

The Perils of Pioneering: Responsible Logistics for Hostile Places

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Overview: Doing logistics well in potentially dangerous and antagonistic settings: that is quite a task! This article explores this subject via a team which went through sudden expulsion from their host country. There is much to learn as the authors discuss the salient factors which affect outcomes: good preparation, group cohesion, contingency plans, debriefing, organizational support, and the concern for persecuted national believers.

*And this Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world
for a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come (Matthew 24:14).*

We watch and wait, eager for the Day of the Lord's return. Yet, Matthew 24:14 is quite clear that this will happen only after all nations have had an opportunity to hear the Good News of reconciliation through the cross, and have responded one way or another to the revelation of God. The word translated as "nations" in this verse comes from the Greek *ethne*, from which we get "ethnic." *Ethne* refers to people who are grouped together by their common language, tribal or cultural identity, rather than the political groupings we term as "nations" in English today. Although there are some 200 political countries in the world now, these contain an estimated 24,000 ethnic or people groups.

Currently, the best research estimates that of these approximately 24,000 people groups, two-thirds have access to the gospel. That is, the members of these 16,000+ people groups currently have opportunity to understand and evaluate the claims of Christ and respond to His invitation to enter His Kingdom. For these, there is a fellowship of followers of Christ speaking their language, able to communicate with them, with perhaps portions of the Bible in their language available to them. But one-third of the world's distinct people groups--the *ethne*--are as yet without any access to the gospel. They still wait to hear.

Many of these remaining people groups are still unreached for obvious reasons. Some have been inaccessible (e.g., isolated due to geography or political climate) or overlooked (e.g., hidden among larger surrounding cultural groups or denied a voice by political powers). The world-wide Church is just now marshaling resources to reach out to them. Other people groups, though, have historically demonstrated resistance or hostility to the gospel. Encountering this resistance, Christians have often chosen a path of "lesser" resistance, focusing instead on people groups who seem more open to hear the Gospel message.

Obviously, these more resistant people groups are included in the Great Commission of Jesus (Matthew 28:18-20). In recent years the Church has become alert to their existence and has increasingly focused its mission efforts on them, sending bearers of the Good News to many environments which are inhospitable--physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. Of these remaining unreached groups, the largest bloc by far are those peoples who are identified with or live under the influence of Islam. They comprise almost half of the individuals in unreached people groups today. This case study describes an effort by the mission agency Frontiers to reach one such unreached Muslim group, and the cost required. Before launching into the case study itself, it will be helpful to first better understand Frontiers and its approach.

Frontiers--The Nature of our Ministry and Work

Frontiers is a relatively young mission agency, born out of the strategic emphases of "unreached peoples" in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Founded in 1983 by Dr. Greg Livingstone, Frontiers accepted a mandate to focus solely on unreached Muslim people groups. This mandate grew out of the then-current reality that very few missionaries and few resources of the Church were focused on Muslim peoples, due primarily to their perceived hostility/resistance to the gospel. An early slogan of Frontiers reflected these statistics: "Missionaries to Muslims are one in a million. Literally!"

Today Frontiers is comprised of more than 600 missionaries on more than 100 teams throughout the Muslim world. These teams draw candidates and resources from 20 Frontiers “sending bases” in North and South America, Europe, Asia, and Africa. A small international office in England coordinates both the teams and sending bases.

Frontiers are a mission agency that has adapted to the realities of communicating the gospel in harsh and often hostile environments. The agency is relatively decentralized, allowing teams and sending bases wide latitude in making decisions which affect the pursuit of their objectives in their respective cultural contexts. Frontiers has adopted a “flat” organizational structure with a minimum of hierarchy between teams or sending bases and the international office.

With such a loose structure, an organization like Frontiers needs a clear common vision and ethos to maintain cohesion and fulfill its mandate. The glue holding Frontiers together is a set of six core principles to which all members of the mission agree:

We only work among Muslim peoples. As mentioned above, this focus seeks to redress the historical under-representation of mission effort among Muslim peoples.

We work in teams. Frontiers defines a team as at least six adults working together in the same geographical area and among the same Muslim people group. A healthy team residing among the people to whom they have been called provides a powerful redemptive testimony through community and provides continuity of effort over time.

We plant churches. We are not content to see a few individuals enter the Kingdom but are called to see viable fellowships of Muslim Background Believers (MBBs) established and multiplying within their culture. We have a theology of “closure” in which the missionary team reduces their influence as the church matures and eventually moves to a partnering or participation stage with the MBB church, or even withdraws completely.

We are eager for coaching and accountability. Each team requires some pre-field training, and each sending base provides candidate schools. Most of the training in Frontiers, however, is done in the field through on-site coaching by individuals with skills relevant to that field and that team’s phase of church planting, as well as providing ongoing mentoring structures for accountability, encouragement, and leadership development.

We are “grace oriented.” We are unified under what we consider essentials: our statement of faith, core principles, and the ethos of Frontiers. Beyond this, we are an interdenominational agency that allows significant diversity of evangelical doctrine and theology, lifestyle, and strategy for each team and field, defined primarily by the team leaders.

We are “field-governed.” The highest governing body in Frontiers is an International Council made up of all team leaders, the International Director and the International Field Director of Frontiers. The rationale behind this is that those actually engaged in church planting on Muslim soil should have the final decision on how the organization is shaped to serve this mandate.

In addition to these core principles, there is a significant amount of shared ethos in the Frontiers organizational culture. For example, only a handful of field workers have “missionary visas,” as most gain residency among the people to whom they are called through their professional skills, a business, or other activity. Frontiers teams also practice an incarnational approach to communicating the Gospel by adapting the message to the local language and culture in ways that reduce any foreign element, without compromising the Scriptural integrity of the message God has sent for all peoples.

Because of the oppressive and sometimes hostile nature of the environments in which we work, we have had to develop a practical theology of sacrifice and suffering. Not only is there spiritual and often political resistance to the Gospel on Muslim fields, but also our team members must balance the responsibilities of their residency role (often a full-time job); language and culture learning, ministry to nationals, team life, family; and for leaders, a leadership role. In the midst of all these stresses, the missionaries are motivated by a deep calling to minister to the people to whom God has brought them.

We have had to ensure that our philosophy of member care, along with our crisis and contingency management approach, respect what God asks of our workers, even though it sometimes goes against a prevailing attitude of “safety, security, and reduction of stress levels at all costs” that is characteristic of many Western cultures. Although no Frontiers worker morbidly seeks to or desires others to go through pain, sacrifice, or suffering, we have come to realize that such experiences normally, according to Scripture and history, accompany the spread of God’s Kingdom.

The Gospel confronts all cultures in some way and is often threatening to people's vested interests, beliefs, values, and traditions. This conflict often triggers persecution of those wanting to embrace the gospel truth. For many who put their faith in Jesus, the Lord becomes the pearl of such great value to them, that they are willing to withstand the fires of persecution.

Our field workers relate amazing testimonies from their front-line experiences. God walks with them at the cutting edge of His Kingdom. As they are willing to follow His leading, no matter the cost, He demonstrates His sovereignty and faithfulness at depths they experienced less frequently while back in their home cultures, where deep dependency on God might seem unnatural, unnecessary, or even frightening to complacent Christians.

The Momboc Case Study

This case study is part of living history, a story that is continuing to unfold and develop even at the time of this writing. Due to reasons that will become clear below, names and details that identify the actual area have been changed to protect believers and the ongoing outreach.

We want to share this story to encourage other Christians who are obeying a calling to plant churches where Christ is not yet known. And to encourage those who support them by holding the “lifelines”. Good logistical support, like good crisis logistics, are so important!

This story is a testimony, among many in the world today, of the power of the gospel breaking into the darkness of one people group--the Momboc. We also share this story in hopes that it may help those who find it difficult to imagine the gospel being a reason for anyone to go through suffering or persecution. We trust that by reading this testimony, they would be prompted to pray for their brothers and sisters in Christ who suffer for their faith. And that they would be able to test their own faith by putting themselves in the shoes of their brothers and sisters in Momboc.

We want the testimony of God's faithfulness to clearly shine. God is faithful to fulfill His Word in calling out individuals from the Momboc culture to become part of His kingdom, as well as God's faithfulness to walk with His beloved children through the dark valley. We count it as joy that, "it has been granted to us not only to believe in Jesus, but also to suffer for Him" (Philippians 1.27-30). There will be members of the church of Momboc among the throngs gathered before the throne worshipping the Lamb. (Revelations 7:9-17) We now know some of their names, and have had the privilege of personally hearing some of their first expressions of worship.

Some Background

Momboc is a small area of the Muslim world which prides itself on being 100% Muslim. In fact, the government of the Momboc province requires that all citizens conform to the Islamic beliefs approved and promoted by the civil government. There is no freedom of religious expression in this province, and the government has demonstrated that it has no tolerance for dissension. It will utilize the full force of the state to ensure compliance with the government sanctioned form of Islam. The government specifically opposes other forms of Islam as well as Christianity.

In spite of this environment of hostility to the Christian faith, there had been a quiet missions effort in the area for at least thirteen years prior to the crisis. Frontiers workers and other Christians from many nations, employed in a variety of professions, were attempting to bless the nation with the contribution of their skills and love, befriending many Mombocs and communicating the gospel to them.

This communication involved dedicated efforts to learn the local language without the aid of traditional language courses or grammar helps, alertness to learn the local culture and worldview, and the many “lessons” necessary to learn how to build sincere trust relationships with Mombocs. This was very hard work, often frustrating and thankless, at other times sweetened by the reward of reciprocated trust and. Each team family and individual had a network of Christians behind them in their home countries, supporting them in prayer, encouragement, accountability, and in many practical ways. Without this support, they would not have been able to persevere for the initial, seemingly fruitless years.

Before moving to the Momboc province, each Frontiers team member had signed an agreement with their team leader that set out the expectations, goals, and methods of the team and ministry. Each had gone through pre-field training which included: learning about Islam and folk Islam, how to acquire a new language without the benefit of language schools, and basic cross-cultural awareness and church-planting principles. In addition, most attended a Frontiers candidate program for orientation.

The team leader interviewed candidates applying to the field, and made the final decision whether to accept the individual or couple onto the team. Candidates joining the Momboc team were encouraged to establish their residence visa in Momboc independent of other team members. Team members offered advice about whom to contact, but new team members entering the province were required to negotiate their own residency.

By 1998, the Frontiers effort in Momboc had grown from one team to three teams, each with a leader who was responsible for helping them focus on their main goal of church planting, encouraging all the team members' spiritual gifts and roles to mesh together, and ensuring accountability between all members. The three teams, though administratively distinct, worked together as one community, interdependent, encouraging one another. The three leaders worked closely together, like elders, for the church planting effort.

Each team met at least weekly for worship, prayer, and continuing discussion of team building and church planting issues. The leaders took part in annual meetings outside of the country that enabled them to interact with leaders from other Muslim fields. Team leaders established regular accountability (written and face-to-face) for team members. They themselves were also accountable monthly to their overseer, based outside the country (who had begun the church planting work among the Mombocs), who mentored them and supported them in their roles.

The Lord used these efforts to bring a small number of Momboc people into the Kingdom of God. Those who had chosen to be baptized were meeting weekly to worship and study portions of the Bible together, and their family and friends were being attracted to Jesus. In close co-operation with these followers of *Isa al Masih* (Jesus the Messiah), Frontiers missionaries completed the first translations of Bible portions, wrote and produced indigenous worship songs, and organized a radio broadcast in the Momboc language.

Those involved in discipling the MBB's (Muslim-Background Believers) were careful to discuss often the potential persecution that would come as their faith became more apparent to their families, friends, and political leaders. The MBB's were well aware of the dangers, more than the expatriates even, as they all personally knew fellow Mombocs who had been arrested and mistreated for other reasons. They knew that in the past, and very recently, Momboc citizens who had openly begun to follow Jesus had been interrogated mercilessly, exiled to distant parts of the province, and had reputedly recanted their faith. For some of those persecuted believers, this treatment resulted in long-term mental problems.

Surprisingly, government officials in one province were well aware of the missionary intentions of many foreigners working in their area, but were willing to “look the other way”. Apparently these missionaries enjoyed a good reputation and were perceived as having a positive influence among the people. One government minister also mentioned in a conversation with a Frontiers team member, “...and of course [the Christian workers] could not be successful anyway.”

The teams also discussed and agreed upon a contingency plan in the case of a believer being arrested and subjected to governmental persecution, or in the case of a team member being arrested and accused of anti-government activity. The team members had all been vigilant over the years to maintain a certain level of security, primarily ensuring that their ministry was not explicitly described in printed publications.

In 1998, the government became aware that portions of Scripture had been published in the language of the Momboc. In addition, a weekly radio program in the Momboc language began being broadcast into the province, outside of governmental control, which looked at Scriptural principles applied to everyday Momboc life. These incidents sparked a heated political debate. It was an election year. A small minority of Muslim fundamentalists in the province, who were trying to build a local power base of their own, accused the incumbent official of allowing Christianity to enter the province during his term of office. Apparently, to demonstrate his Islamic credentials, the government official who was running for re-election quietly organized a crackdown on perceived Christian activity throughout the area. At that time a relative of one of the Momboc believers, angered by a recent family conflict, went to government police headquarters and personally identified all the Momboc believers and foreign missionaries he knew.

Search, Seizure, Interrogation, Expulsion

Over a two-day period in June 1998, Momboc government police raided the homes of more than a dozen foreign families (some with Frontiers, some not). Government police arrived unannounced at the homes and systematically searched the premises without any warrants, confiscating all literature, music, files, computers, photographs, and other media suspected of being linked to Christianity. They were especially interested in any materials in the local language.

The government brought in specialists to break into even secure files on the computers, including personal diaries, and church-planting training materials. In the months that followed, various parts of this confidential information were published in the local paper or spread by word of mouth from the police officials to other involved in the crisis. Photographs were used to identify Momboc people who had been friends with the team members and believers, and thus were under suspicion of being favorable to Christianity themselves.

During the next several days, all the foreigners whose homes had been searched were brought to police headquarters in the capital city. Their passports were taken, and they were submitted to questioning. After hours of interrogation, they were coerced into signing statements that often did not reflect their views or included statements or confessions they had not said, nor with which they agreed. They were also asked to review the lists of confiscated items, though they were told that none would be returned any time soon.

While this was happening, the government police also rounded up at least 60 Momboc citizens on the charge of “being Christian” and jailed them. Many of these citizens were in fact followers of Jesus (some were not related to the Frontiers team) or sympathetic to the gospel, though some were not.

While the foreigners waited for hours in the police headquarters, their Momboc friends were brought in, possibly to allow the police to gauge the reaction between them--whether they recognized or acknowledged each other. These meetings seemed to be carefully staged to give the Momboc believers the impression that their foreign friends were choosing to betray them and then leave the province painlessly. Both the foreigners and the Momboc believers agonized over how to respond during these unexpected meetings, as well as how to answer during the interrogations. Most of the foreigners felt high levels of guilt and regret, no matter whether they acknowledged the MBBs or not in these staged meetings, and no matter how they answered the questions.

Each foreign family was informed of their imminent deportation from the province, and they quickly began to pack and prepare for leaving. Within the highly charged environment there were understandably high levels of stress for all of the families preparing to be deported. Stresses included

concern for the local believers, concern for what might be happening to other team members, repeated trips to the police station for questioning, unexpected visits by police at any hour of the day, the inability to go out to communicate with employers and their friends, and the injunction to stay in their homes. Many felt sick and nauseous, had trouble sleeping, and lost their appetites. Some at times even forgot simple tasks like feeding their children regularly.

Within ten days of the initial raids, almost all foreigners under investigation had been deported from the province and forced to sign a statement that they had broken local laws (though no law was specified) and were “expelled for life.” Government police escorted those expelled to the plane, even accompanying some of them on the flight to a nearby country. Expelled team members were from several countries, and personnel from their respective embassies met them at the airport when they disembarked from the Momboc flight.

After the foreigners were expelled, most of the Momboc believers were imprisoned along with the other Momboc people being accused as sympathetic to Christians. The believers were kept in prison for several months, with repeated interrogations and teachings designed to force them to return to Islamic beliefs. One Momboc citizen was singled out as the ringleader and subjected to torture, beatings, and solitary confinement for five months.

The Momboc citizens who were arrested were all taken without warning--simply a knock on the door by uniformed men, and then confinement at the police station. Their families were at first given no contact with them, although as the months progressed, some husbands were allowed a ten-minute visit once a week with their wives. The families faced strong community disapproval. However, not one of the unbelieving spouses sought divorce from their imprisoned believing spouse during this time or even later. This is significant as the Momboc area is infamous for its very high divorce rate and lack of commitment in marriage relationships.

Frontiers' Response to the Crisis

The Frontiers teams in Momboc had prepared a contingency plan with protocols for handling a variety of field crises. Within hours of the raids by the government police, they began to put this plan into effect.

As part of this plan, the leaders of the three teams carefully managed the flow of information about the crisis, meeting frequently to assess the situation. Team members kept in touch with each other through visits, and communicated updates to their leaders as the situation developed. Rumors about the crisis were controlled by ensuring that the facts were checked and verified, and the team members agreed on a common response before they communicated with contacts outside the country.

All information was channeled to the team leaders' overseer outside the country via email and phone through one designated spokesperson. Team members agreed to not speak with the local or international press without permission. Team members shared information with family or close friends, but only that information which had been agreed to by the leaders and other team members. Meanwhile the team leaders' overseer was watching closely, evaluating how best to support the teams through the crisis, and which information to share with outsiders for prayer and action.

The contingency plan stipulated that if team members were expelled, they would gather to be debriefed in a neutral country before returning to their home country. It was important that they be given a chance to process their experience before facing family, friends, and churches. They managed to assemble at the agreed upon meeting point at a specific hotel in a nearby country, after first making contact with the embassies of their home countries to report what had happened to them and file a report asking for the return of their personal items.

Meanwhile, the Frontiers international office quickly pulled together a crisis debriefing team, comprised of a psychologist who had been in contact with several team members over the past years, the Momboc team overseer-mentors, and a representative from a Frontiers sending base. This debriefing team quickly disengaged from their other responsibilities and flew out at short notice to be at the team assembly point as the first team members began to arrive.

A pool of funds managed by the International Headquarters covered the costs of this trip for them. The psychologist brought special treats for the children of the teams, to encourage them during the debriefing. He also brought basic medications, and a water filter to ensure none became more ill during this high stress time in an area with poor standards of cleanliness.

In the first meeting, the debriefing team was introduced, and the basic plan for the debriefing was discussed. The debrief team sketched out an introduction to the different phases individuals and groups go through when facing a serious crisis or “critical incident:”

Alarm Phase. Shocked and stunned; adjust and make sense of what is happening; individuals wonder if it will mean prison, torture, nothing significant, etc.

Mobilization Phase. Recover from initial shock and begin to develop plans; or try to remember contingency plans.

Action Phase. High level of activity, constructive work and cooperation: diligent and heroic phase; also produces high levels of stress and possibly frustration.

Let-Down Phase. Transition from the crisis experience back to normal routine; often the most intense period as feelings that were suppressed, denied, or put on hold during the crisis now surface.

Letting Go Phase. Sadness, depression, restlessness, inability to get involved with regular work responsibilities, annoyance at work; often involves coming out of “emotional armor,” feelings of estrangement or alienation from those who didn’t go through the trauma.

All the team families were essentially still in the *action phase* as they arrived at the hotel. The first deported team members noticed that government police had followed them to the hotel that their country’s embassy had arranged for their initial arrival. They were still feeling on “high alert” as they later arrived at the assembly point. In fact, it took several days to successfully transition as a group from the action phase to the let-down phase because team members who arrived later, still full of adrenaline from their experience with the government police, reactivated the action phase feelings of those who had arrived earlier.

As the group settled, the team members were encouraged to tell their stories--relating the facts of what happened to them--and also to hear the stories of other team members which they had not had the chance to either hear or fully understand on the field. This was done as a large group, with the psychologist moderating and helping the stories to be told in an orderly manner. Many discussed tough decisions they faced and vivid thoughts or sensory memories (sounds, smells, sights) from their experience. Many relived step by step all the people they had interacted with during the last days. The de-briefing staff encouraged the team members to stay with just the facts at this point, and reserve the emotional responses for a later stage of the debriefing. Those with children had to take turns being in this meeting, as there was no ready system of child-care available. The psychologist also used a similar approach (age-appropriate) to work with the children of the families, helping them to process, come to terms with, and begin to understand what they and their parents had been through. There were eight children at the debriefing, all under age eight.

The debriefing took several days and helped everyone get a much better understanding of the full picture of the crisis. Many were encouraged by the instances of God’s intervention and the positive accounts/perspectives of others, especially instances involving Momboc friends. Many Momboc friends cared for them during these days of crisis in Momboc, at great risk to themselves, by providing meals for the families on their own initiative, helping care for the children while parents went through interrogations, helping families to pack and close up their houses, and taking the risk to pass on last messages to other close friends.

The debriefing team encouraged all team members to write up their stories during the next few days--both as a means to help them process their experiences as well as to provide a record of their part in the incident. Within a month after the debriefing sessions these stories had been gathered into one document that all could read, to see the overall picture of what they had been through.

Once the missionaries had told their personal stories, the debriefing staff encouraged the team members to answer the question: "What did this mean to me personally?" Many then talked about their anger, fear, frustration, sense of having betrayed the Momboc believers, sense of having been betrayed, stress, confusion, guilt, grief, etc. As they listened to each other, empathized and identified, many began to gain more emotional distance from the experience and a lessening of the pain and intensity. They felt a great relief in being able to address these issues in a safe and controlled environment with trusted team members.

In the next stage of debriefing, team members were encouraged to interact with each other--to discuss any conflicts or other relational issues that needed resolution. They had an opportunity to say the things they felt they needed to say to others on the team, and to express appreciation or encouragement.

The focus then shifted to the next steps. Many on the team were quite concerned with the national believers who had been left behind, especially those in prison for their faith. They drafted plans to start an international prayer and letter writing campaign built around the lack of freedom of religious expression in Momboc.

The representatives from the international office also agreed that expelled team members would continue to be recognized as members of the three teams and as field missionaries by Frontiers for the next six months. This would allow the team members to retain an identity in Frontiers while reflecting on what they should do next. Plans were made to hold, at the end of this six-month period, a small team conference at which time the team would be officially dissolved. Individuals would then be released to pursue the Lord's directions for them; namely, whether to continue work with Momboc people, to join a team on another Muslim field or with another agency, or to leave missions work altogether. This promise of continued identity as Frontiers team members gave them a sense of security in the midst of so many abrupt changes: changes of home, country, job, role, ministry, friends, daily routine, neighbors, language, essential lifestyle, "team family," and so on.

The team conference was subsequently held in January 1999 in Europe, and all of the expelled team members attended. It provided an excellent opportunity for them to interact with each other and with other invitees who had a vital interest in the Momboc effort. Also attending were those who had earlier been part of the teams (who had left Momboc before the year of the expulsion) as well as new candidates who felt they were being called to minister in the future to Momboc people. The participants discussed their insights and the lessons learned in many aspects of their lives and ministry among the Momboc people. They prayed together often. The conference helped the group bring closure to the teams' efforts thus far, and to commission the teams of the future.

The Next Two Years

Due to international pressure applied through the efforts of the expelled team members, all Momboc believers were released from prison within six months. They returned to and remain in their family and community context. This presence in Momboc is very important: those who have believed have not been "extracted" or exiled from their culture; instead their testimony remains. Several of these Momboc people, whom expelled team members have been able to contact and debrief, have retained their faith despite torture and abuse. Other MBBs have not been available to contact, we can only hear rumors of their faith or renouncing of faith, and continue to pray that the truth of Jesus which they once embraced would keep stirring in their hearts.

Of the Frontiers missionaries expelled from or prevented from returning to Momboc, sixteen have chosen to continue in a church planting effort among Momboc people, eight have pursued or are planning to pursue ministry to other mission fields, and three have left missions to pursue other work. Several of the expelled team members have been able to make face-to-face contact with the Momboc

believers who went through the torture and imprisonment, to debrief them, and help them to work through the crisis in ways similar to those used by the debrief team.

Although we have no way of hearing direct news about all the believers, we have received second-hand reports from Momboc friends in the area. There are indications that a few Momboc believers are continuing on in their faith, seeking teaching and fellowship whenever they are able to travel outside of the province. As yet, there is no sign that they are daring to fellowship with each other while inside the province. They have been threatened with yet worse punishment if they are accused of or found to be praying to Jesus, talking about Him, or using any literature about Him.

There are also indications that interest in the Gospel has increased in the province significantly due to sympathy for those imprisoned and expelled during the crisis. In addition, the earlier church planting strategies continue via the ongoing efforts in translation, radio broadcasts, and development of indigenous worship songs. This interest continues despite a climate of extreme tension and fear. There are still frequent government warnings against Christianity and threats of punishment to those who spread news about Jesus, openly follow Him, or neglect to report others who do these things. The general population continues to be warned about the methods that may be used by missionaries, including friendliness, helpfulness, and desire to learn the local language.

Recently, some team members who had been expelled have settled in provinces near the Momboc province to re-establish ministry among the Momboc people. All of these team members who have resumed ministry with the Momboc people have had to work through difficult emotions and fears as they return to proximity to the province. In their new locations they find they must minister in a very different way than they were able while in Momboc. Free from the influence of the Momboc government, they have new freedom in communicating the Gospel, and can openly discuss the crisis they went through with their Momboc friends. Even so, many still fight off irrational fears of being expelled suddenly from their new location. And they, along with those who have not returned to face-to-face Momboc ministry, continue to experience the normal grief involved in such an abrupt change of life which entailed so many losses. Even the supportive response to the crisis described in this paper cannot erase the trauma of the event.

News of the Momboc experience sparked interest in a variety of mission agencies in how to effectively assist MBBs under persecution in hostile environments. Early in 1999, a multi-agency steering committee was formed in Europe from Elam, Frontiers, TearFund, Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, People International, and YWAM to hold a consultation exploring social, cultural, economic, legal, and human right factors MBBs must address as they respond to the gospel.

This consultation was held in February 2001, and two-thirds of the attendees were MBB leaders. Participants prepared case studies, from the specific cultural contexts and perspectives of MBBs, reflecting on principles and lessons learned from their personal experiences. These case studies were reviewed and common patterns and principles identified. The principles were then used as a basis for in-depth discussions at the consultation which resulted in an initial list of best practice principles compiled by MBB leaders. This list will soon be published to stimulate a wider discussion and refinement of these principles among those involved in Muslim ministry.

The story of the Momboc field is, of course, not finished, and this case study is only one small chapter of a book that covers hundreds of years of God's redemptive work. Even so, it is clear that in this case what the enemy of human souls intended for evil, God is using for good, in ways we would never have imagined. Member care that recognizes the role of sacrifice and suffering has been critical to the process. Such member care helped to bridge the crisis effectively and ensure that the effort to bring Good News to the Momboc people continues--and that captives are being set free.

Reflection and Discussion

1. What were the logistical factors that helped this team evacuate and work through the trauma of expulsion?
2. Based on the information in this case study, identify three things stand out as being done well, and three areas that could have been improved.
3. Has your mission agency/sending church developed a “theology of suffering” to help it evaluate how to proactively (rather than reactively) respond to persecution on its fields, both for missionaries and national believers? If so, what are the basic points?
4. In your organization, what are some of the main logistics needed to prepare missionaries and teams for crises? For example, what contingency plans are in place to anticipate the 3-5 most likely crises for individual mission fields? Has a secure, safe and neutral “assembly site” been identified where an adequate debriefing can be held? Has a debriefing team been identified, trained in critical incident debriefing techniques and made available to respond to such situations?
5. Is preparation for persecution part of the discipling program for national believers? What plans and/or protocols have been made for national believers left behind?

Some Suggested Readings

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