

Ronald S. Lauder
President

David de Rothschild
Chairman Governing Board

Chella Safra
Treasurer

Robert Singer
CEO & EVP

Human Rights Council 32nd Session
Item 6 – Universal Periodic Review - Denmark

NGO: World Jewish Congress

Representative delivering the statement: Ms. Lauren Rose

Thank you Mr. President,

The World Jewish Congress commends the Danish government for its positive response to the range of recommendations, particularly the recommendation against the ban of religious male circumcision as practiced by members of the Jewish and Muslim faiths. It is crucial that fundamental religious freedoms and minority rights continue to be upheld. We therefore welcome that the government of Denmark has given its commitment not to ban the religious circumcision of boys.

Unfortunately, there have been ongoing attempts in Denmark to ban religious circumcision of boys, or Brith Milah, as it is called in Hebrew, a cornerstone of Jewish identity which has been carried out safely on Jewish boys at 8 days old for thousands of years by specially trained mohels. However, recently anti-circumcision campaigners have cited a variety of reasons in opposition to the practice, including the argument that the practice causes harm to children. Such arguments are baseless, and show a profound lack of understanding for well-established religious practices among the wider population.

Denmark's small Jewish community has been part of its society for more than five centuries, and for more than 200 years, Danish Jews have enjoyed the same legal rights as Christians. Yet in March 2013, when this Council's Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Heiner Bielefeldt, visited Denmark, his report emphasized the growing concern of the Jewish and Muslim communities over a ban on religious circumcision.

Conversely, following a brutal attack last year on Copenhagen's main synagogue, in which a community security guard protecting a Bar Mitzvah celebration inside was murdered by a terrorist, Danish society rallied with its Jewish community. It gave a strong signal: Jews are part of the fabric of this country, they deserve our protection, we don't want them to leave.

This statement of support was welcome. However, protecting Jewish life is not limited to safeguarding community buildings or Jewish leaders. It must also include the protection of the rights of Jews to lead a Jewish life, carrying out the sacred practices and customs without being stigmatized or forced to deny their own religion. Indeed, freedom of religion is a cornerstone of any democratic and free society, and it is the responsibility of the State and its representatives to guarantee that fundamental rights enshrined in international law are respected.

The World Jewish Congress therefore sincerely hopes that any attempts to single out Jews or Muslims in Denmark by criminalizing well-established religious practices such as the right of parents to circumcise their male children will be stopped.

New York
501 Madison Avenue
New York, NY 10022
United States of America
Tel: +1 212 755 57 70
Fax: +1 212 755 58 83
new.york@wjcmail.org

Geneva
1 Rue de Varembé
CH-1202 Geneva
Switzerland
Tel: +41 22 734 13 25
Fax: +41 22 734 13 25
geneva@wjcmail.org

Jerusalem
9a Diskin Street, 5th Floor
Jerusalem 96440
Israel
Tel: +972 2 633 30 00
Fax: +972 2 659 81 00
jerusalem@wjcmail.org

Brussels
Rue de Stassart 84
B-1050 Brussels
Belgium
Tel: +32 2 552 09 00
Fax: +32 2 552 09 11
brussels@wjcmail.org

Buenos Aires
Larrea 744
AR-C1030AAP Buenos Aires
Argentina
Tel: +54 11 49 62 50 28
Fax: +54 11 49 63 70 56
buenos.aires@wjcmail.org