

Security Briefs 19 – Strategic Intercultural Relations Part 1

The Changing Security Environment

It's no surprise to most workers that the security environment around the world is seeing some significant changes. Gone are the days when you can show up in a country with your western passport and get a long-term religious worker or residency visa without much trouble. Instead, expats are getting an increased level of scrutiny, both by the government and by the people living around you.

Additionally, the security environment of the country you serve can change rapidly and dramatically with little or no advance warning. Sometimes this can happen almost overnight. "Safe" or low risk countries can become hostile to westerners and Christians very quickly. It isn't uncommon now for global workers to be detained and interrogated by government officials, sometimes even tortured during those interrogations. Sometimes expats can be expelled with little advance notice even after years of residence in that country.

It is important that we begin to prepare for the possibility that this could happen even in a "safe" country. It wasn't long ago that a northern European very western country in the EU sent armed police officers into a Christian school. They detained, interrogated, and immediately deported several global workers with no notice. Ukraine was a country that was among the most open in the world before being invaded by Russia. And Turkey – despite being an Islamic country – moved from a very open country for global workers to one where expats are regularly deported or denied residence visas.

Preparing for a potential change in security environments in your country will go a long way toward easing the stress and burden of the new realities.

Strategic Intercultural Relations

Over the next several episodes, we will be discussing how you can better integrate into your local context. This is both good theology and a good security strategy. Your identity and behavior will shape people's perception of who you are. If people have a good perception of you then they will be less likely to be suspicious of you.

I have borrowed from a sister sending organization for content for this series on developing a strategy for responding to our ever-changing security environments. They call this strategy Strategic Intercultural Relations or SIR, and it can help you thrive in even the most challenging of environments.

SIR has three core elements. The first is Legitimacy – or cultivating your identity in your context. The next is Awareness which refers to understanding yourself and those around you. The final element is Respect. This is behavior that leads to an honorable reputation and open doors for your work.

Now you know.

Check out our next episode where we will begin to discuss the first of these core elements: Legitimacy.