

**Banning God's law in the name of the Holy child –
The Nordic position on ritual male circumcision**

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The protection of the best interest of the child is the dual responsibility of parents and society. In societies consisting of majority and minorities the understanding of what constitutes the best interests of the child might be the subject for different opinions between parents, society and the child itself. Often such differences of opinion may be solved by compromises and respectful dialogue based on the needs of the child and respect for conflicting human rights and legal principles such as non-discrimination, freedom of religion and proportionality.

Sometimes, however, it is difficult to find a satisfactory solution. In the Nordic countries ritual male circumcision of minor boys has proved to be an issue hard to reach an agreement on. Representatives for the protestant majority claim that ritual male circumcision is clearly inconsistent with the best interests of the child and a harmful practice that should be outlawed. Legislation has been passed to regulate it. Representatives for the Jewish and Muslim minorities have, nationally as well as globally, argued that ritual male circumcision is a vital aspect of the best interests of the child as well as freedom of religion enabling the child to be a member of a religious community and tradition.

On no other contemporary issue the interpretation of the best interests of the child of official representatives of the majority Nordic society versus those of the minority communities has been so hard to reconcile. Recently, however, there seems to be a change in the position of the Swedish majority society, in part explained by an improved dialogue with children and young people from communities practicing ritual male circumcision.