

**Guiding Principles for Ethical Decisions Concerning
Religious Freedom Around the World**

[We] consider the rights of private judgment, in all matters that respect religion, as universal and inalienable: We do not even wish to see any religious constitution aided by the civil power, further than may be necessary for protection and security, and at the same time, be equal and common to all others. PC(USA) Book of Order, G-1.0301

- \$ We affirm fundamental human rights as those rights and duties of humans without which they cannot fulfill their calling as persons made in the image of God, alike living before God and in relationship with one another. We recognize that the rights of any individual are bound with the duties of securing rights for those from whom they are withheld. Among these rights is that of religious freedom.
- \$ We confess as Reformed Christians that all freedom comes from God. Because governments may err in implementing God's intent for human life, we believe it our duty to uphold the rights of religious freedom for all, doing so without arrogating to ourselves what is God's.
- \$ We respect the God-given humanness in all people and accept the existence of religious plurality upon which any insistence for religious freedom in all societies must be based.
- \$ We acknowledge that our own well-being is tied to the well-being of others, as expressed in Jeremiah's exhortation to the exiles, "Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you..., and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare" (Jer. 29:7).
- \$ We recognize that the Church of Jesus Christ is one body and that, therefore, its mission in the world is most faithfully carried out where each part works in partnership with other parts.

Therefore, we affirm that:

1. Religious freedom is a universal human right.
2. Religious freedom is a human right that is necessarily tied to other human rights. It is tempered by the complementary requirements of social justice, human dignity, and respect for others' religious freedom.
 - a. freedom of religion implies freedom of conscience.
 - b. religious freedom requires recognition of cultural and religious diversity as basic to human reality.
 - c. religious freedom calls for watchfulness in order that conflicting values not undermine the universality and indivisibility of human rights.
 - d. religious freedom (and religion) should not be used to conceal economic, political, class or racial struggles.

Attachment 1.2

3. Governments have responsibility to promote and protect religious freedom and should:
 - a. give specific protections concerning religious freedom in their official policies, constitution and practices;and should not:
 - b. co-opt, manipulate or constrain religious practice by any persons, groups or religious bodies except as may properly be necessary for the protection of human rights for all;
 - c. limit or deny religious participation in public life; or
 - d. discriminate either for or against any religious tradition or organization.

4. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) as a national church should:
 - a. advocate for the religious freedom of any persons, groups and religious bodies such as is consistent with the human rights for all;
 - b. determine the most appropriate ways to support Christian persons, groups and religious bodies, whether “officially” recognized by their government or not, that are struggling under repressive governments determined to intimidate or control the practice of their faith;
 - c. remain open to the possibility of relationship with any Christian organizations that demonstrate they are genuine expressions of the Church, the Body of Christ, helping them fulfill all six Great Ends of the Church without hindrance;
 - d. speak with a voice that is distinct from that of the U.S. government;
 - e. guard against functioning as an agent of government or being used to further government foreign policy objectives as an institution, in its mission endeavors or through its employees;
 - f. express concern when U.S. government policies limit contact between churches and Christians of the U.S. and churches and Christians in other countries, as well as persons of other faiths in those countries;
 - g. advocate that no official U.S. government relationship or diplomatic status be accorded any religious group or organization;
 - h. urge the U.S. government to accord a key role to the United Nations in issues of religious freedom abroad even as it recognizes that a U.S. government role, based upon U.S. policies, is appropriate;

Attachment 1.3

- i. give deference to partner churches' determination of how to address issues of religious freedom in their own contexts and advocate, when consistent with General Assembly policies, as appropriate;
 - j. work to strengthen mechanisms of mutual trust and self-criticism that make joint action possible.
 - k. accept responsibility for engaging in appropriate discussion with Christians we understand could be violating the religious freedom of persons of any faith tradition; and advocate, consistent with General Assembly policy, for oppressed persons of every faith tradition; and
 - l. be aware of the role of media and educate its members about general stereotypes and particular complexities in situations of curtailed religious freedom abroad.
5. Congregations, Presbyteries, Synods and other entities within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) should:
- a. be concerned about and take action concerning human rights/religious freedom for all people;
 - b. be a witness to the church's understanding that issues of religious freedom cannot be separated from other human rights issues;
 - c. carefully consider the most appropriate ways, as a part of the PC(USA), to support Christian persons, groups and religious bodies, whether "officially" recognized by their government or not, that are struggling under repressive governments;
 - d. remain open to the possibility of relationship with any Christian organizations that demonstrate they are genuine expressions of the Body of Christ, helping them fulfill all six Great Ends of the Church without hindrance; and
 - e. follow appropriate steps such as suggested in the "Checklist for PC(USA) Entities Confronted with Reports of Religious Freedom Violations.

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