

# How Do We Talk About Them?

*Communicating with and about our GO workers in restricted access countries*

## ***Why the question?***

A lot has changed in the world of missions in the last thirty years. Much of the focus on the remaining task of world evangelization has shifted to the remaining unreached (sometimes referred to as hidden) people groups of the world. This involves hundreds of people groups and totals slightly more than two billion people.

One of the reasons that many of these people groups remain largely unreached is that they live in nations or societies dominated by world religions or worldviews hostile to the open propagation of the Gospel and the planting of the church. The countries in which these peoples are found are frequently referred to as *restricted access* (RA) countries. This includes the worlds of Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, as well as few remaining secularized dictator states. Most of these people live in that region of the world referred to as the *10/40 Window*, stretching from the west coast of North Africa, through the Middle East, across South and Central Asia, and across China and Southeast Asia to Japan.

Prior to this current era, most of the global church's effort and growth has focused on regions where Christian ministry could openly take place with relatively little organized political opposition. Missionaries could gain legal access to live and work in their countries of service with the identity of a missionary (foreign religious worker).

This is typically NOT the case in the countries where most of the world's remaining unreached live. Our GO workers who live and work in these regions must do so without maintaining the identity of a traditional religious worker (missionary). For this reason those who publically speak/write about them or communicate with them must reckon with this new reality.

## ***So how do we handle this?***

There are some simple guidelines to observe.

1. If you are unsure about whether the worker in question lives and works in an "open" or restricted access (RA) country, find that out first before sending him/her any written communication or publically speaking or posting information about him/her. (This information can be obtained from the GO Office).
2. If presented the opportunity to do so in person, it is always good to ask workers what restrictions and guidelines they wish to be observed in their case.
3. It's probably best to train ourselves to not use the word *missionary* when referring to our GO workers. This refers to anything in print or our spoken words. While the word has rich historical meaning, it is increasingly misunderstood and creates problems in many areas of the world.
4. Many workers can not use in any of their email or other communications words such as *God, evangelism, church planting, prayer, discipleship*, and many of the other religious or theological terms that we frequently use in our ordinary communications here in the West. Develop other terms that you can use when communicating with them via email. Some examples are...
  - God = dad, father
  - Evangelism = talking about beliefs
  - Prayer = remember to dad
  - Church planting = starting new community groups
  - Discipleship = training others to live

4. Even though it would be beneficial to place photos, displays, or some other visual representation of a worker in some place on campus where you do ministry, people do travel globally from some of the countries in which our GO workers live and work. Make sure there is nothing posted publically that would create a problem should someone from that country walk into your room.
5. As a general rule, it is wise to mask the identity of the worker and the country by eliminating specificity. Some examples would be...
  - Alex and Kristi T in East Asia
  - Greg and Michelle B in Central Asia
  - Dave and Kari A in North Africa
6. Lastly, if you have any doubts about something you want to email a worker, post in a public place, include in a newsletter or other document you wish to circulate...*don't do it!* Check with the GO Office first to check on the wisdom of your plans. With time, you will gain a sense of what is appropriate.

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