additional defamatory coverage and was followed by a significant increase in physical and verbal threats, assaults, vandalism and arson, all in violation of basic human rights.

II. VIOLATIONS OF THE PROVISIONS OF THE COVENANT

Freedom of thought, conscience and religion (article 18), protection from advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence (article 20), right of peaceful assembly and association (articles 21 and 22), right to respect for security of the person, private life, honour and reputation (articles 9 and 17)

1. Physical and verbal assaults

9. On **16 March 2023**, in Bräkne-Hoby, two Jehovah's Witnesses visited a man at his home to peacefully share their faith, as protected by article 18 of the Covenant. The man showed them a rifle and angrily told them to leave. When the female Witness tried to politely end the conversation, the man became angrier and said: “I won't hesitate to use this.” The two Witnesses did not file a police report.
10. On **29 March 2023**, a man made threats against the headquarters of Jehovah's Witnesses in Scandinavia and referred to the mass shooting at a place of worship of Jehovah's Witnesses in

Hamburg, Germany, in March 2023. He said: "You don't want something like what happened in Hamburg to happen again," directing the threat to the Witnesses' congregation in Sundbyberg.

11. On **26 August 2023**, two male Witnesses visited a man in Haninge in response to his formal request for a visit by Jehovah's Witnesses. After inviting them into his house, the man told them that he had anticipated women coming to visit him, and he threatened the male Witnesses with a gun and a knife. The Witnesses tried to peacefully end the conversation and leave, but the man blocked their way out. He allowed them to leave only when one of the Witnesses managed to inform his family about the situation by text message. A police report was filed, and a trial is scheduled to begin in late May 2025.
12. On **16 September 2023**, in Hurva, a man ran toward two of Jehovah's Witnesses (an adult and a minor) who were publicly sharing Bible literature with those who wished to accept it. The man began cursing, tore up their literature and spat in the face of the adult Witness. The man then cursed at two female Witnesses who were walking on the street, seized the literature they were carrying, and ripped it up. The Witnesses ran to their cars to escape, but the man threw rocks, damaging one of the vehicles. On 3 June 2024, the Prosecutor's Office decided not to take action against the perpetrator.
13. On **16 January 2024**, in Timrå, a man approached two female Witnesses who were standing by a small, portable literature display cart and offering free Bible courses and Bible-based literature. He cursed at them, told them he does not like Jehovah's Witnesses and forcefully overturned the display cart. The incident was reported to the police, who later closed the case because of a lack of evidence.
14. On **14 March 2024**, in Sundsvall, a man threatened a minister of Jehovah's Witnesses over the telephone, saying that if Jehovah's Witnesses ring his doorbell, he "will come and burn down the Kingdom Hall [place of worship for Jehovah's Witnesses]." The Witnesses reported this incident to the police, who later closed the case, deeming it as one person's word against that of another, with no definitive evidence available.
15. On **19 March 2024**, in Knäred, a man approached two of Jehovah's Witnesses who were visiting a rural area to peacefully share their beliefs with those who were willing to converse. When the Witnesses introduced themselves and stated what they were doing, the man told them: "Get out of here for your own safety," and he showed them a gun inside his jacket. They reported the incident to the police, but the criminal investigation was closed on 16 April 2024. The police decision to close the investigation was later appealed, but the Prosecutor's Office announced on 3 April 2025 that they would not overturn the decision.
16. On **19 July 2024**, in Hökerum, a man threatened two of Jehovah's Witnesses with an iron bar, when they visited his neighbourhood to peacefully share their beliefs. The Witnesses quickly withdrew, but the perpetrator followed them to their car, where he threatened them and their fellow believers. The incident was not reported to the police.
17. On **7 September 2024**, in Södra Sandby, two of Jehovah's Witnesses who made a peaceful call at a woman's home were threatened with a garden tool. The woman screamed that something terrible would happen if they did not leave the premises. The incident was not reported to the police.

18. On **11 March, 2025**, in Helsingborg, two of Jehovah's Witnesses called at a home to peacefully share their beliefs. The householder physically assaulted one of the Witnesses, pushing him and preventing the Witnesses from leaving the property. The perpetrator asked who was in charge of their religious activities. Shortly afterwards, he approached another Witness, who was visiting other houses in the street, violently pushing him. The perpetrator threatened the entire group of Witnesses, saying that he would pay a visit to their place of worship. The incident was reported to the police, and the investigation is ongoing.
19. On **16 March, 2025**, in Helsingborg, a man chased two of Jehovah's Witnesses with hedge shears while they were visiting the neighbourhood to peacefully share their beliefs. The incident was reported to the police, who did not initiate an investigation because of a lack of evidence.
20. On **18 March, 2025**, in Motala, a man left a voicemail at the local congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses, saying that he wishes someone would shoot all Jehovah's Witnesses. The incident was reported to the police, and the investigation is ongoing.
21. Allowing such attacks to continue with impunity fails to safeguard the security of the person, as provided for in article 9 of the Covenant, as well as fails to protect the freedoms set out in articles 17 and 18.

2. Defamatory media reports

22. During 2022, the State-controlled national broadcaster SVT published a series of news articles and broadcast television programmes that slandered Jehovah's Witnesses with false and defamatory statements from former Witnesses. In one of the broadcasts, two high-ranking officials, namely, the director of the Swedish Agency for Support for Faith Communities and the (now former) State Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, made derogatory comments about the Witnesses. On **28 June 2023**, and again four days later, an extended version of that programme was broadcast on SVT's second television channel, SVT2.
23. Following the tragic shooting at a Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses in Hamburg, Germany, in March 2023, SVT and TV4, the two largest TV media organizations in Sweden, published defamatory reports. Former Witnesses blamed the victims for the tragedy. The television channels made no attempt in advance to contact Jehovah's Witnesses for comments and refused to publish a response after the programme. Jehovah's Witnesses filed a complaint against SVT with a Swedish press ethics organization, but this was rejected.
24. On **20 April 2023**, SVT broadcast a 28-minute programme *Story: Sektbarnets hämnd* (Story: The revenge of the sect child) based on an interview with an investigative journalist, Ms. Jenny Kuttim, who had published a book containing false and defamatory accusations about Jehovah's Witnesses. The interview contained the same accusations as those made in the book, giving a seriously misleading and one-sided portrayal of the Witnesses. Again, Jehovah's Witnesses were not contacted for comment prior to the programme's airing.
25. On **9 October 2023**, an article titled *Paret lämnade religiöst trauma och sexuella övergrepp bakom sig* (The couple left religious trauma and sexual abuse behind) was published on the website Allas.se. A former Witness interviewee claimed that "children are hurt" within the religious community. She alleged that she was brought up with "oppression and brainwashing". Allas.se did not contact Jehovah's Witnesses for comment before the article was published.

26. On **9 March 2024**, a journalist from SVT participated in an interview on *Sjuhärad*, a local broadcast by the State-funded radio station P4. The journalist alleged “oppression” within the community of Jehovah's Witnesses and referred to the loss of registration and State grants for Jehovah's Witnesses in Norway, which has subsequently been overturned by the Appeal Court of Borgarting.¹ The journalist commented: “I think we will have to do the same thing in Sweden. And not just for Jehovah's Witnesses but for religions in general.” Although the journalist contacted Jehovah's Witnesses in advance, the majority of the material that they provided was ignored.
27. On **28 April 2024**, the nationwide television station TV4 aired a 17-minute video that included an interview with a disaffected former Jehovah's Witness. She accused the Witnesses of enforcing a strict way of living and claimed that she receives messages on social media from “people who are thinking about leaving the religion but are afraid to do so.” The television station did not contact Jehovah's Witnesses in advance for comment.
28. On **2 June 2024**, SVT published three online articles based on interviews with a former Witness by two journalists with a reputation for prejudiced reporting. The articles included allegations of an ongoing “mass exodus” of Jehovah's Witnesses, despite the Witnesses having provided evidence to refute this claim. The interviewees falsely accused Jehovah's Witnesses of “violation of human rights, psychological violence and negative social control” of minors. The SVT journalist ignored the offer by Jehovah's Witnesses to provide additional, accurate information. Two of the three interviews were televised the next day.
29. On **6 November 2024**, an article titled *Jette stöttes ut: Jag får aldrig mer träffa mina systrar* (Jette was ostracized: I will never see my sisters again) was published on the website Allas.se. The article contains several false, derogatory and defamatory statements by both a former Witness interviewee and the interviewing journalist. The article misrepresents the views of Jehovah's Witnesses on child rearing, on their Bible-based practice of removing unrepentant wrongdoers from the faith and on their view of divorce. The article also claims that Jehovah's Witnesses are a “closed community”. Before the article was published, Allas.se did not contact Jehovah's Witnesses for comment or ascertain the factual basis of the claims.
30. Cumulatively, the climate created by inaccurate reporting and hate speech constitutes advocacy of religious hatred and incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence, in violation of article 20 of the Covenant. This is in addition to violating the protection of honour and reputation vouchsafed by article 17. The effects of this hate speech are manifest in the next section.

3. Vandalism and arson

31. On **2 September 2022**, unknown persons threw bottles and cans at the entrance of a Kingdom Hall in Nyköping. Trespassers drew several swastikas, wrote “Satan” in the driveway and littered the property with rubbish. Since 2018, the Witnesses have experienced ten similar incidents at this Kingdom Hall, six of which have been reported to the police. No action has been taken.
32. On **8 November 2022**, during a religious meeting, unknown persons threw eggs at the entrance of a Kingdom Hall in Härnösand. Later that evening, vandals again threw eggs. Some of those

¹ On 14 March 2025.

in attendance experienced considerable anxiety and fear because of these unprovoked, aggressive actions.

33. On **5 June 2023**, trespassers vandalized the entrance of the Kingdom Hall in Alingsås. The intruders destroyed three glass bricks and damaged the wooden front door, along with damaging lighting fixtures and other parts of the building. The Witnesses reported the incident to the police.
34. On **18 August 2023**, in Kungälv, unknown persons set combustible material on fire at the entrance of the Kingdom Hall, causing significant damage. On **24 May 2024**, another attempt was made to set the building on fire. Both incidents were reported to the police, but the investigations have been closed without a prosecution.
35. On **18 November 2023** and **2 December 2023**, in Visby, two teenagers disrupted a religious meeting at the Kingdom Hall. They noisily banged on the doors, threw a piece of wood at an emergency exit, spray painted graffiti on a door and a signpost and cursed at those who approached them. On one occasion, they set off fireworks aimed toward the Kingdom Hall. The incident was reported to police patrolling in the area. The police did not contact the congregation again.
36. These actions constitute a violation of protections guaranteed by numerous articles of the Covenant.

III. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

37. Jehovah's Witnesses in Sweden and as a worldwide organization express concern about the human rights violations noted above in the submission. They respectfully request the Government of Sweden to take the necessary steps to:
 - (1) Ensure that misinformation and unverified media reports do not serve as a basis for drafting legislation related to State grants for religious communities;
 - (2) Ensure that such legislation abides by international standards and reject deliberately vague wording aimed at stigmatizing religious groups or beliefs;
 - (3) Ensure that freedom of religion is protected by increasing efforts to reduce threats, physical attacks, verbal abuse and acts of vandalism against Jehovah's Witnesses and their properties;
 - (4) Ensure that media outlets and organizations who oppose religious minorities are held accountable for hate speech comprising false, misleading, inflammatory and potentially damaging reports about Jehovah's Witnesses;
 - (5) Abide by its commitment to uphold the fundamental freedoms guaranteed by the Covenant for all citizens, including Jehovah's Witnesses.