



THE EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF  
JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM SUBCOMMITTEE

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20 November 2024

Mr Bjørn Erik Thon  
Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombudsman  
Kingdom of Norway

Dear Bjorn Erik Thon,

*The European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses* is a registered international association that provides support to members of this community facing fundamental human rights violations in various parts of the world. Adherents of the persuasion are present in more than 200 lands, and they are recognized as law-abiding citizens belonging to a peaceful religion. We are taking the liberty of contacting you regarding their situation in Norway.

On 27 January 2022, the County Governor of Oslo and Viken announced an arbitrary, unilateral decision to deny Jehovah's Witnesses State Grants under the Religious Communities Act for the previous year, a decision that breaks with a 30-year practice. Jehovah's Witnesses applied to the Ministry of Children and Families, which on 30 September 2022, informed them that it upheld the decision. This is troubling in itself.

What gives additional grounds for serious concern is that on 22 December 2022, the County Governor revoked Jehovah's Witnesses' registration as a religious community. They, therefore, had no option but litigation. However, on 3 April 2024, the District Court surprisingly ruled in favour of the State, thus validating unprecedented and discriminatory decisions. No other internationally-recognized religion has faced similar arbitrary proscription by the Norwegian authorities. Our faith community, which comprises approximately 20,000 believers in Norway, is naturally deeply concerned about the situation. Independent academics and human rights experts, both domestically and abroad, are on record as being baffled by these developments.

Naturally, Jehovah's Witnesses have appealed. The case is listed for hearing in the Court of Appeal 4-14 February 2025. We believe the outcome will be crucial for freedom of religion or belief in Norway, and will have considerable bearing on the country's currently enviable international reputation.

We would greatly appreciate a short meeting with you, in order to hear your professional opinion on the matter and to receive any recommendations you feel able to offer. Our international delegation will be in Oslo 2-6 December 2024 and is available to meet at a convenient time and place, either in person or via video conference. We look forward to an informal and friendly dialogue with you regarding this important matter. Please contact our representative Andreas Gribowski for more information and to schedule the meeting. Telephone: +45 59 45 60 00; email: pid.dk@jw.org.

Best regards,

Marc Hansen  
European Association of  
Jehovah's Witnesses

Jørgen Pedersen  
Chair of the Association of  
Jehovah's Witnesses in Norway