



Integrating Christian Witness

‘You Will Be My Witnesses’

*Unavoidable
witness in the work
of World Vision*



Integrating Christian Witness Series

- 'You Will Be My Witnesses': Unavoidable Witness in the Work of World Vision
- Reflections on Marketing and Fund-raising
- Reflections on Business and Micro-enterprise Development
- Reflections on Advocacy and Justice
- Reflections on Grace-Shaped Leadership
- Extraordinary Witness in Ordinary Ways
- After Liberation, Then What?: Enabling and Protecting Communities in Post-Authoritarian Contexts
- Biblical Foundations for Humanitarian Workers
- Exploring Islam Series

‘You Will Be My Witnesses’

*Unavoidable
witness in the work
of World Vision*

Tim Dearborn

For internal use amongst World Vision staff and boards.
Use with outside parties requires approval from the
Partnership Leader – Christian Commitments.



Integrating Christian Witness Series – no. 1

© 2011 World Vision International

ISBN 978-1-887983-41-9

Author: Tim Dearborn

All rights reserved. No portion of this publication may be reproduced in any form, except for brief excerpts in reviews, without prior permission of the publisher.

Published by Christian Commitments on behalf of World Vision International.

For internal use amongst World Vision staff and boards.
Use with outside parties requires approval from
the Partnership Leader – Christian Commitments.

For further information about this publication or World Vision International publications, or for additional copies of this publication, please contact wvi_publishing@wvi.org.

Series Editor: Tim Dearborn. Editor in Chief: Edna Valdez. Senior Editor: Rebecca Russell. Production Management: Katie Klopman, Ann Abraham. Copyediting: Joan Laflamme. Proofreading: Jo Marie Dooley. Cover Design and Interior Layout: Rebekah Roose, Wayne Dailey.

Preface

Purpose: The purpose of this document is to explore the meaning and implications of World Vision's call to witness to the kingdom of God and the gospel of Christ through our life and work. Its purpose is to guide us toward greater clarity, unity, confidence and credibility in the complex challenges we face in our Christian witness as a humanitarian relief and development organisation.

Use: This document is designed to assist staff in leadership positions in understanding World Vision's commitment that all programmes witness to Christ 'to the fullest extent possible as appropriate for their context'¹ so they can guide their staff and strategies accordingly.

Intention: This document is meant to be a discussion document for internal use.

Questions for reflection and discussion are included at the end of each section.

These reflections are based on presentations at the World Vision International National Directors Conference in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, August 18–20, 2010.

¹ World Vision International, *Ministry Policy on Witness to Jesus Christ* (2004), wvcentral.org.

Contents

Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1. Standards for Ethical Witness	4
Chapter 2. The Preparation of Witnesses.....	15
Chapter 3. Approaches to Witness.....	22
Additional Resources	32

INTRODUCTION

Our Call to Be Witnesses

A problem to manage – or a gift to steward?

Few issues in World Vision's work are more inspiring for some and controversial for others than the commitment in our Mission Statement which is publicly visible for all to see – that we will bear witness to the good news of the kingdom of God and to Jesus Christ.²

A storm of questions arises:

Isn't witness the same as proselytism, and haven't we committed ourselves not to proselytise?

How can World Vision be committed to Christian witness and still work effectively in highly sensitive other-faith contexts?

How can World Vision do this and fulfil the Humanitarian Charter and Red Cross Code of Conduct's commitment both to political and religious impartiality and neutrality?

Everyone in positions of leadership in World Vision has opinions and concerns in response to these questions. We are a diverse organisation of people propelled by God's love who are eager to relieve suffering and seek the well-being of all children. This diversity enriches the quality of our work in various contexts. However, our era of interdependent and

² World Vision International's Mission Statement affirms that we 'witness to the good news of the Kingdom of God . . . and witness to Jesus Christ by life, deed, word and sign that encourages people to respond to the Gospel'.

instant global communication demands that there be enough in common in how we witness for there to be ‘family likeness’ amongst World Vision offices and staff throughout the world. Otherwise, we risk endangering our credibility, our effectiveness and even the lives of our staff.

As followers of Christ we are entrusted with extraordinarily good news:

We believe that God is good and that all people are embraced by God’s concern and care.

We believe that one day all tears will be wiped away, all sorrows will cease and all injustice will end.

We believe that in Christ all creation is reconciled and our divided homes and world will one day experience God’s peace.

We believe that the kingdom of God is coming and one day all people will experience life in all its fullness.

This good news floods our hearts with hope and propels us into the world to give tangible evidence of God’s love.

Central questions about witness

Attitudes towards public witness to Christ vary greatly according to our contexts, backgrounds, church traditions and life experience. The appropriateness of a humanitarian organisation engaging in the verbal expression of faith amongst people who are not necessarily Christian is disputed and even divisive. This doesn’t stem from lack of faith, commitment or confidence in the goodness of the gospel. Rather, it is provoked by three questions:

First, should a Christian humanitarian organisation ever bear verbal witness to faith in Jesus Christ amongst people of another or no faith – or should its witness be through deeds rather than words?

Second, if the organisation bears witness, how does it use its power and influence so that people come to share the faith because of the truth of the gospel – not because of the aid and resources the organisation provides?

Third, how can World Vision's commitment to witness to Christ by life, deed, word and sign be lived out in unity, confidence and joy – so that it's something celebrated rather than something shrouded in fear of doing harm, provoking offense or even damaging children's well-being?

Our commitments are expressed in our Mission Statement, *Policy on Witness to Jesus Christ* and *Ministry Policy on Interfaith Relations*. They have recently been reaffirmed in the 2011 *Affirmation of Christian Witness*, which proclaims, '*World Vision hopes that all we do will bear witness to God's unconditional love and contribute to people experiencing fullness of life as followers of Jesus Christ in an environment that respects their rights and freedom*'.³ Rather than provoking controversy, caution and anxiety, how can our call to be witnesses lead to great joy within us and amongst the people with whom we serve? We are witnesses to 'good news of great joy for all people' (Luke 2:10).

The thesis of this study is that all people and all organisations inevitably and unavoidably witness to something. Through our lives and deeds, even if we never use a single word, we witness to what we value, to what motivates us, and even to what we believe. Therefore, whether to witness isn't an option. All people are witnesses. The central questions are to what do we witness and how do we make sure that our witness occurs in appropriate ways, so that it is indeed 'good news of great joy'?

3 World Vision International's *Affirmation on Christian Witness* (2011), wvcentral.org.

Standards for Ethical Witness

We need to begin with a definition of ‘witness’. To ‘witness’ is to give evidence through how one lives and what one says to what one believes, has done and has experienced. It comes from the language of the courtroom. An attorney and a judge look for any evidence that reveals inconsistency between what the witness says and what the witness has done. Every person and indeed every organisation is constantly ‘cross-examined’ by other people and even by life itself. A witness is credible if his or her life, deeds and words reinforce one another.

“*To ‘witness’ is to give evidence through how one lives and what one says to what one believes, has done and has experienced.*”

For Christians, the call to be witnesses comes from a much closer source than the courtroom. It comes from Jesus himself. In his last words recorded in the Bible, Jesus says, ‘you will be my witnesses’ everywhere in the world (Acts 1:8). At this point we might prefer the cold pressure of the courtroom over the commanding word of Jesus, for the term he uses for *witness* is an uncomfortable one. It’s the word *martyr*. ‘You will be my martyrs...!’ To be a witness means our very lives, at any cost, give evidence of the goodness, love and truth of the God whom we serve.

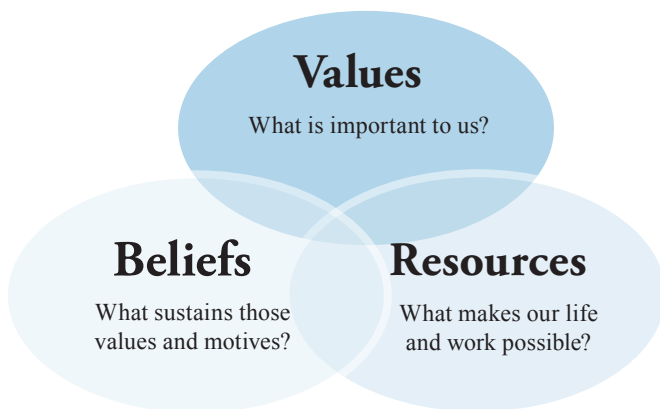
We are called to the integration of the **lives** we live, the **deeds** of love, justice and mercy we do, and the **words** used to explain the beliefs, motives and power behind our lives and deeds. If there is inconsistency between what we profess and how we behave, our witness is not credible or helpful.

Everyone is a witness. Our choice is not whether to witness but rather to what, to whom and how we witness. All persons and organisations, regardless of religious beliefs, are witnesses to what they believe and value. Everything people do, every moment of their life, witnesses to the **values** they hold important, the **beliefs** that sustain those values and motivate their actions, and the **resources** or powers that make their life and work possible.

There is no such thing as a humanitarian organisation that is not also a witnessing organisation.

What other people see as motivating and empowering our actions is that to which we have witnessed. Therefore, explicitly or implicitly, all humanitarian organisations lift something up before the eyes of recipients as the source of the aid that is given, the work that is done and the cause of changes that result.

All people and all organisations unavoidably witness to:



Is witness the same as proselytism? Traditionally, proselytism has been understood as the use of aid or assistance to induce or entice people to hear a religious message and/or convert from one faith to another. World Vision's rejection of proselytism as unethical and inappropriate is in accordance with this definition. However, recently, the understanding of proselytism has broadened and is now commonly understood to be any public activity with the hope others might come to share one's own beliefs and values. By this definition not just public witness but all advertisements, marketing strategies and even public service announcements are proselytising. Even a person giving testimony in court with the desire to persuade others that he or she is telling the truth could be accused of proselytisation. At this point the word's meaning has become so broad that it is no longer helpful. Therefore, we need further clarification regarding ethical and unethical witness.

What is the relation of witness to evangelism? Evangelism is the sharing of the gospel of Christ with the purpose of inviting people to repentance, faith in Jesus Christ, membership in the church and service in the world. **Evangelism** stems from the word 'evangel', which means 'good news' or 'gospel'. It is intentional acts, relationships and proclamation with the goal of people coming to faith in Christ. **Witness** is related to evangelism but has a broader meaning. To witness is to give a first-hand account of something seen, experienced or heard.

To witness is to give evidence of what one believes, values and understands by how one lives, serves and speaks.

This account is given both in words and in actions; it is the natural expression of what one believes, values and understands shown by how one lives, serves and speaks. The credibility of our witness depends on whether what we say matches what we do. If our doing doesn't match our speaking, then neither our lives nor our deeds are credible.

Witness is inevitable and unavoidable

It is impossible to avoid being a witness. It is as natural and inevitable as breathing and eating. Implicit witness occurs in all relief and development activities. Witness is given to one's beliefs about the power of money, particular geo-political issues, specific cultural values, and the meaning and purpose of human life.

But here is our challenge. Many people would suggest it is acceptable for humanitarian organisations to 'witness' to 'secular' values and motives like charity, generosity, courage, justice and compassion. However, the humanitarian workplace must be swept clean of religious witness, such as to God's transforming love and power encountered in Christ, for the humanitarian 'public space' should be spiritually neutral. In reality, this is to impose a particular world view – the separation of personal spiritual life from corporate public life – upon the rest of the world. It is thus, in fact, a form of not only witness but also the promotion of a particular 'religious' point of view. The massive resurgence amongst the world's religions in recent decades and the growing emergence of religious expressions in the 'public square' demonstrate that for most people there is no 'spiritually neutral' space. All of life and all of work are rooted in religious convictions.

If a government, donor or community partner were to insist that we not witness in our work, it might as well insist that we stop working. It is impossible not to witness. Furthermore, to suggest that witness should be private and personal rather than corporate and public is to misunderstand corporate influence and the inevitability of organisational witness. Organisations themselves, and not just the individuals within them, bear witness to something. To deny or ignore this is to risk being deceptive and even manipulative in our work.

The reality that witness is unavoidable raises a complex challenge. Aid agencies bring large amounts of power and influence to bear on human lives at their weakest and most vulnerable points. Clear standards must

be followed to ensure that no harm occurs in the lives of the recipients through our witness. For this reason, rather than simply privatising religious witness or banning it from humanitarian activity – which is actually to impose a particular world view – the challenge for the humanitarian agency is how to work in ways that witness ethically.

Witness must be ethical

The history of colonialism, missionary expansion and Western cultural power through globalisation provides ample evidence of how easy it is to be destructive of the dignity, worth and values of others. This sad history fuels the impossible aspiration that all aid and development should be neutral or silent about matters of belief. The desire not to impose one's beliefs and values is commendable. But not to witness by one's actions and life to what one believes and values is impossible. Therefore, we need clear standards for ethical witness.

Unethical and inappropriate witness uses aid or influence to induce people to hear a religious message and/or to change religious beliefs. It uses power to entice people to adopt a set of values or beliefs rather than ensuring people's freedom from within their own context and culture to determine how to engage with new ideas and approaches to life that are appropriate for them. A health fair or food-distribution programme which requires people to hear a sermon or watch a religious programme prior to being immunised, get mosquito nets, or receive a sack of rice violates humanitarian ethics and discredits the values and beliefs motivating the humanitarian actions.

If people or power must be manipulated in order to get them to embrace one's values and convictions, then the values are not of much value and the convictions are not very commendable.

Ethical aid agencies have agreed to abide by the Red Cross Code of Conduct's 10 principles, which include the commitment that 'aid will not be used to further a particular political or religious standpoint'.⁴

⁴ For the full text of the *Principles of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Response Programmes*, see the **Additional Resources** section.

We endorse the Red Cross Code of Conduct not simply because it establishes the standards of the humanitarian ‘industry’ by which we must abide, but because we believe it is consistent with the will and way of God. Amongst the Principles of Conduct, several apply specifically to what we could call ‘Standards for Witness’ in humanitarian response.⁵

Standard 1: Non-discrimination. ‘Aid is given regardless of the race, creed or nationality of the recipients and without adverse distinction of any kind.’

Standard 2: Need-based. ‘Aid priorities are calculated on the basis of need alone.’

Standard 3: Non-manipulation. ‘Aid will not be used to further a particular political or religious standpoint.’⁶

We seek to evaluate all that we do according to these three standards. Failure to work this way not only violates the Humanitarian Charter,⁷ but more important, it violates the will and way of God. This Red Cross Code rejects linking aid to people adhering to, embracing or accepting a particular political or religious creed. To be ethical, aid cannot implement or be driven by a government’s policies and interests (Article 4, Red Cross Code). However, the code affirms that non-governmental humanitarian agencies have ‘the right to espouse particular political or religious opinions’. At issue is the conviction that ‘assistance will not be dependent on the adherence of recipients to those opinions’ or that ‘the promise,

5 *Principles of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Response Programmes* **does not refer to these as standards nor use these titles. The author has done so to integrate these principles into a broader set of ethical standards for witness.**

6 *Principles of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Response Programmes* (1994).

7 **The Sphere Project, *The Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response: The Sphere Project* (2004).**

delivery or distribution of assistance' will be tied to 'the embracing or acceptance of a particular political or religious creed' (Article 3, Red Cross Code).

The Red Cross Code recognises that NGOs have the 'right to espouse particular political or religious opinions'. Thus the code does not forbid witnessing – espousing a belief. For this reason World Vision can affirm in its Ministry Policies its **hope** that 'people will consider Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour' and its '**desire** that all children would have the opportunity to discover and experience God's love in Jesus Christ to the extent possible given the context'.⁸ We would be dishonest and deceptive if we did not acknowledge this as our hope and desire. At issue is how this gets expressed and is made operational in our work. Every agency hopes its best motives, beliefs and strengths are expressed with integrity through its work. Most government aid is given with the hope of enhancing the donor's credibility and reputation. Corporations provide financial grants and donations of services and commodities partially to enhance their recognition and respect.

World Vision believes that further clarification is required to ensure that we do our work to the highest ethical standards and do not misuse our influence in the lives of vulnerable people, especially children. Therefore we affirm other ethical standards for our work in addition to the principles in the Red Cross Code of Conduct.⁹

Standard 4: Compassion. We will make sure that our work and words express love for people in the ways we would like to be loved if we were in their situation.

⁸ World Vision International, *Ministry Policy on Interfaith Relations* (2009), *Principles to Guide the Formation of National Policies on Spiritual Nurture of Children* (clause 9) (2010), wvcentral.org.

⁹ This is a commonly recognised need. For example, in 2011 the World Council of Churches, the Roman Catholic Church and the World Evangelical Alliance adopted a joint code of conduct for Christian witness, 'Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct', which is included in the Additional Resources section. It is a more lengthy set of principles which parallels World Vision's commitments.

The great commandment of the Christian faith is to ‘love God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind, and to love our neighbours as ourselves’ (Mark 12:29–31). Love for our neighbours is expressed as we ‘do to others as you would have them do to you’ (Matt. 7:12). This neighbourly love is evident in how we love people in need, people who are vulnerable and on the margins of society. It is evidenced in how we love children and seek their well-being. It is also seen in how we love those who might consider themselves our enemies.

If we were in a similar situation as that of people who are poor and oppressed (or even those who see us as their enemies), how would we like to be treated? If we were refugees, if we were desperately seeking food to keep our children alive, if we were victims of war or injustice and people of another faith approached our children seeking to convert them – how would we like to be treated? Our witness only honours the God whom we serve if it is shaped by compassion. If we can’t identify with and share in the suffering and needs of those whom we serve, then we are not serving them in the way of Christ.

The evaluation of our witness will not only require a review of our activities but a review of what has happened in the lives and relationships of recipients.¹⁰

- Do community members feel valued and understood?
- Do they perceive aid workers as genuinely caring for them and to the extent possible attempting to share in their distress and suffering?
- Are their dignity, identity, vision for their future and ability to exercise responsibility enhanced?

¹⁰ Sensitivity to the impact of aid on recipients is expressed in the Red Cross Code in principles 5, 6, 7, 9 and 10 (see Additional Resources for the text).

Standard 5: Communication. We are careful to ensure that we witness not to the power of money or human assistance, but to the power of God's love.

Humanitarian assistance inevitably involves an imbalance of power. Therefore, we must be very careful to ensure that community members understand the source of our power and capacity. If community members think that our actions are possible because of our affluence and expertise, or even because of others' charity and generosity, then we stand on unequal ground. We have the power; they have the need.

As a result, we have only witnessed to resources which are currently inaccessible to them. If community members understand that our lives and work are made possible by the power of God's love, then we stand on level ground. We all have equal access to the 'resources' – the love of God – which empower us. Of course human training, skill, finances and, at times, sacrifice are essential and integral to our work. But that which sustains and compels us in response to human need is the powerful love and justice of God.

Vigilance in what we communicate regarding what empowers us is as important for the well-being of community members as vigilance in financial management and programme design. How do community members describe our sources and use of power?

Standard 6: Respect for others' freedom. We uphold the right and freedom of all people to make choices about their own religious beliefs.¹¹

11 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 18: 'Freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.'

We honour and respect the freedom and responsibility of all people regarding their values, behaviour and beliefs. In this regard we must confess that we are standing with convictions which are not embraced by all societies. Not everyone can embrace the Universal Declaration on Human Rights or the Convention on the Rights of Children. They are not ‘universal’ affirmations,¹² for not all the societies and countries in which we serve grant this freedom to all their members. Our commitment to religious freedom needs to be worked out with wisdom and care.

Therefore, our respect for others mandates that we do not impose unwanted verbal witness upon anyone. All of our work, including our words, must occur with the permission of the community or individual involved, never as an imposition. We invite others to a dialogue rather than engage in an unwanted monologue. We recognise and honour the fact that parents and caregivers have primary responsibility for the spiritual nurture of children.

Of course we affirm our belief that fullness of life and the flourishing of human society are found most fully in Jesus Christ. We hope for all people to be free to receive and respond to the love we encounter in Christ and the strength we find in the Spirit of God. Because God’s love is freely given, we honour others’ freedom and refuse to impose anything upon them. Therefore, whenever we engage in discussions of religious beliefs, we ensure that appropriate consent is given by individuals (if adults) and by caregivers (if children).

12 In 2000, Muslim nations that are members of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation officially resolved to support the Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam. This alternative document affirms in the preface every person’s ‘freedom and right to a dignified life in accordance with the Islamic Shari’ah’ without any discrimination on grounds of ‘race, colour, language, sex, religious belief, political affiliation, social status or other considerations’ (Article 1).

The next two sections explore how to live out these standards for ethical witness so that we honour both the God whom we follow and the people whom we serve.

For discussion and prayer

What is your response to the assertion that all lives and actions witness to something – that witness is unavoidable?

Are the proposed ethical standards for witness helpful or not? Are there other changes you would propose?

Discuss implications of these standards for your own programmes. To what extent are they aligned? What might need to be changed?

The Preparation of Witnesses

Preparing witnesses

Attorneys preparing for trial do extensive work to select and prepare witnesses. The credibility of whatever witness is given depends on the integrity of the person giving it. God is the ultimate witness and is not limited or constrained by what we do. However, no individual or organisation wants what it values and believes to be discredited by its life and words. We seek the same when we prepare our staff.

Since witness is given by our individual as well as our corporate life and work, it is right for Christian organisations to equip staff to be able to live and serve in ways that give appropriate and credible witness. Therefore, the meaning of World Vision's Core Value 'We are Christian' is explained with the statement: 'The staff we engage are equipped by belief and practice to bear this witness.'

*The value and impact of a witness depend
on the seamless intergration of life,
deed and word.*

In stating this we immediately perceive an important opportunity. World Vision embraces the gift of staff members who are followers of other faiths. They exercise vital roles in our work in sensitive and in other-faith contexts as we serve together to relieve oppression and poverty and seek the well-being of children. How can we possibly suggest that they too engage in ‘Christian’ witness without imposing inappropriate and unreasonable expectations on their lives? Although these individuals may not desire to ‘witness to Jesus Christ’, they realise that they serve within a Christian organisation. Therefore, their understanding of World Vision’s Christian identity and commitments is essential. Often, they are the primary spokespersons for World Vision in their communities. They too need to be equipped to represent faithfully or ‘witness to’ what it means for World Vision to be a Christian organisation. Therefore, for example, World Vision Cambodia has for years invited all staff, including those who are Buddhist or of other faiths, to participate in a workshop on holistic Christian witness using the following analogy: ‘If you are witness to an accident between a motorcyclist and a pedestrian, you need to be able to give an accurate account of what you saw. Similarly, when community members ask you about World Vision’s Christian identity, you need to be able to represent accurately our Christian commitments.’¹³

For this to occur – especially in contexts of other faiths or in high-risk situations – significant investment in Christian formation, spiritual nurture and capacity building amongst staff is essential. The 1999 WVI Triennial Council passed a resolution stating, ‘World Vision shall implement intentional programmes for the spiritual formation of all staff, leaders and boards that are appropriate for our diversity as a Partnership.’

13 Materials for this workshop are posted on the Christian Commitments Community of Practice database, wvcentral.org.

By *formation* we don't mean some kind of rigid or authoritarian moulding of people into a particular 'form'. Rather, we mean special attention to the spiritual nurture and preparation of our staff so that they are equipped to represent World Vision's Christian identity accurately in the complex situations in which we serve. Therefore, World Vision's *Ministry Policy on Interfaith Relations* develops precise commitments regarding the nurture and preparation of our staff for work in challenging contexts.

Spiritual nurture of Christian staff

1. **We make special investment** in the selection, orientation and support of staff leaders in these contexts.
2. **We develop a pool of current and potential Christian staff** with special training and orientation for leadership roles in interfaith contexts.
3. **We choose country leadership from mature Christian people** who are familiar with working in interfaith contexts and with World Vision's commitments.
4. **We provide adequate orientation** for Christian staff regarding the dominant religions and cultures in which they serve, as well as World Vision's policies and protocols for work in interfaith contexts.
5. **We make special accommodation** for Christian worship and spiritual nurture by providing additional resources, time and training for Bible study, prayer, fellowship and pastoral support. The primary responsibility for spiritual nurture lies with staff members themselves.
6. **We take reasonable steps to ensure staff safety** and orient staff to the management of potential risks.
7. **We develop spiritual nurture** and Christian formation emphasizes on the reality of sacrifice, endurance, resilience and suffering in Christian life and witness.

8. **We encourage an environment that celebrates all expressions of Christian faith** to enable staff to adopt an inclusive and respectful approach to different church traditions.
9. **We support all staff, especially those with family**, as they address the specific challenges that are associated with their circumstances.¹⁴

The policy also includes commitments regarding the spiritual nurture of staff of other faiths.

World Vision values its staff from other faith backgrounds and their significant contribution to its work. Though it is not our role to provide for the spiritual needs of staff of other faiths, it is our duty to demonstrate religious and cultural sensitivity especially in offices with staff of other faiths. Every World Vision entity develops contextually appropriate responses which may take various forms including the following:

1. Regular opportunities are provided for structured dialogue between Christian staff and those of other faiths for mutual understanding and respect, and more effective work together.
2. To the extent considered to be appropriate by the National or other WV entity director, accommodation is made for staff of other faiths to carry out their religious observances. The possibility of using WV premises for religious practices depends on the local context.
3. Staff members (Christian as well as those of other faiths) are sensitive toward each other. . . . People of all faiths (and of none) are shown respect and staff members are expected to be tolerant as regards expressions of faith other than their own.
4. If conversion (to any faith) occurs, we respect the convert and his or her decision as an expression of personal religious freedom.
5. Staff members are not pressured to engage in practices that go against the central tenets of their faith. At the same time, they are expected to show understanding and reasonable support for WV's Christian identity and ethos of which they were made aware when they were hired.¹⁵

14 World Vision International, *World Vision Ministry Policy on Interfaith Relations* (2009).

15 World Vision International, *World Vision Ministry Policy on Interfaith Relations* (2009).

These commitments depend upon action words: *develop, choose, provide, make special accommodation, take reasonable steps, encourage, support*. This kind of formation won't happen automatically or without planning, investment and careful programming which simultaneously honours the diversity of our backgrounds, traditions and contexts as well as our commitment to live as followers of Jesus Christ.

Bryant Myers, who was a member of World Vision for more than 30 years, finally serving as vice president for ministries at World Vision International, sets forth a compelling challenge in a World Vision publication entitled *Provoking the Question*:

People ask questions as a result of witnessing something they do not expect or understand. . . . If the people do not ask questions to which the gospel is the answer,... we need to get down on our knees and ask God why our lives and our work are so similar to everyone else's that no one has raised a question related to what we believe.... We must do our work and live our lives in a way that calls attention to the new Spirit that lives within us. We need to relate to people, be transparent, and promote our development technology in a way that creates a sense of wonder. We must seek a spirituality that makes our lives eloquent.¹⁶

Eloquence in word and in life is a learned skill, not a natural trait.

*We must seek a spirituality that
makes our lives eloquent.*

Why should we engage in this as a Christian humanitarian organisation? Isn't this the role of the church and of personal (private) spiritual practices? Yes and no. Staff should get this kind of formation from churches. Yet even in churches with the most developed programmes in nurture and discipleship, it is unlikely that some of the specific issues humanitarian workers face will be addressed. Have you ever heard sermons on God's will for work in other-faith contexts, accountability for managing millions of dollars, responses to

16 Bryant Myers, *Provoking the Question: Uniting Christian Witness in Transformational Development* (Monrovia, CA: WVI, 2006).

corrupt governments, the management of pressure from family to use money and programmes to benefit relatives, strategies for addressing extreme poverty, or living in precariously violent situations?

Mahatma Gandhi was once asked, ‘What would it take for India to become Christian?’ His simple response described what it would mean for Christians to live eloquent lives:

I would suggest, <i>first</i> , that all of you Christians must begin to live more like Jesus Christ.	Live more like Jesus.
<i>Second</i> , I would suggest that you must practise your religion without adulterating or toning it down.	Don’t water down your religion.
<i>Third</i> , I would suggest that you must put your emphasis upon love, for love is the centre and soul of Christianity.	Emphasise love.
<i>Fourth</i> , I would suggest that you study the non-Christian religions and culture more sympathetically in order to find the good that is in them, so that you might have a more sympathetic approach to the people. ¹⁷	Approach people of other religions and cultures with sympathy.

This is why we give careful attention to how we nourish our corporate as well as our individual life. The apostle Paul prayed for Christ’s followers to ‘be filled with all the fullness of God who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or even imagine’ (Eph. 3:19–20).

We are people with a world vision. Our Vision Statement declares: ‘Our vision for every child, life in all its fullness; our prayer for every heart, the will to make it so.’

17 E. Stanley Jones, *Christ of the Indian Road* (Lucknow, India: Lucknow Publishing House, 1925), 102–3.

In the commentary on this statement, entitled *Our Envisioned Future*, we declare:

We look forward to a world where every child experiences life in all its fullness.

Where they are protected, cared for and given the opportunities to become all God meant them to be.

They grow strong in communities free of need and full of promise. Where families are valued, created preserved and the most vulnerable live in security and confidence.

They become responsible citizens of well led nations, where peace and justice reign and all have the opportunity to contribute.

They flourish in a world where the treasure of our hearts and the measure of our wealth is the happiness and well-being of all the world's children.

In such a world, all taste the joy of the kingdom of heaven.

Not to prepare one for credible witness may actually rob the world of signs of that future.

For discussion and prayer

What is your reaction to Gandhi's advice?

What steps could you take to improve the Christian formation and preparation of our staff?

Approaches to Witness

Prayer and development

Discernment is central to effective development. We must know what issues, opportunities, needs and dreams people share in a community. Prayer is an integral dimension of discernment. We need to know what God is doing in a community or context, and what role God would have us exercise. We fulfil our commitments in different ways in every context. Prayer, patient listening, thoughtful analysis and spiritual discernment are foundational to effective work and witness. In prayer we affirm our utter reliance on the love, presence and power of God.

We also pray to be shown ways we damage people's dignity, dishonour their community, and thus discredit the God of love whom we serve. We pray that our lives and work express God's generous love. We pray for God to demonstrate God's love in ways that surpass our limited human efforts. We pray for God's mercy and for God's powerful intervention in situations of suffering, poverty and injustice.

We cannot succeed in our work as a humanitarian organisation without prayer.

As a result, prayer is neither peripheral to our work nor merely preparation for it. Rather than an extraneous ‘inherently religious activity’, we believe that prayer is a vital and central activity in a person’s and community’s development. Some forces and factors that contribute to poverty and injustice can be discerned and addressed only through prayer.

Working to address all the causes of poverty

Poverty involves more than socio-economic, environmental and geo-political factors. True, these must be addressed, but if relational, character and spiritual factors are not also addressed, then development may be limited and even bear unintended negative consequences. Beliefs have an important role in sustained, transformational development. Holistic responses to poverty address the whole of human life: personal and corporate, human, divine and demonic. Examples include beliefs about:

Inappropriate hierarchies in human relationships that divide and disrupt families, communities and harmony
Human and spiritual powers that exploit people’s vulnerability and needs
De-valuing of certain classes of people so that some live with a poor sense of self-worth, identity and dignity
Hopelessness because the future is viewed as fixed and unchangeable
Feelings of powerlessness to improve one’s life when one’s class, caste or gender forbids change
Values that stress submission to, or detachment from, socio-economic activity, or may deny the importance of involvement in the world’s affairs
Environmental damage or neglect of the physical creation when it is viewed as expendable or existing merely for human consumption
View of time that diminishes concern for the well-being of future generations or makes one’s life here and now meaningless and unimportant ¹⁸

18 For development of these ideas, see Jayakumar Christian, *God of the Empty-Handed* (Monrovia, CA: MARC, 1999; revised edition, Victoria, Australia: Acorn Press, 2011); and Bryant Myers, *Walking with the Poor* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999; revised and expanded edition, 2011).

Not to explore with people the impact of belief systems on poverty is to fail to address some of the root causes of poverty and, therefore, to fail in our mandate as an organisation. For this reason we affirm witness to Christ and the kingdom of God as ‘an integrating principle in all we do’.¹⁹ In a world divided by walls of ethnicity, gender, economics, politics and religion, we ask the Spirit of God to work through World Vision to build bridges that connect people around a common concern for the future of children. We work with people and communities with whom the church often has no contact. We seek to build bridges to connect people to the leadership structure of their community, to churches and to people of other faiths – even in contexts where churches have no established presence – so that people can work together for the well-being of children. In this God is glorified and the love of God is manifest.

The 2011 *World Vision International Affirmation on Christian Witness* underscores the centrality of relationships: ‘We will equip our staff to engage through relationships in issues of Christian faith. . . . We expect all staff to engage respectfully with people of other faiths.’²⁰

Relating with respect to people of other faiths

Our work – and therefore our witness – is ultimately relational. Our relationships are bridges across which the love of God travels. Learning how to love people who are radically different from us is a prerequisite for our work and a fruit of the Spirit of God. Building caring relationships with people across walls of difference is an acquired skill rather than a natural instinct.

Therefore we equip our staff and partners with important theological affirmations for relationships with people of other faiths. These are

19 World Vision International, *World Vision Policy on Witness to Jesus Christ* (2006), wvcentral.org.

20 World Vision International, *World Vision International Affirmation on Christian Witness* (2011), wvcentral.org.

described in more detail in World Vision's *Ministry Policy on Interfaith Relations*.

1. **We value our common humanity with all people, as we are all created in God's image.** Therefore we relate to all people with humility and respect.
2. **We believe that God loves all people and wills that all people flourish.** Therefore we accept our responsibility to contribute to the common good of society regardless of race, creed or gender.
3. **We believe Jesus Christ is good news for all people.** Therefore we witness to the truthfulness of the gospel in ways that are appropriate to every context with neither hesitation nor aggression.
4. **We believe salvation is the work of the Holy Spirit and that God alone is the judge of people's salvation.** Therefore we reject all judgment of others; and refuse to use our influence or aid to entice people to convert.
5. **We believe God ordains human freedom in general and religious freedom in particular.** Therefore, we support the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights including article 18 on religious freedom.
6. **We believe God's love and our mission call us to collaborate with people and organisations of other faiths.** Therefore we work with all people, regardless of faith, who share a commitment to the well-being of children and the poor.²¹

Discerning how to measure witness

These affirmations may be noble and good, but how do we implement them in practice amidst the messy and sometimes harsh 'realities on the ground' which we face every day? We tend to prioritise in our activities that which we can measure. And we only measure that for which we have

21 World Vision International, *Ministry Policy on Interfaith Relations* (2009).

indicators. Therefore, we face the sensitive question of how to measure – or even whether we should attempt to measure – Christian witness.

- Is it possible, and even if it is, dare we measure changes in the beliefs that contribute to poverty?
- Do we look for indicators that people will have opportunities to experience God's love, or that love for their neighbours will grow, as we hope?

To begin with, we need to discard inadequate outcomes that risk reinforcing perceptions that everything we do in relief and development is actually only a means to fulfil our 'real' goal of converting people to Christianity. Of course we hope that our work will contribute to people experiencing fullness of life as followers of Christ. We affirm that over and over again. However, we don't use conversion as the measure of our success or the outcome indicator of effective ministry.

We believe that our witness as a Christian humanitarian organisation can be measured in several ways. These are developed more fully in the World Vision *Global Christian Commitments Strategy*, and the *Christian Commitments Programme and Funding Guidelines*. Detailed indicators and various tools for measuring these through surveys, interviews and focus groups have also been developed.²²

1. Do staff indicate they have grown in Christ-centred life and work?

- Do staff indicate that their Christian life and relationship with God have deepened since they joined World Vision?
- Do supporters, community members and partners express respect for the values, faith and care of World Vision staff?

2. Have partnerships been created with churches, supporters and children that contribute to the well-being of children?

- Is there an increase in church involvement in holistic ministry?

²² These documents can be found on wvcentral.org.

- Are churches and supporters co-operating across differences of denomination, country and culture to improve the lives of children?

3. Are children able to describe ways in which families and communities encourage them in their pursuit of understanding, experiences and relationships which enable them to discover, grow in and experience God's love?

Indicators and assessment tools for this are included in the Child Well-being Outcome resources. Some indicators are the following:

- Can children name a Christian person from whom they've received care?
- Are there opportunities in a community for children to receive Christian nurture?

4. Is there an increase in interfaith co-operation?

- Do staff members express increased freedom and respect in their relationships with people of other faiths?
- Are Christian and other faith leaders working together for the well-being of children?

5. Is there increased prayer for situations of poverty and injustice?

- Do staff, churches and supporters indicate increased engagement in intercessory prayer for issues affecting children and those in poverty?
- Is prayer recognised as integral to discernment, development and addressing suffering and poverty?

6. Is the credibility of the Christian faith enhanced?

- Do community members and supporters express increased appreciation for the role of Christian faith in our life and work?
- Are people asking questions more frequently about the meaning of our Christian commitments?

Practical approaches to credible Christian witness

If these are desired outcomes, and credible ways we might measure progress towards them, what specific steps will move towards witness that bears this kind of fruit? We suggest six components we can undertake individually and organisationally to enhance the quality of our relationships and our Christian witness.

1. Don't criticise

We affirm all that is good amongst the people with whom we serve.

We do not build bridges or witness to Christ by attacking the weaknesses of others' lives or faith.

We are not critics of others' beliefs.

Our calling is to follow Christ and by our lives, deeds and words invite people to journey with us.

2. Cultivate humility

We engage others in a spirit of humility.

We do not build bridges or witness to Christ if we show arrogance, act superior or become judgemental. Only Christ is the judge. That is not our role.

Our calling is to love and respect the people and cultures of those with whom we work.

3. Be honest

We acknowledge our Christian faith and dependence on God through prayer.

We do not build bridges or witness to Christ if we are clandestine or devious about either our motives or our faith.

Our calling is to be open and confident in our witness.

4. Ask questions

Out of genuine curiosity and interest we ask questions about what others believe and how their faith affects their life.

We do not build bridges or witness to Christ if we are defensive about our faith and seek to defend Jesus from others' criticism.

Our calling is to live freely in the marketplace of differing beliefs. The meaning and implications of Christian faith and life need to be discussed, not protected. We seek to build bridges of dialogue and friendship.

5. Focus with others on the well-being and future of children

We work to bring people together, regardless of religious beliefs, around common concern for the well-being of children.

We do not build bridges or witness simply by talking and listening. Working together to address critical needs of children and to create a future filled with hope and opportunity unites us.

Our calling is to walk with people who long for their children to be valued and to flourish. Addressing this common concern helps people to see we have more in common than we have differences that divide us. The future of all our children depends on mutual trust and respect across religious divides.

6. 'Lift up' Jesus Christ

We acknowledge Jesus Christ, who makes our life and work possible, and we acknowledge our dependency on the Spirit of God to give us the capacity to love and serve.

We do not build bridges or witness to Christ simply by recommending a set of values. Jesus did not take on human flesh simply to teach a way of life or a set of values, but rather to be Life itself.

Our calling is to so live and serve that Jesus is honoured and 'lifted up' in attractive and credible ways before all people.

If our relationships with people have these qualities, then our witness will have credibility. If our witness has credibility, then we will provoke curiosity amongst other people about our motives and our capacity to live and serve in the ways we do. This kind of witness creates a word-friendly space for conversation about issues of faith. This kind of witness ‘provokes the questions in people’s minds to which Jesus is the answer’.²³

Conversations about faith then can occur as natural and normal dimensions of life, as ordinary as sharing meals or going on walks together, working together in a garden, and playing together with children. This kind of witness is woven into the ordinary fabric of life rather than being some kind of specialised activity added to other events. In most places in the world, it is normal for friends to talk together about issues of faith and tell stories of how God has met them and provided for them over their lifetimes. In these conversations, telling of one’s own transformation through Christ over a cup of tea after a long day working together in a field, planning community events, or providing emergency relief supplies is the ordinary thing. If issues of faith are truly at the core of our life, then our relationships with people can naturally soar to new heights as we explore with one another our understanding of the meaning and purpose of life, how we face issues of suffering and death, and how we encounter God in our daily existence.

Our witness is an expression of joy-filled love

When our lives are eloquent, when we humbly lift up Jesus and build relationships of respect, appropriate verbal witness is normal and natural. Credible witness includes words, but it isn’t only about words. It depends on embodied words. Our deeds give evidence to the God in whom we trust, and our words explain our deeds.

Few people in the world would argue with the Christ who embraces those who are poor, welcomes little children, heals social outcasts, confronts oppressors, and carries our sins, shame and sorrows on the cross yet rises triumphantly to walk with us on our road together. In fact, most people,

²³ Myers, *Provoking the Question*.

encountering this Person, would say, 'I could believe in and trust a God who is like Jesus'. E. Stanley Jones expresses this by saying, 'The greatest news that has ever been broken to the human race is the news that God is like Christ. . . . No higher compliment can be paid to human nature than to be called Christlike.'²⁴

Our calling is to live, serve and speak so that Jesus is lifted up before others. Not a dead Christ, bound in the grave-clothes of our doctrinal controversies, but the fresh and living Christ. We are propelled into the world by the love of God, empowered by the conviction that Christ is risen; he is risen indeed. We have 'good news of great joy for all people'. The kingdom of God is at hand.

For discussion and prayer

How does your current strategy engage in the 'spiritual' factors that contribute to poverty? Do you think our work should do more? Why or why not? If so, what more could be done in ways that abide by our ethical standards?

What is your response to these affirmations about our relationships with people of other faiths? Are there any with which you disagree? Are any particularly challenging? What would change if these attitudes were expressed more fully in the work of your team?

What steps could be taken to strengthen your own, your staff's and your office's relationships with people of other faiths?

As you reflect on all that has been explored in this study of the integration of witness in our work, what particularly strikes you? Are there any steps which you are motivated to take in your own leadership of your staff and in your own witness?

²⁴ Jones, *Christ of the Indian Road*, 26–27.

Additional Resources

Principles of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief Programmes (1994)²⁵

1. The humanitarian imperative comes first.
2. Aid is given regardless of the race, creed or nationality of the recipients and without adverse distinction of any kind. Aid priorities are calculated on the basis of need alone.
3. Aid will not be used to further a particular political or religious standpoint.
4. We shall endeavour not to act as instruments of government foreign policy.
5. We shall respect culture and custom.
6. We shall attempt to build disaster response on local capacities.
7. Ways shall be found to involve programme beneficiaries in the management of relief aid.
8. Relief aid must strive to reduce future vulnerabilities to disaster as well as meeting basic needs.
9. We hold ourselves accountable to both those we seek to assist and those from whom we accept resources.
10. In our information, publicity and advertizing activities, we shall recognize disaster victims as dignified human beings, not hopeless objects.

²⁵ <http://www.ifrc.org/en/publications-and-reports/code-of-conduct/>

Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct²⁶

Adopted by the World Council of Churches, the Roman Catholic Church Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, and The World Evangelical Alliance (2011)

A basis for Christian witness

1. For Christians it is a privilege and joy to give an accounting for the hope that is within them and to do so with gentleness and respect (cf. 1 Peter 3:15).
2. Jesus Christ is the supreme witness (cf. John 18:37). Christian witness is always a sharing in his witness, which takes the form of proclamation of the kingdom, service to neighbour and the total gift of self even if that act of giving leads to the cross. Just as the Father sent the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit, so believers are sent in mission to witness in word and action to the love of the triune God.
3. The example and teaching of Jesus Christ and of the early church must be the guides for Christian mission. For two millennia Christians have sought to follow Christ's way by sharing the good news of God's kingdom (cf. Luke 4:16–20).
4. Christian witness in a pluralistic world includes engaging in dialogue with people of different religions and cultures (cf. Acts 17:22–28).
5. In some contexts, living and proclaiming the gospel is difficult, hindered or even prohibited, yet Christians are commissioned by Christ to continue faithfully in solidarity with one another in their witness to him (cf. Matthew 28:19–20; Mark 16:14–18; Luke 24:44–48; John 20:21; Acts 1:8).

²⁶ http://www.oikoumene.org/fileadmin/files/wccmain/2011pdfs/ChristianWitness_recommendations.pdf

6. If Christians engage in inappropriate methods of exercising mission by resorting to deception and coercive means, they betray the gospel and may cause suffering to others. Such departures call for repentance and remind us of our need for God's continuing grace (cf. Romans 3:23).
7. Christians affirm that while it is their responsibility to witness to Christ, conversion is ultimately the work of the Holy Spirit (cf. John 16:7–9; Acts 10:44–47). They recognize that the Spirit blows where the Spirit wills in ways over which no human being has control (cf. John 3:8).

Principles

Christians are called to adhere to the following principles as they seek to fulfil Christ's commission in an appropriate manner, particularly within interreligious contexts.

1. **Acting in God's love.** Christians believe that God is the source of all love and, accordingly, in their witness they are called to live lives of love and to love their neighbour as themselves (cf. Matthew 22:34–40; John 14:15).
2. **Imitating Jesus Christ.** In all aspects of life, and especially in their witness, Christians are called to follow the example and teachings of Jesus Christ, sharing his love, giving glory and honour to God the Father in the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. John 20:21–23).
3. **Christian virtues.** Christians are called to conduct themselves with integrity, charity, compassion and humility, and to overcome all arrogance, condescension and disparagement (cf. Galatians 5:22).
4. **Acts of service and justice.** Christians are called to act justly and to love tenderly (cf. Micah 6:8). They are further called to serve others and in so doing to recognize Christ in the least of their sisters and brothers (cf. Matthew 25:45). Acts of service, such as providing education, health care, relief services and acts of justice and advocacy are an integral part of witnessing to the gospel.

The exploitation of situations of poverty and need has no place in Christian outreach. Christians should denounce and refrain from offering all forms of allurements, including financial incentives and rewards, in their acts of service.

5. **Discernment in ministries of healing.** As an integral part of their witness to the gospel, Christians exercise ministries of healing. They are called to exercise discernment as they carry out these ministries, fully respecting human dignity and ensuring that the vulnerability of people and their need for healing are not exploited.
6. **Rejection of violence.** Christians are called to reject all forms of violence, even psychological or social, including the abuse of power in their witness. They also reject violence, unjust discrimination or repression by any religious or secular authority, including the violation or destruction of places of worship, sacred symbols or texts.
7. **Freedom of religion and belief.** Religious freedom including the right to publicly profess, practice, propagate and change one's religion flows from the very dignity of the human person which is grounded in the creation of all human beings in the image and likeness of God (cf. Genesis 1:26). Thus, all human beings have equal rights and responsibilities. Where any religion is instrumentalized for political ends, or where religious persecution occurs, Christians are called to engage in a prophetic witness denouncing such actions.
8. **Mutual respect and solidarity.** Christians are called to commit themselves to work with all people in mutual respect, promoting together justice, peace and the common good. Interreligious cooperation is an essential dimension of such commitment.
9. **Respect for all people.** Christians recognize that the gospel both challenges and enriches cultures. Even when the gospel challenges certain aspects of cultures, Christians are called to respect all people. Christians are also called to discern elements in their own cultures that are challenged by the gospel.

10. **Renouncing false witness.** Christians are to speak sincerely and respectfully; they are to listen in order to learn about and understand others' beliefs and practices, and are encouraged to acknowledge and appreciate what is true and good in them. Any comment or critical approach should be made in a spirit of mutual respect, making sure not to bear false witness concerning other religions.
11. **Ensuring personal discernment.** Christians are to acknowledge that changing one's religion is a decisive step that must be accompanied by sufficient time for adequate reflection and preparation, through a process ensuring full personal freedom.
12. **Building interreligious relationships.** Christians should continue to build relationships of respect and trust with people of different religions so as to facilitate deeper mutual understanding, reconciliation and cooperation for the common good.

About the Author

Tim Dearborn has served with World Vision for more than 10 years, currently as Partnership leader for Christian Commitments for World Vision International as part of the WVI president's executive office. He holds a Ph.D. in systematic theology from the University of Aberdeen in Scotland, master's degrees in mission and in the history of religion from Fuller Seminary and Harvard University, and a degree in history from Whitman College. Tim has been an ordained minister with the Presbyterian Church (USA) for 35 years. Prior to his current appointment at WVI, he served as a professor at Seattle Pacific University, Fuller Theological Seminary, Regent College, the University of Aberdeen, Scotland, and the Faculte de Theologie Evangelique in Paris; and at University Presbyterian Church in Seattle as its first Pastor of Urban and Global Mission. He has authored seven books on spirituality, globalisation and mission-related issues and has been married for 40 years to Kerry Dearborn. They have three grown daughters, two sons-in-law and a growing number of grandchildren.

Executive Office

6-9 The Square
Stockley Park
Uxbridge Middlesex
UB11 1FW
United Kingdom

International Liaison Office

Chemin de Balexert 7-9
Case Postale 545
CH-1219 Châtelaine
Switzerland

European Union Liaison Office

Avenue Livingstone 33
1000 Brussels
Belgium

United Nations Liaison Office

919 2nd Avenue, 2nd floor
New York, NY 10017
USA