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RABBIS MOURN LACK OF TOLERANCE IN SWEDEN AFTER ANTI-CIRCUMCISION VOTE

Last week, the Swedish Center Party voted by a majority of 314-166 at its annual meeting to work to fight the non-medical circumcision of boys.

BY ILANIT CHERNICK / OCTOBER 7, 2019 19:11 🇮🇱

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Rabbi Moshe Wiseberg, a "mohel", or ritual circumciser, holds a baby after circumcising him in Jerusalem. (photo credit: REUTERS/Ronen Zvulun)





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Swedish rabbis and Jewish leaders have slammed a push by Sweden's Center Party to ban circumcision.

The party voted last week 314-166 at its annual meeting to oppose the non-medical circumcision of boys. The party's head, Annie Loof, was among several leaders who criticized the vote.

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Jewish circumcisions are currently licensed by the Swedish National Board of Health. When carried out on the eighth day of a Jewish boy's life, they are joined by a nurse or a medical doctor.

The Conference of European Rabbis (CER) said it will fight the proposed ban, with CER President Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt warning that the Center Party's decision could start a wave of anti-religious legislation across Europe.

"We see this decision as the beginning of a new wave of anti-circumcision legislation in Europe," Goldschmidt said in a statement released on Monday. "This is part of the bad spirit of anti-religious legislative initiatives in Europe. The Swedish Center Party's decision to promote a ban on religious circumcision is a request for Jews to leave Sweden, the most liberal of EU states. We mourn the lack of tolerance and loss of diversity in today's Sweden."

Goldschmidt made clear that if it comes to it, the CER "will enlist the international community, as we did in Iceland and other countries, in order to fend off this attack. Even though the Swedish Center Party is not part of the coalition, we must remember that it represents 8% of the votes, holds 31 seats in the 349-member Parliament, and is the third-largest party in Sweden."

Goldschmidt pointed out that in the past few years there has been "a number of similar legislative attempts against circumcision in Finland, Iceland, Denmark, Sweden and Norway. We have seen how the process moves forward, and only after we put up a strong fight, with the help of international organizations, did these countries decide not to ban [circumcision]."





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"To our relief, all the parties in Sweden rejected the proposal to ban or limit circumcision other than the Green Party, which described circumcision as 'problematic.'"

The CER represents more than 700 religious leaders of mainstream synagogue communities across Europe.

Goldschmidt also met in Brussels with Israel's ambassador to Belgium and Luxembourg, Emmanuel Nahshon, "to mobilize Israel for the fight against anti-religious legislation in Belgium."

According to the CER, Nahshon received "a comprehensive overview of the special problems" European Jewry is facing, and "in particular the legislation against shechita [ritual slaughter] in the two largest provinces in Belgium. Nahshon expressed his confidence that Israel would help as much as possible in the battle against anti-religious legislation that often accepts antisemitic expression of humanity."

On Friday, the leadership of the Orthodox Union (OU), the US's largest Orthodox Jewish umbrella organization, expressed deep concern over the Swedish Center Party's vote on non-medical circumcision of boys.

OU president Moishe Bane said that "the Swedish Center Party's decision to promote a ban on religious circumcision is synonymous with calling for the end of Jewish life in Sweden. Religious circumcision is a core Jewish obligation, which has been practiced for over two millennia."

OU executive vice president Allen Fagin warned that the party's "decision to promote a ban on religious circumcision would lead to the exodus of Jews from the country. We ask that they hear our concerns, understand the importance of this issue, and respond accordingly."

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