



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on July 19, 2012

Persecuted & Exiled Swedish Homeschoolers “Walk to Freedom,” Vow to Fight On

STOCKHOLM - After walking some 120 miles over six days in the “Walk to Freedom” as a protest against Sweden’s controversial new [ban on homeschooling](#), a passionate group of persecuted Swedish homeschoolers and their supporters boarded a ferry to Finland on July 19 in pursuit of educational liberty. The walk, which drew some three dozen participants overall, was aimed at attracting more attention to the unprecedented wave of Swedish political refugees created by the Nordic Kingdom’s draconian education regime.



Starting in the town of Akso, the “[Walk to Freedom](#)” began on July 13 following a week-long international homeschooling camp. From there, the activists — and fellow travelers who joined them along the way for shorter segments — marched across towns in Sweden. Along the way, they were chatting with people, handing out flyers with information on homeschooling, and drawing attention to the fact that so many families have been forced to flee the country.

“We’re doing it because the Swedish government created a law which is creating refugees — perfectly good, functioning families are having to leave the country just because they want to take the responsibility to educate their own children,” Jake Clay, one of the main organizers behind the walk, told *The New American* in an interview. “It’s an embarrassment to Sweden — it’s crazy, it’s shocking, it’s really sad as well. The government is forcing people out of the country.”

The controversy over homeschooling in Sweden erupted into an international scandal in 2010 when Parliament passed a law purporting to ban home education while forcing all “private” schools to teach the government curriculum. Of course, the estimated 50 to 100 families educating their children at home fought hard to stop it. But in the end, despite a global outcry, lawmakers went ahead with the scheme anyway — and Sweden became the first Western nation since National Socialist (Nazi) Germany to outlaw home education.

Swedish homeschoolers, however, refused to surrender. Since the law went into effect last year, dozens of homeschooling families have been forced into political exile. Many of the refugees [moved a few hours away by boat](#) to the self-governing, Swedish-speaking Aland Islands in the Baltic Sea. The territory is technically part of Finland, which guarantees the right of parents to direct the education of their children in its Constitution.

“We escaped from Sweden when they changed the school law that forced us to have our children in school instead of home educating them, so we moved to Aland a year ago — we sold our house and everything,” said homeschooling father of three and recent political exile Nicklas Lantz, saying he wished his youngest son could have been at least a few years older before his family had to leave. “We don’t have a war against school, we just want to educate our children the way we feel suits us the best.”



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In an interview with *TNA* at the ferry to Finland, Lantz said the walk was aimed at “opening people’s eyes to what is happening in Sweden.” His oldest son, 11-year-old Lucas, added — in perfect English — that he thought homeschooling was “nice” and the law purporting to outlaw it in Sweden is “not very good — I want to homeschool and they don’t want us to.”

Politicians “talk a lot about Sweden as the land of the free — about the freedom we have in Sweden,” continued Lantz, who works as an actor. “When you start to look at it, it’s not much freedom if you want to choose how to bring up your children — then it’s not much freedom. They just need to see that we are people, not numbers or figures in their calculations, and we actually have to move due to the law.”

Another homeschooler who fled to the Finish islands this year is Jonas Himmelstrand, the president of the Swedish Homeschooling Association (ROHUS). A well-known critic of Sweden’s family policies and also the founder of the Mireja Institute, Himmelstrand [finally decided to leave](#) after being constantly harassed and threatened by authorities in his homeland over the decision to homeschool.

The battle to defend educational liberty in Sweden, however, is just getting started, he added — especially now that much of ROHUS’s board is living in exile on the Aland Islands. And he was proud to support the latest effort to raise awareness about the persecuted homeschoolers’ plight in their homeland.

“The ‘Walk to Freedom’ is a real grass-roots home education activity initiated by a few young people — of which some are Swedish home education graduates — who feel that they want the right to home educate in Sweden when they have their own children,” Himmelstrand told *TNA*, noting that he would meet the marchers tomorrow when they get off the ferry.

“The walk is a modern expression of the rich human tradition of marching for human rights causes whenever governments threaten them for whatever cause,” he added. “It is an irony that this march happens in Sweden, which puts a severe dent in the myth of Sweden as the perfected social and liberal state.”

Like virtually all free nations, Finland respects the rights of families to choose home education, Himmelstrand observed. And eventually, Sweden will have to learn to protect the rights of citizens as well.

“A human right can never be overturned by any government for any length of time,” he concluded. “This combined with the ordeals which healthy and loving Swedish home education families are willing to go through to continue home educating should awaken some doubt in any Swedish politician with a heart: ‘Maybe we did a mistake by outlawing home education? How can we get it right again?’ ”

Before Parliament passed the draconian education act, Christopher Warren — an Oxford graduate, a retired professional educator, a longtime human rights activist, and the creator of the liberty-minded [FreeSweden.net](#) website — produced a comprehensive report for lawmakers explaining the benefits of home education. It was ignored by the political class. Today, the passionate homeschooling father of three children is one of the few people left in all of Sweden with official permission to homeschool. But he, too, refuses to allow the Swedish government to trample the rights of home educators without a fight.

“The small community of exiles on the Aland Islands is growing in Stockholm’s own back yard free from the predations of a pre-Cambrian, Soviet-style educational system that refuses to wake up to the 21st century,” Warren told *TNA*, slamming the Swedish government’s efforts to persecute and oppress homeschoolers. In the end, however, the controversial “experiment” will fail, he added.



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Sweden's political refugees will have plenty of help in the fight from abroad, too, as the global homeschooling community continues to stand by their side. And with their dedication to do what they feel is best for their children — even if it means leaving their homeland behind — homeschooling advocates say the government's efforts to quash the movement will fail.

“Swedish homeschoolers are fortunate to have a refuge one hundred miles off their coast,” said attorney and Director of International Affairs Michael Donnelly with the U.S.-based Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA). “The Swedes’ symbolic march for freedom highlights the tragic plight of parents in Sweden who are persecuted by increasingly hard-line laws and administrators.”

Meanwhile, as the political class in Sweden ignores the growing outcry, the once-respected nation's prized reputation will continue to suffer. “In a civilized democracy as Sweden purports to be, no parent should be forced to choose between their homeland and homeschooling,” Donnelly told *TNA*. “A nation such as Sweden that harshly imposes an iron-fisted state monopoly on education is totalitarian and does not deserve the title of democracy.”

But the fight will undoubtedly go on. In fact, “Walk to Freedom” participants — while exhausted from six days of walking — seemed optimistic, promising to continue working harder to restore educational freedom no matter how long it takes. The battle, they said, is only just getting started.

Photo: “Walk to Freedom” homeschooling activists stand in front of the ferry at the port in Stockholm that will take them to the Aland Islands, a Finish territory that has become a refuge for numerous Swedish political exiles seeking educational freedom.

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