

Poland partially revokes its ban on ritual animal slaughter

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The Polish parliament has given in to worldwide pressure from Jewish and Muslim groups and revised its ban on ritual slaughter of animals without pre-stunning.

The Sejm (Polish parliament) made a statement in a position paper sent recently to the country's Constitutional Tribunal. It permits religious slaughter without stunning if the meat is for the consumption of local Jewish and Muslim communities only.

The ritual slaughter of animals carried out for economic or commercial reasons remains illegal.

The Constitutional Tribunal had ruled in 2012 that the Government was acting unconstitutionally by allowing Jews and Muslims to slaughter animals in this way without pre-stunning. An attempt by the Government in 2013 to reverse the ban was rejected by the Parliament.

Meanwhile, Denmark has come under intense pressure from Jewish groups over its ban on ritual slaughter without pre-stunning.

Agriculture and Food Minister Dan Jørgensen banned all slaughter without pre-stunning last month, although the importation of kosher and halal meat is still legal.

Jørgensen was quoted as saying that "animal rights come before religion," a statement he later denied having made during a meeting with Jewish and Muslim community leaders.

Now the Conference of European Rabbis has issued a strongly-worded condemnation of Denmark's ban, saying it is "a fig leaf intended to cover the country's woeful record on animal welfare."

Rabbi Menachem Margolin, president of the Rabbinical Center of Europe, another continental rabbinical organisation, pointed out that Denmark does not have laws banning humans having sex with animals. He said that the dichotomy between allowing sex with animals who cannot give consent and disallowing ancient religious traditions calls into question the sincerity of those who say that the ban is not anti-Semitic. "Those supporting the ban are hypocrites," he added.

Rabbi Yitzchock Loewenthal of Chabad of Denmark said: "As long as hunting and bestiality are allowed in Denmark, the ban against shechita is populist at best."

Rabbi Marc Schneier of the New- York based Foundation for Ethnic Understanding, whose European representatives recently met with Jørgensen, called the ban "pathetic", stating that a country that "legalises animal brothels" and lacks "humane factory-farming standards" cannot claim the moral authority to ban shechita.

"This ban is nothing more than a political stunt to appease a growing far-right faction in Denmark," he said.

However, Ben Williamson of PETA UK – a leading animal welfare organisation - commended Denmark for its ban on ritual slaughter, which he termed one of the "least humane methods of slaughter."

John Blackwell, president-elect of the British Veterinary Association, also came under fire from religious groups last month by arguing that the ritual killing of poultry, sheep and cattle by cutting their throats causes unnecessary suffering to animals. He said that Britain's abattoirs should follow the Danish example.

Mr Blackwell said on the Radio 4 Today programme: "Our view has always been that animals should be stunned. They should be imperceptible to pain as death supervenes.

"We are looking for a meeting of minds to review the evidence base which clearly shows that slaughtering animals without stunning compromises welfare. If that can't happen then I would like labelling at the point of sale that gives the consumer informed choice. If that is not possible we would be looking for a ban for killing without stunning.

"There is no insensibility for these animals by cutting its throat and these remain conscious for seven seconds for sheep and two minutes for cattle and that is not acceptable. As a vet and scientist welfare is top of our list".

This led to Prime Minister David Cameron saying that ritual slaughter would never be banned in Britain during his term in office.

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