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PUBLIC AFFAIRS AND RELIGIOUS LIBERTY— DEPARTMENTAL POLICIES

FL 05 Philosophy

The use of force and coercion is inimical to authentic religion. God accepts homage and worship only when they are freely given. While all human rights are of great importance, religious liberty is unique and of special significance. It deals not only with the inter-human dimension, but with a person's relationship with God, the Creator. Seventh-day Adventists therefore view religious liberty as the primordial human right that undergirds all human rights.

Separation of church and state offers the best safeguard for religious liberty and is in harmony with Jesus' statement, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" (Matt 22:21). The Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Department encourages, where feasible, such separation. The Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Department also believes that the union of church and state is a sure formula for discrimination and intolerance and offers a fertile soil for the spread of persecution.

In view of its divinely ordained role, civil government is entitled to respectful and willing obedience, to the extent that civil laws and regulations are not in conflict with God's requirements, for it is necessary "to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

FL 05 05 Religious Liberty—1. Religious liberty includes the fundamental human right to have, adopt, or change one's religion or religious belief according to conscience and to manifest and practice one's religion individually or in fellowship with other believers, in prayer, devotions, witness, and teaching, including the observance of a weekly day of rest and worship in harmony with the precepts of one's religion, subject to respect for the equivalent rights of others.

2. Religious liberty also includes the right to publish literature, operate church schools at all levels, as well as other institutions, ecclesiastic control of doctrine, polity and appointment of ministers and church officials, without outside interference, and the right to have regular international contacts and relationships with church organisations and other faith groups in all parts of the world.

FL 10 Purpose

The Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Department, one of the original core departments of the Church, was established to promote and maintain religious liberty, with particular emphasis upon individual liberty of conscience. In so doing, the Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Department is involved in government relations, inter-church contacts and, where indicated, networks with non-governmental organisations which have kindred goals in upholding

religious freedom. The department not only works for the religious liberties of both individual church members and organised entities of the Church, but also supports the rightful religious liberties of all people.

In view of the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the “great controversy” and the climactic events of human history involving union of church and state, eliminating the free exercise of religion, and resulting in persecution of the faithful remnant, the Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Department monitors and seeks to interpret prudently current trends that may reflect the prophetic scenario.

FL 15 Departmental Responsibilities

1. The General Conference Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Department supports the various divisions in the promotion of the annual Religious Liberty Sabbath and special offerings for religious liberty ministry.

2. The Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Department director of the Division serves as an adviser for its fields, and facilitates assistance from the General Conference PARL Department as needed.

FL 20 International Religious Liberty Association

The Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Department carries on a number of functions in co-operation with the International Religious Liberty Association. Founded in 1888 by Seventh-day Adventists and re-organised in 1946, the International Religious Liberty Association has enlarged its sphere of support and activity by including on both its Board of Directors and Board of Experts, religious liberty advocates from different faith communities. The director of the Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Department serves as Secretary General of the International Religious Liberty Association. One of the main activities of the association is the conducting of international and regional religious liberty congresses, conferences, and seminars.

FL 25 Religious Liberty Litigation

In various countries it may become necessary from time to time to take legal action in defense of the religious liberty rights of church organisations or individuals, including the right of Sabbath observance. However, before resorting to the courts, every effort should be made to settle matters equitably in support of free exercise of religion. Prudence should always prevail when it appears advisable to seek rights or redress through the judicial system, not the least because of the heavy costs that can be incurred and the possible far-reaching consequences of court decisions.

Each union shall establish procedures governing religious liberty litigation.