

Religious Liberty Partnership

Best Practices for Ministry to and with the Persecuted

Introduction

This code of Best Practices for Ministry to and with believers who are persecuted around the world is designed as a benchmark document to guide the policies and practice of organisations in their involvement. It is not intended to establish legal standards or liability. Rather the motivation for the development of this code is based upon the responsibility toward all participants and partners in religious liberty work, that they are served with the highest standards possible.

The code does not necessarily reflect current practice, but encourages aspirations toward excellence. However, minimal standards are implied and therefore these principles should be seen as steps in the process rather than an end in themselves. It is also recognised that the code may not be applicable to all situations in religious liberty work.

Please recognize that no document or agreement on principles can reflect the attitude and relationships from which they were birthed. We have attempted, however, to do so.

These issues were identified by the membership of the Religious Liberty Partnership (RLP) as needing to be somehow addressed in this document:

- Problems of market or donor driven ministry
- Common understanding of the needs of the situation
- Doing no harm
- Cross-cultural value and appreciation
- Long-term thinking that is proactive as opposed to reactive
- The tendency to see money / technology / resources as the primary responses to need
- Possible disagreements over the root causes of persecution
- Ministry preparation / Biblical and theological training / knowing and applying Biblical principles concerning persecution
- Communication integrity
 - Between organizations.
 - Within own organization / network
 - Between nationals and international
 - Encouraging partners abroad
- Respect a Body of Christ (differing gifts) relational viewpoint
- Partnering and collaboration
- Accountability among RLP ministries
- Recognizing the centrality of the local church—i.e., providing funds through and capacity building of the local church to render aid and counseling
- Concept of working with persecuted church leaders as equals as opposed to primarily seeing them as victims
- Equal access to opportunity, including those without a knowledge of English
- Danger of over professionalism
- Acknowledgement of the diversity of our community and its response
- Respecting the religious freedom of all faiths

Principle 1

Collaboration and Partnership – those experiencing persecution are best served by ministries working together and cooperating while maintaining ministry distinctives. This includes the reduction of duplication; wisely sharing information; growing common understanding of problems and root causes of persecution; strong relationship and trust; and accountability (information, money, etc).

Key Indicators

- We are making the time to develop relationship and trust with one another.
- We are seeking to avoid duplication of ministry in a given area whenever possible.
- We are seeking to develop our collective intellectual capital by appropriately sharing information, knowledge and lessons learned.
- We are seeing attitudes of competition are being reduced.
- We are speaking well of each other and making direct contact with each other in the case of any disagreements.
- We are seeing more joint projects launched.
- We are learning how to share success with each other.

Principle 2

Doing No Harm – ministry to the persecuted should operate under the core value of ensuring that we actively work to never do harm to those we are trying to serve. This to include cross cultural consideration and appreciation; equal access to opportunity; support of local leaders; long-term thinking and sustainability; and the examination of possible exploitation.

Key Indicators

- We are respecting local culture, language and practices of the affected ministries..
- We are learning when to take no for an answer in avoiding the exploitation/over exposure of persecuted believers for the sake of publicity/promotion.
- We are promoting unity and not feeding disunity among local Christians by providing broad access to resources, consulting on possible projects, and evaluating past and present projects, especially as it relates to sustainability.

Principle 3

Education and Training – as learning entities we are continually trying to learn from our mistakes, as well as the mistakes of other ministries, and willingly embrace the opportunity to do so in order to serve the persecuted more effectively. This to include preparation for future possible persecution; training of Biblical principles and theology; criteria for leaving; orientation and teaching to workers in countering dependency; and promotion of local church leadership.

Key Indicators

- We are providing orientation and training on key issues such as dependency, partnering, cultural sensitivity, sustainability, etc, to our staffs and workers.
- We are promoting the understanding and awareness of different levels of persecution, including religious literacy to government officials.
- We are providing appropriate preparation to our leadership, staff and partners as to the Biblical and missiological principles of persecution.
- We are providing education and training – including legal training – to Christian leaders in places where religious liberty is being violated.

Principle 4

Communication – striving to demonstrate integrity in all of our communications. This to include integrity in promotions; integrity in information gathering; integrity in dissemination; integrity in security, and integrity in use of statistics and facts.

Key Indicators

- Organisations are providing effective communication without exaggerating the needs, the statistics, and the plight of persecuted Christians.
- Accurate and verifiable statistics and research are being used.
- Appropriate sourcing, acknowledgements, and permissions are being practiced.
- Appropriate security and sensitivity is being shown to the impact on persecuted believers in our information gathering.
- We are following the directives and guidance of a variety of local leaders in what can be reported and publicized.
- We seek agreement to use the same numbers regarding those being persecuted, the number believers from a Muslim background, and those being killed for their faith.

Principle 5

Accountability – mutual accountability leads to more effective ministry and faithful stewardship of our shared calling to the persecuted. This to include stories, financial standards; information; and evaluation.

Key Indicators

- Adherence to nationally agreed upon financial standards, including certified audited accounting, is occurring.
- Organisations are open to receiving input from other RLP members, as well as our persecuted communities, as to our faithfulness to and our fulfillment of the best practices.
- Significant concerns on accountability are being expressed face to face.
- Where there is failure to resolve disputes among us, they are handled by Mathew 18 principles and mediation if necessary.

Principle 6

Advocacy – raising the awareness of the situation of persecuted believers as well as seeking to influence socio-economic and political policies and structures. This to include: advocacy being done with the benefit of persecuted believers in mind; and advocacy being done collaboratively with other ministries.

Key Indicators

- Neglected peoples are receiving appropriate attention.
- Whenever it is possible, advocacy is being done cooperatively with other organisations, including the promotion of in-country religious liberty commissions.
- Campaigns and advocacy work are being done with the participation and agreement of their persecuted families and local church leadership whenever possible.
- There is a recognition that advocacy language can sometimes be different than ministry language.

Principle 7

Operational Strategies – ministry to the persecuted must go beyond “marketable” strategies. This to include attitudes of participating **with** persecuted church leaders and understanding that there may be differences in opinion among local believers on how to handle a given situation.

Key Indicators

- We try and see that our work is never driven only by our donors.
- Money, technology, resources are not being seen as the only “answer”. When looking to address the needs of the persecuted we are looking beyond monetary, technical or other material resources.
- Organisations are growing in their heart motivation for the persecuted, not merely by secular management standards.
- Organisations are looking to determine long term considerations and impact as part of their overall strategy rather than mere expediency.
- The establishment of branch offices are being done with sensitivity to local culture, context and economic realities (salary, personnel) as well as avoided when national organizations are doing the required work.
- Organisational involvement is building the capacity and self sufficiency of national leaders and churches.
- When RLP members visit another country, efforts are being made to inform and potentially visit those with offices in that country.
- We make available our vision, mission, and long-term strategies to each other.

Principle 8

Ethical fundraising and data collection – raising funds for ministry to the persecuted needs to exemplify integrity.

Key Indicators

- Accurate and verifiable statistics, facts, and testimonies are used in fund-raising materials with the avoidance of sensationalistic approaches.
- The needs of the persecuted are presented truthfully, respectfully and in such a way as not to exploit their plight for material gain or further endanger them through publicity.
- We will resist the trend to harvest data through the unethical use of campaign actions. This includes the use of online or mass petitions in instances where they are likely to be of no effect.

We view these Best Practices as a “living document,” originally drafted by a multi-organisational task force from the Religious Liberty Partnership in August 2007. Reviewed and subject to change each year, this is the twelfth incarnation, dated April 2018.

Questions, comments and additional information requests should be sent to:

Brian O’Connell, RLP Facilitator
Brian@RLPartnership.org
Phone: +1-425-218-4718
www.RLPartnership.org