

SCIENTOLOGY WINS TAX EXEMPTION

STOCKHOLM, Sweden (EP) — Scientologists claimed victory after tax authorities in Sweden granted the Church of Scientology exemption from all taxes on the basis that the Church of Scientology is a religious, nonprofit association. In the written background to the decision, which arose out of a past tax matter relating to the Swedish Church, the ruling from the tax authorities referred to the Church of Scientology's activities as "consisting among other things of worshipping God, services such as naming ceremonies, weddings and funerals, spiritual counseling and studies of the Church's scriptures." Earlier this month, a German court ruled in favor of the Church of Scientology during a legal battle with the city government of Stuttgart. The court reversed a decree made by the Stuttgart government in 1994 that the Church of Scientology didn't qualify as a nonprofit organization. The Stuttgart court also affirmed a 1997 decision of Germany's highest court that Scientology was truly a religion. Similar rulings and tax privileges have been given to the Church of Scientology in the United States, Australia, and Venezuela, Germany and Italy. The Church of Scientology was founded by author L. Ron Hubbard in the early 1950s and is considered by many to be a cult.