



Outcry over Sweden's Persecution of Homeschoolers Grows

As homeschooling families continue to flee Sweden in the face of escalating persecution, the global outcry over the controversial Swedish policies is growing louder. More than a few critics and reporters have even blasted the government's actions and behavior as reminiscent of the former Soviet Union.



In recent days, a senior U.S. lawmaker and popular televangelist Pat Robertson have spoken about the situation as well. And Jews around the world are concerned about the fate of a Jewish homeschooling family [being targeted](#) in Sweden, too.

The Swedish government was already [facing worldwide criticism](#) from human rights groups for what opponents called its "kidnapping" of Domenic Johansson. The then-7-year-old homeschooler was abducted from an airplane bound for India by police after his parents refused to stop educating him at home — and that was in June of 2009, while homeschooling was still technically legal. The boy remains in state custody, completely isolated from his parents.

The ongoing tragedy drew [prompt condemnation](#) from around the world. Organizations like the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA), the Alliance Defense Fund (ADF), Advocates International, the Network for Freedom in Education, the Nordic Committee for Human Rights, and many more all got involved. Media outlets from every corner of the globe picked up the story, too, shattering Sweden's image as a "social utopia."

And now, the pressure just got turned up another notch. After a [tear-jerking report about the Johansson family's plight](#) by the Christian Broadcasting Network, popular television evangelist Pat Robertson — an American media icon with incalculable global influence — offered his comments: "It's so amazing — this family was leaving," he said. "They were on an airplane — on an airplane leaving — so what do the Swedes care whether they were homeschooling their kid? They were leaving the country!"

And the tragedy is a consequence of overbearing government, he warned. "This is what socialism does. This is what the Big Brother does. And they never want to admit a mistake. That's what happened here," Robertson [said](#) during a segment of *The 700 Club*, an enormously influential Christian TV program aired throughout the U.S. and around the world. The show [reaches](#) hundreds of millions of people in more than a dozen nations every year.

"They made a mistake and they won't admit it, so this poor child is being destroyed — the family is being ruined — because of a bureaucratic mistake," Robertson continued, calling the tragedy "unbelievable." "It breaks your heart. That's why we have got to fight for your freedom. Fight for your freedom here in America — don't give up your liberties."

Robertson's co-host, Kristi Watts, agreed. "My heart is just on the floor right now," she said, asking parents around the world to pray for the family and the little boy.

Before Pat Robertson and CBN's most recent segment on the Johansson family, Fox News personality



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Judge Andrew Napolitano exposed the tragedy on Freedom Watch as well. And as time goes by, pressure on the Swedish government is intensifying. But it is not just the Johansson family that has been targeted.

In 2010, Sweden's Parliament [passed a draconian law essentially banning homeschooling](#) while forcing all schools to teach the highly controversial government curriculum. The measure officially made Sweden the first Western nation since Nazi Germany to prohibit home education.

Homeschoolers in the Scandinavian nation, terrified of what might happen after the Johansson saga, [began to flee](#). Families moved to Canada, the Czech Republic, various Nordic nations — all of which allow home education — and other nations. So far, however, despite the persecution, no homeschooled children in Sweden have been enrolled long-term in government schools.

After the controversial law went into effect last year, Jonas Himmelstrand (pictured above), the president of the Swedish Association for Home Education (ROHUS), decided to stay and fight — at least until the persecution campaign intensified. But enormous fines and threats from the social services finally [forced him to seek asylum with his family in neighboring Finland](#), where he now lives in the same area as other Swedish homeschooling exiles.

And the world has taken notice. Most recently, U.S. Senator Roy Blunt (R-Mo.) [sent a letter](#) to the Swedish Ambassador to the United States, Jonas Hafström, inquiring about the Himmelstrands. According to [reports](#), Sen. Blunt wanted to know why they were forced to flee from their homeland.

The response from Ambassador Hafström has human rights advocates very concerned about the situation. "Sweden believes in defending the rights of the child, and as a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Sweden offers strong legal protection to the rights of children," Hafström claimed in the letter.

Analysts [seized](#) on the comment to re-emphasize the potential dangers of the highly controversial UN CRC treaty, which the U.S. government has not ratified. However, others have noted that multiple UN and EU treaties specifically permit homeschooling, thereby rendering the Ambassador's response bizarre, according to critics.

"Parents have a prior right to determine the form and content of their children's education," [explained](#) HSLDA Chairman Mike Farris, who also leads the group ParentalRights.org. "In ... Sweden, we see a one-size-fits-all approach to education that seeks to restrict, if not deny, a parent's ability to teach what they believe."

The Swedish government, apparently, does not see it that way. "All children in Sweden have the right to education on the same terms and high quality instruction, and we find that compulsory schooling is a way to guarantee that this right is fulfilled for all children. Under Swedish law, school instruction must be comprehensive and objective," Ambassador Hafström's response continued, misusing the term "rights" to refer to state mandates instead. "The government does not find that homeschooling is necessary for religious or philosophical reasons."

But along with Christians, atheists, and others, Jews in Sweden and around the world disagree. In the Swedish city of Gothenburg, authorities are attempting to [force](#) a respected Jewish family — using official threats and intimidation — to violate their values by sending their remaining school-age children to government school.

Out of 11 children, four are still young enough to be subject to the government edict, though they have



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been educated successfully outside of the Swedish system by their parents and through a Jewish distance-learning program. The family's older children — most of whom were also taught at home — were all educated to a much higher standard than their Swedish peers.

"This is a stain on the reputation of a country that takes pride in equality as a fundamental value," [said](#) Rabbi Alexander Namdar, a representative of the Chassidic movement to Sweden for over two decades. The family's attorney told reporters that the case would be a critical test of Sweden's religious freedom, and the government's threats have already created a [firestorm](#) of controversy.

Homeschooling families and human rights advocates around the world have been engaged in a massive letter-writing campaign asking Swedish authorities to respect international treaties and individual rights. Other outraged activists have even called for a boycott of Swedish goods. Some are simply praying. But across the globe, pressure is mounting and will almost certainly continue to build.

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