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Referanser:

Saksdokumenter:

A Code of Conduct for Missionary Activities

Oslokoalisjonens arbeid med Code of Conduct for Missionary Activities

Sammendrag

Siden 2006 har Oslokoalisjonen hatt et prosjekt kalt Missionary Activities and Human Rights. Prosjektet har resultert i et større internasjonalt arbeid med å lage retningslinjer for misjonsvirksomhet (Code of Conduct for Missionary Activities). Gard Lindseth var leder for dette prosjektet mens hans jobbet i Mellomkirkelig råd.

Dokumentet har vært og er fremdeles et prosessdokument. I november 2008 ble det arrangert et internasjonalt arbeidsseminar i Oslo som ga videre føringer for dokumentet. Fagfolk fra alle de store verdensreligionene var involvert i dette arbeidet. 18. juni d.å. arrangeres det siste av de internasjonale redaksjonsmøtene for dokumentet, og MKR bes om å komme med evt. innspill til dokumentet nå i siste fase.

Dokumentet tenkes offentliggjort mot slutten av 2008.

For mer informasjon om tekst og prosess, se <http://www.oslocoalition.org/mhr.php>

Forslag til vedtak

MKR takker for arbeidet med Code of Conduct for Missionary Activities, og ber om at følgende momenter vektlegges i sluttforhandlingen av dokumentet:

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The Oslo Coalition

— on Freedom

— of Religion

— or Belief

**Missionary Activities and Human Rights:
A Code of Conduct for Missionary Activities**

*A document prepared by the project group on Missionary Activities and Human rights,
The Oslo Coalition on Freedom of Religion or Belief
Oslo, March 2009*

A Code of Conduct for Missionary Activities
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A CODE OF CONDUCT FOR MISSIONARY ACTIVITIES

Introduction

Background and Objectives:

The Project on Missionary Activities and Human Rights at the Oslo Coalition on Freedom of Religion and Belief aims to contribute, on the basis of human rights, to the prevention of conflicts arising from missionary activities and to promote peaceful religious co-existence. To this end, and through a long consultative process, the project group and its advisory committee have created the Code of Conduct for Missionary Activities. The intention of the Code of Conduct is to stimulate to internal debate within organisations that have the propagation of their religion among their main objectives, or those that are affected or subjected by missionary activities. It is our hope that they will use the Code of Conduct as a basis for examining their own activities in the light of ethics and universally accepted interpretations of human rights. The challenge ahead is to connect inter-religious initiatives in this area (that are still very few) to the Oslo-coalition project so as to establish a broad network of concerned groups that may effect real changes in the thinking and practice of those who are involved in or affected by missionary activities.

As followers of different religions and worldviews, we differ on faith doctrines and with regard to the content on our faiths and beliefs. To some, mission may be found morally objectionable, to others it may be perfectly justifiable, and to others it may have the character of an ethical imperative. However, it is precisely because we hold different convictions that there is a need to agree on ethical guidelines for missionary activities. A code of conduct for missionary activities faces us all with the challenge of viewing all religions and beliefs as equal – for the purpose of peaceful co-existence.

The project is grounded on the idea that the human rights conventions provides a good starting point for how we should relate to missionary activities. However, the conventions do not provide ready made answers to all the kinds of conflicts and situations that may occur in missionary activities. Thus, the project, while building on human rights, moves beyond them to also address how ethical considerations may lead to commonly agreed norms for missionary activities. This is a continuous discussion that will not ever reach clear conclusions that all participants can subscribe to. We are also aware that due to a number of political, institutional or practical obstacles in the context one is operating, it is sometimes difficult to adhere to ethical guidelines for mission. But we hope that the resulting Code of Conduct will serve to keep the discussion and the awareness of the ethical dilemmas alive.

This document is primarily directed to organisations involved in missionary activities. However, we are fully aware of the fact that governments themselves sometimes engage in missionary activities or play the role of being the representative of religious communities to whom missionary activities are directed. The role of governments in missionary activities is a controversial one, and there are many issues left to be discussed here – for a later project. In this project we primarily delimit ourselves to encourage governments to make sure their reactions to missionary activities harmonise with the human rights conventions. Governments should protect the rights of those who engage in missionary activities as well as those to whom such activities are directed. However, to the extent governments take a more active and controversial role in this area the recommendations of the present code of conducts are also relevant to them.

The Concept of Missionary activities

The concept of *Mission* arose in Christian environments, but is now also used as a religious science category. Other concepts like “proselytism” or “propagating a religion or belief” are also often used to describe this activity. In the context of this project it is important that the terminology used is understood as neutral – in the sense of not implying approval or disapproval of the phenomenon referred to – and that it is easily understood. We believe that the term “missionary activities” best meets this requirement, and have thus chose to use this term in this document. By this term we will come to understand the **activity of communicating a religion or worldview through verbal**

communication or through various related activities as an invitation to others to accept the religion or worldview.

Activities to disseminate the religion in some form or other always exist in all religions that claim to represent a universal truth. If one claims that something is true, it is implicitly claimed that opposing viewpoints are untrue, or contain truth to a lesser degree. In order to better understand how missionary activities are conceptualised and justified within various faith traditions, we have included a short presentation on mission as seen from 4 of the most widespread religions in the world today in appendix 1¹. It is evident from these perspectives that the scope, aims and methods for mission differ between religions. It is also evident that many believers have a problematic relationship to mission and missionary activities. This is largely due to historical reasons where missionary activities were connected to religious wars or colonialism in ways that made the target groups react against it. Understanding the wounds and pains that have been caused by such missionary activities are important when relating to mission today. Missionary activities will always contain a critical element. It should also be noted, however, that although missionary activities often is a cause of conflicts, mission can also be valuable because they give knowledge of a religions view of oneself and of others.

The range of activities that we refer to as "missionary activities" could be wide. Some activities are specific to particular religions. Cultural differences also make it also difficult to clearly delimit what falls within the framework of missionary activities or not. The code of conducts we present in section 2 of this document takes this into consideration. The choice of categories has been developed through a consultation process since 2005 that has included a number of national and international seminars under the auspices of the Oslo Coalition, with representatives from Norwegian and foreign academics, faith communities and missionary organisations.

Ethical Dilemmas – and document outline

In working in this field we are continually challenged by ethical dilemmas, and differing interpretations of the "grey zones" of the human rights conventions. Article 18 of the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (CCPR) make no distinction between the right "to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching" as a right for the individual for himself, compared to a right to approach others in various ways without invitation to promote his religion among them. The core issue of the right to engage in faith persuasion thus appears to be better grounded in article 19 of the CCPR regarding freedom of expression which reads as follows: "Everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference" (art. 19.1) and; "Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds..." (Art 19.2). There are limitations in the CCPR as to how far these rights extend, in terms of the means used to carry the message across to the target group. However, it is our understanding that derived from these human rights articles; people both have a right to choose a religion and a right to hold a religious view and to present this view to others. *Still*, there is no need to agree completely on to what extend missionary activities are covered by the human rights framework in order to discuss what is an ethical or an unethical way of doing mission. The very fact that missionary activities take place is reason enough for this.

The code of conduct that we hereby present is an attempt to solve a number of ethical conflicts that may occur in missionary activities. In section 2.2 we address those who carry out missionary activities and look at some of the questions arising.

Section 2.2.1 looks at ethical communication and at the inflammatory question of freedom of speech in relation to criticising another religion when propagating one's own. Section 2.2.2 addresses the question of cultural awareness, and respect for the social customs and norms of the community in which one is operating.

Another contentious issue concerns the offer of essential services such as health and education by missionary organisations. Section 2.2.3 looks at the question as to what degree such services may be connected directly or indirectly to missionary activities and still be ethical. This question is also connected to that of inequality. An affluent missionary organisation from the West can easily take advantage of its economic advantage to win followers through such development projects. Examples

¹ This will be included in a later version of the document

of such situations are included in Appendix 2, "Cases"². In section 2.2.3 we have attempted to give guidelines.

Another ethical dilemma caused by inequality concerns social inequality in target groups. In most countries and within most religious groups there are social divisions leaving certain sections of the population in disadvantaged circumstances. Is approaching such sections of the populations as perceived "soft targets" for missionary activities unethical, even if the intention is to erase the inequality? In section 2.2.4 we deal with two such "soft targets" – women and minors.

Finally this document deals with how one should respond to missionary activities. Emphasis is put on those who feel themselves victimised or threatened by the missionary activities of others. Situations where religions are expanding do in many cases lead to "countermeasures" by representatives of religious groups that consider themselves targeted. In section 2.3 we suggest how these groups could relate to and solve problems relating to missionary activities.

² This will be included in a later version of the document

Presenting a code of conduct concerning missionary activities

This proposed code of conduct is a draft version based on consultations over a period of more than three years with leaders and representatives of various religions and worldviews. The main purpose for proposing a code of conduct is to focus sharply on the real issues that give rise to tensions and conflicts between religions and worldviews as well as within them. It is our hope that amicable solutions may be found to conflicts related to missionary activities through open and frank discussions.

1 To whom is this Code of Conduct addressed?

“Missionary activity” is the term used in this document for the **activity of communicating a religion or worldview through verbal communication or through various related activities as an invitation to others to accept the religion or worldview**³.

A code of conduct concerning missionary activities should be addressed to

- a) those who are involved in missionary activities
- b) those to whom such activities are directed

2 Those who are involved in missionary activities

It has to be emphasised that the term “those who are involved in missionary activities” applies to those who engage directly as well as those who engage indirectly through various forms of support. It also include those who engage in mission as a primary activity as well as those who promote a religion or worldview as a secondary activity, such as some NGOs engaged in development or humanitarian activities.

2.1 Communicating belief ethically

- We will seek to focus on our own religion. We seek not to misrepresent the faith of others or denigrate them for the purpose of turning them away from their religion.
- We consider criticising a religion to be allowed. Making truthful claims are inherent in missionary activities, but should be done taking into consideration of the feelings of others. We consider the most acceptable form of criticism to be that which is grounded in a rational comparison between alternative faiths. Hostility and ridicule are always problematic, but well-reasoned, persuasive critique should never be so.
- When propagating a religion by potentially controversial means, such as door to door canvassing, we will ensure that this is done in ways that respect the right to privacy and also are acceptable according to local social norms.

2.2 Communicating belief in cross cultural situations

- When coming from the outside to another society, we would be sensitive to cultural differences within that society and adjust accordingly and avoid actions that are considered disrespectful and objectionable in that society, including those defined as such for religious reasons. However, we consider it appropriate to challenge cultural norms that are opposed to the freedom to promote and receive ideas.
- We will take care not to adopt terminologies, rituals and customs from other religions in ways that may create misunderstandings about our identity and impressions of trying to achieve acceptance through adopting the appearances of other religions.
- People who have converted may in some cases be aggressive towards the religion they have left. We will try to help those who have converted to our faith to heal the wounds of parting and to come to terms with their religious past.
- We will be aware of the feelings of others and try to avoid a confrontational language of conquests in relation to countries dominated by other religions.
- We consider that coercion and manipulation never have a role in missionary activities.
- We will try to be honest in what we promise as a result of joining our religion.
- As a general rule, we will not undertake undercover missionary activities and will respect the laws of the country.

³ Hereafter we only use the word “religion”, for clarity and a smoother reading of the text

2.3 Employing means of missionary activities ethically

Missionary activities do not only communicate a religion or worldview through verbal communication. They also included a wide range of related activities employed to promote the religion or worldview as an option for others to accept. The following sections look at some of these activities.

2.3.1 Missionary activities and educational services

- When providing education to others, we will be clear about our mission statements or benchmarks for mission i.e. the character of our institution in terms of its religion or worldview.
- We acknowledge the right of schools to promote its own belief tradition. However, using the offer of education merely as a tool to gain a foothold within another religious group should not take place.
- We encourage preschools and schools to respect the religious affiliation of the pupils and not to involve them in religious activities or expose them to religious propagation without explicit and voluntary consent of their parents or legal guardians. We will not prevent or discourage such children from practising the religion of their family when staying in the institution
- We encourage schools which provide denominational religious instructions to also enable access to alternative religious instruction to pupils with different religious affiliation, where such instruction is customary.

2.3.2 Missionary activities and charitable work

- We consider charity to be an end in itself, not merely a means to convert people.
- We will not combine charity with preaching in ways that impair the freedom of the recipients to chose whether or not to listen.
- When giving charity, we will do that without any explicit or implicit obligations upon the part of the recipient, e.g. demands of participation in the religious activities in the donor community or of expressing acceptance of its religion.
- We will try to be aware of the weakness felt by many destitute in asserting their religious identity and assure ourselves that expressions of acceptance and participation in religious activities are genuine.
- When helping people in vulnerable situations, such as refugees, we will take care to give them time to consider carefully any new religious choice.
- When helping people in other disadvantaged situation, they should first be helped to improve their situation in life before being exposed to any attempt to convert them.
- We will be transparent with regard to the religious affiliation of our organisation and our mission statements when doing charitable work. We consider it appropriate to respond to genuine enquiries about our affiliation.

2.4 Missionary activities, minors and women

- We realise that children and women (in many contexts and countries) are vulnerable groups. We consider it therefore essential that cultural differences are understood so that conflicts due to these are avoided.
- In accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (art 14), we will respect the rights of the parents to give their children an upbringing in accordance with their beliefs in all relevant circumstances.
- We will be sensitive to the development of the child as a free adherent to any religion or none. As a general rule, missionary activities should not be directed at minors without informed, explicit and voluntary consent by children and parents/guardians.
- Sunday schools and similar forms of religious tuition should be directed at children with similar religious background. In the case of other children with other backgrounds, we will be particularly careful to obtain genuine consent to participation from their parents or legal guardians.
- In case of a minor wanting to convert to our religion, we would establish a dialogue with its parents with the aim of maintaining good relationship between the parents and their child.
- We recognize that women "have the right to have or adopt a religion or belief of her choice" (CCPR, art 18), and the "freedom to change her religion or belief" (DHR, art. 18) independent of decisions taken by her husband or family. This also includes the right to retain her own religion in cases where her husband or family convert.

- We will act with extreme care in cases where we know that there is a danger that a woman will come into conflict with her family (husband/father) if she should choose to convert as a result of our activities. We will do our utmost to ensure that such a conflict does not arise.

3 Those to whom missionary activities are directed

As mentioned in point 3.1 the focus of a code of conduct should be on organisations. However, groups of people that are targeted by missionary activities vary greatly as to their level of formal religious organisation. Many groups have no formal organisation connecting them to a religious leadership beyond the local community. Many groups, especially those belonging to indigenous peoples, do not distinguish between secular and religious leadership. Being aware of this, we also need to have a focus on individuals as well as various local social groups, as partners in a dialogue on how to conduct and respond to missionary activities.

3.1 Responding responsibly to missionary activities

- We recognise that the most fundamental of all human rights connected with freedom of religion of the individual is “the right to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice” (CCPR, art. 18) or “freedom to change his religion or belief” (DHR, art. 18).
- We recognise the right to manifest religion or belief in teaching (CCPR, art. 18) and the right to freedom of expression (CCPR, art. 19) in the context of missionary activities.
- In a situation where another religion is propagated in our community by means that we consider unethical in our community, we will first try to solve the issue by direct contact with those involved in the propagation.
- If the problems persist, we will bring them to the attention of leaders in our religious community.
- We encourage the establishment of inter-religious councils for the purpose of mediation or dialogue to deal with problems connected with missionary activities.
- We will appeal to legal measures in conformity with international human rights standards when mediation or dialogue do not lead to satisfactory solutions in protecting our rights to maintain our religion or belief in situations where we consider such rights being violated through the missionary activities of others..