

# Visiting the Persecuted Church

## Best Practices for Foreign Teams when visiting Sri Lanka

### 1. Culture shock

It will be most helpful for the sending organization to conduct a brief orientation for visitors and staff, prior to arrival in Sri Lanka. This will help them grasp the local situation and be culturally sensitive. Such orientation is essential to the safety of visitors and local pastoral workers serving in hostile environments.

### 2. Objectives

Most visitors from organizations have set objectives for their visits to the Persecuted Church. It will be most helpful to communicate your trip objectives to the local partner well in advance of the visit, giving time for any adjustments and setting a suitable date for the visit that is acceptable to both parties.

### 3. Itinerary

When making travel arrangements etc..., we, the local partners have to work within certain limitations. For example: some parts of Sri Lanka are not easily accessible and can require eight hours of road travel. Travel to some other areas requires prior clearance from the Ministry of Defense. It is essential for visitors to consult with the local partner in preparing an itinerary. A sudden visit to a given location may not be realistic.

### 4. Local wisdom

It is always best to follow guidelines set by the local partner when making field visits. Your host will have a better understanding and experience of the ground situation and is in a better position to make good decisions and assessments.

### 4. Enthusiasm vs. good sense

While we appreciate the efforts of visitors to capture on film and highlight the plight of

the Persecuted Church in Sri Lanka, it should also be bourn in mind that while visitors leave our shores after a brief visit, the local pastors, staff and workers continue to live here amidst persecution and are vulnerable to danger. For example: a very visible and loud reporter or video crew invariably attracts attention and places the local pastor in danger. It must be remembered that most places you will visit are often watched and monitored by interested parties.

### 5. Camera-shy

Most victims of persecution are from very humble circumstances. To them, facing a foreign journalist, interviews, posing for video filming, etc., are strange and alien experiences. Many of them feel uncomfortable "acting" for the camera. This situation needs sensitive handling.

### 6. Taking 'no' for an answer

It is our culture to show hospitality to visitors. This is particularly so in rural villages. Most local Christians will accommodate the requests of a guest, even if it is inconvenient, dangerous, embarrassing or uncomfortable. For example: requesting a persecution victim to act out a traumatic scene from an attack or repeat a painful experience several times. In such instances, it is our responsibility as the local partner, to intervene on behalf of the victims and deny the request. Please trust our judgment in such instances, even if the victim may "appear" to be willing to comply with the visitor's request.

### 7. Gifts

The churches or victims you visit may have many material needs and often a visitor's heart will be moved to help. It is best to consult with your local partner as to the appropriateness of a gift or a promise of help before making such a commitment to the vic-

tims. Ideally, any gift from the visiting organization should be given through the local partner. As local partners, we will in turn issue proper receipts and reports of such gifts.

### 8. Attire and conduct

There may be places that you visit where being clad in appropriate clothing is a way of showing courteousness to your hosts. For example, if you are invited to speak or share at a meeting or visit a business office, dressing in shorts is not

appropriate. Most places of cultural interest which are also places of Buddhist worship require modest dress. Similarly, behaviour which may be normal and acceptable in the West may also not be acceptable in very conservative, rural areas. Seek guidance from your host as to what is appropriate.

### 9. Reporting

There may be times when publicizing sensitive information can endanger the local Christians or hinder the work of the Church. It is best to follow the guidelines set by the local partners and always cross check reports, scripts and copy before it is publicized.

### 10. Our commitment

As partners and hosts, we are committed to making your visit fruitful and mutually beneficial; subject to our paramount duty to protect and ensure the safety and best interest of local pastors, believers and churches. In this context, we advocate that visitors follow the advice of our staff as to what actions and behaviour are acceptable when making field visits. <<

Formulated by: Roshini Wickremesinhe  
Advocacy & Legal Officer, NCEASL, 2003 / Updated  
2007

*National Christian Evangelical  
Alliance of Sri Lanka*