



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on June 15, 2010

State 'Kidnapping' of Swedish Home-schooler Prompts International Outcry

The case of eight-year-old Domenic Johansson, separated from his family by Swedish authorities last year over his parents' decision to legally home school him, has prompted an international outcry from human rights groups, American home schooling organizations, and activists on the World Wide Web.



Last summer, armed police seized the boy from an airplane without a warrant just as the family was about to move to the mother's home country of India. Court documents show the original reason for taking Domenic was home schooling, which currently remains legal in Sweden. Later, the court that upheld the government's decision cited some unfilled cavities the family was planning to treat in India, and the fact that the boy had not received all of his "recommended" vaccines, which are technically optional under Swedish law.

Domenic has been separated from his parents ever since — with one-hour supervised visits permitted every five weeks. He is being subjected to various "psychiatric treatments," which four separate sources independently described as "brainwashing." According to the boy's father, Christer Johansson, Domenic is not the same as before he was taken.

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He had never in his life been sick, his Dad said — until he was seized by the government. Now, he has trouble remembering the names of his pets, family friends, and even his favorite hat. He's also very depressed. The boy's mother, Annie, has been in shock since the day when police took her son. She barely gets out of bed and has been in the Emergency Room five times since then, according to Mr. Johansson.

"I'm still so shocked that I have trouble speaking about these things," Mr. Johansson told *The New American* in a telephone interview. "To go through this in 2010 is outrageous — unbelievable really."

He said the social services had been haranguing him for years about vaccines and kindergarten. "When I told them about home schooling and human rights, that's when they started to get really nasty," he said. Finally, the family decided to leave. But the government would not allow it. And now, the state is doing everything in its power to keep the family apart.

"They're trying to make us look bad at every court hearing, they're manipulating facts, and they're using socialist ideals saying that 'we don't believe this is good for Domenic, this is better for Domenic.'



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They're really breaking us down," Mr. Johansson said.

But the massive international outcry generated over this case has been a blessing, he added. "I thank God, actually, because without it, I don't think I would be alive today," he said, recounting the trauma of battling the government for his child while attempting to care for his wife. "The support we have, I don't even have time to reply to all of the mail," he explained, adding that his allies come from literally all over the globe.

"There is nothing else that I think about except that we're going to get Domenic back," he said. "Annie has proved that she's not going to continue to live unless Domenic comes back. We wanted to move from here because we don't like this country anymore, and Annie needs to see her family — she hasn't seen them in nine years.... I won't accept anything else except that he's going to come back," Mr. Johansson said, noting that they would probably leave for India as soon as Domenic is returned. "This is kidnapping, actually — if you don't have any good reasons to take a child, it's kidnapping."

And international allies of the family agree — it's state-sponsored kidnapping. The case has attracted a firestorm of international criticism, and some very heavy hitters have joined the family's fight.

"We got involved because the home-schooling issue was implicated here and this was just such an outrageous violation of the family's rights," explained Michael Donnelly, the director for international relations and a staff attorney with the U.S.-based non-profit [Home School Legal Defense Association](#). In an interview with *The New American*, he explained that his organization has done a lot of work publicizing the case. They have also been in contact with Swedish officials, and are researching various options to move forward with a legal strategy.

"This case is so egregious ... the way the social services in Gotland have treated this poor family is so shocking to the conscience of any human being," Donnelly said. "[The government employees] just don't want to admit that they were wrong. If they return the boy they'd have to admit that they did a terrible, terrible thing — a terrible thing." But despite the reluctance of social workers to acknowledge their mistake, "we hold out hope that justice will be done," Donnelly added.

The HSLDA is working with another major organization to achieve that goal. Roger Kiska, legal counsel for the Alliance Defense Fund in Europe, is serving as international legal co-counsel for the Johansson family. "The state was playing Big Brother in this case in a discriminatory manner," Kiska told *The New American* in a telephone interview from Slovakia. "[Domenic] was being incredibly well taken care of, and his health was much better when he was living with his parents."

Among other strategies, the ADF — a huge international organization consisting of some 1,600 allied lawyers around the world — is considering filing a complaint with the European Court of Human Rights. The case would be made up of three main components, Kiska explained: there was no justification to violate the right to family, or the right of the family to educate the child at home, or the family's right to travel and move to India.

"We know from our correspondence with the social services and the family's dealings with the social services that they have a genuine hatred for the Johanssons," Kiska said. "It seems like [the social services] know they made a mistake — they don't have any evidence to do what they did, and that they didn't investigate it at all — but now they're just digging in and making life as miserable as they can.... We're grateful for all of the international support, and we look forward to our day in court — we have the law on our side." Kiska also has high hopes that justice will be served.

Advocates International, an even larger group consisting of 30,000 attorneys in over 100 countries, has



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also spoken out. “This is statism with a vengeance,” said AI President Sam Ericsson, a Swede. “The state and their social service workers have total power to violate the most fundamental rights — parents caring for their children.”

Closer to Sweden, a number of other groups have taken an interest in the case as well. In Germany, for example, Jörg Großelütern of the Network for Freedom in Education told *The New American* that he wrote a letter to Swedish authorities calling for Domenic to be returned to his parents.

Despite the protests of the social services, internationally acclaimed family-rights attorney and president of the Nordic Committee for Human Rights Ruby Harrold-Claesson was miraculously appointed by the Swedish court to serve as the family’s lawyer. But she was unexpectedly removed from the case after attempting to visit Domenic at school. She is appealing the decision, and observers have expressed outrage that she was kicked off. HSLDA ran a [piece](#) calling the decision “a stunning display of bureaucratic indifference and contempt of due process rights.”

“People have a lot of good things to say about Sweden, but you just have to scratch the surface and you’ll find what’s underneath,” Harrold-Claesson told *The New American* in a telephone interview. “This kind of treatment is unheard of in a Western democracy.... They can’t justify this in any way — it’s a violation of the family’s human rights,” she said of the actions against the Johansson family. “They have just been harassing this family for years.” The Nordic Committee for Human Rights has posted several articles about the case on its website and doesn’t intend to back off.

The new lawyer appointed by the court to replace Harrold-Claesson, Johan Carlsson, was not very willing to talk about the case when reached by *The New American*. He said he planned to meet his “client” soon. Vice president of the municipal social services Sonja Landin said, without elaborating, that she could not talk about the case. Other [officials](#) with the municipal social services board, including the president, could not be reached by phone despite multiple attempts.

Even in Sweden, where people tend to trust the government, outrage is mounting. A popular [blog](#) about the case in Sweden is documenting the tragedy. Media commentators have called the move “outright kidnapping” and claimed the police and social services read the rule book “backwards,” saying the affair showed “an ugly picture of legal certainty for Swedish citizens.”

[The Swedish Association of Home Education](#) (ROHUS), even though the organization is not officially involved in the case, has also posted several pieces on its website about the topic. Its president, Jonas Himmelstrand, has written letters to various officials including the Swedish Minister of Public Health. He has also discussed the case with the media and in an article he wrote for a local newspaper in the municipality where the Johansson family lives.

“All our members know about the case through the ROHUS mailing list. All Swedish home-schoolers know about the case — it is a national Swedish home-schooling trauma,” Himmelstrand told *The New American* in an e-mail. “We are working hard to make home schooling easily legally possible in Sweden, which includes every Swedish home-schooling family, of course, including the Johansson family, whose fate leaves you at a loss of words.”

While the organization lacks the resources to get involved in individual cases, “ROHUS takes a strong stand on the right for Swedish families to choose home schooling,” Himmelstrand added. “We also have a clear stand that homeschooling alone can never be a reason for action from the social authorities.”

But unfortunately, this isn’t the first time a child has been taken into custody by Swedish authorities with home schooling as the primary “reason.” Other families are faced with steep fines and threats. And



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if a new law passes through Parliament later this month, the situation will only get worse. The government is currently debating a bill that would essentially outlaw all home schooling, and even though ROHUS is fighting it, the outcome is still uncertain.

“Basically, it seems that the 50-100 Swedish homeschooling families are too few to matter politically — human rights notwithstanding,” Himmelstrand explained, noting that they had tried to educate officials on the benefits of home education with solid evidence, but some did not understand. “The Swedish political authorities have deeply underestimated the convictions of Swedish homeschoolers. Most will not accept the new law. They will respond with civil disobedience, or political exile.”

In addition to the organizations and attorneys around the world lining up to help the Johansson family, activists on the Internet have also mounted a powerful campaign to have Domenic reunited with his parents. A Facebook group called [Return Domenic Johansson to His Parents!](#) has almost 3,500 members at the time of this writing — and it’s growing fast.

One of the blogs started to deal with the issue, [Friends of Domenic](#), has already attracted international attention since its founding last month. Visitors to the site come primarily from the United States and Sweden, but also from such diverse places as Kenya, New Zealand, Canada, Australia, Russia, South Africa, India, Italy, Belarus, Nigeria, Brazil, Venezuela, Mexico, Turkey and other nations. It’s run by a concerned American who at first couldn’t believe what happened, and is now determined to help the family in any way she can.

“I read about Domenic’s seizure shortly after it happened, and I was appalled,” said Kelley Brautigam, the home-schooling mother of six — four of whom were adopted from the foster care system — who runs the blog. “I just watched, and I thought that things were languishing from the public’s perspective — not enough people knew about it, not enough people knew enough to understand that there isn’t more to the story,” so that’s why she started the effort, she told *The New American* in a telephone interview. The case also shows intolerance on the part of Swedish authorities, she added.

News organizations around the world have picked up and followed the story as events unfold. From [Poland](#) to [Vietnam](#) — and especially in the United States with [WorldNetDaily](#), LifeSiteNews, [Christian Broadcasting Network](#), and more — media have blasted the Swedish authorities’ actions. According to critics, the Domenic Johansson case has severely tarnished the international reputation of the Swedish regime.

Of course, this case is not unique to Sweden. [Germany](#), for example, has mistreated home-schoolers so badly that they are fleeing the country in droves to places more free like America. But like other families committed to the education of their children, the Johansson family has no plans to give up this fight. “Domenic is coming home. We will not accept anything else,” Mr. Johansson concluded.

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