



Persuasion or coercion? 55-60 min

RECOGNISING AND ANALYSING VIOLATIONS

SCENARIO
GROUP EXERCISE

About the exercise

TARGET AUDIENCE

Any type of audience, however the exercise requires participants to have a basic prior understanding of freedom of religion or belief (FORB).

PURPOSE

- To help participants explore the differences between religious persuasion as the peaceful expression or manifestation of religion or belief, and coercion to change beliefs.
- To enable participants to practice the skill of recognising and analysing violations of FORB.

DESCRIPTION

A buzz group exercise in which participants discuss scenarios from different parts of the world. This exercise is a useful way to break up a knowledge input on recognising violations of FORB and encourages peer-to-peer learning.



Instructions

RESOURCES AND ADVANCE PREPARATION

- Read through the [annotated facilitators version](#) of the scenarios on page 250 and choose four or five scenarios that will work well in your context. Try to choose a mix of more obvious and more complex scenarios with varying types of coercion (legislative, social, economic).
- Print one copy of each chosen [scenario handout](#) or write the scenarios on separate flipchart sheets.
- Set up 'stations' in the training space, which small groups of participants can gather around to read and discuss each scenario.
- Have a bell or mobile phone alarm to hand to keep time.

Find the scenario handouts at www.forb-learning.org/exercises/persuasion-or-coercion-scenarios.

HOW TO INTRODUCE THE EXERCISE 8 MIN

Explain the following:

Some people think that sharing your beliefs with another person with the aim of encouraging them to change their religion or beliefs is immoral. Others see sharing their faith as a central religious duty, considering it immoral to fail to share the 'good news' or truth of their beliefs. Human rights take no position on the question of the morality of sharing your beliefs, but three things are important:

- The right to change your beliefs is an absolute right. It may never be restricted, by anyone.
- Both freedom of religion and belief and freedom of expression protect the right to tell other people about what you believe and why you consider your

beliefs to be good or true. We also have a right to access to information about ideas. Religious ideas are no different to political or other ideas in this sense.

- Freedom of religion or belief explicitly forbids coercion to have, change or maintain your religion or belief.

But where do we draw the line between persuasion and coercion? Elicit responses from one or two participants, asking: How would you define the difference between persuasion and coercion?

Thank them for their thoughts and ideas and continue to provide input as follows: In any given case, we need to weigh up the following four factors:

- **WHO IS DOING THE PERSUADING?**

Does the person or body doing the persuading hold a position of power and influence over the person being persuaded? Are they abusing that power in their manner of persuasion?

- **WHO IS THE RECIPIENT?**

Is the person being persuaded particularly vulnerable to coercion for some reason? Is their vulnerability being taken advantage of in the manner of persuasion?

- **WHERE IS THE PERSUASION TAKING PLACE?**

Is the recipient there by choice and are they free to leave? If not, there is an increased risk of coercion.

- **WHAT FORM DOES THE PERSUASION TAKE?**

The following forms of persuasion are NOT acceptable, as they are coercive:

- Promises or offers of something of material value in exchange for conversion, e.g., money, work, humanitarian assistance or social advantages.
- Removal or threat to withhold something of value, e.g., access to education, medical care, employment, civil and political rights.
- Threat or use of physical violence or blackmail.

Elicit reactions to these criteria from one or two participants.

HOW TO RUN THE EXERCISE 45-50 MIN

- **SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION** (20-25 MIN)

Ask the participants to get into threes with the people sitting closest to them. Ask each small group to gather at one of the scenario 'stations'. Tell them they will have 5 minutes to discuss each scenario. After the bell/timer rings they need to move on to the next scenario. Display the guiding questions on a flipchart sheet / PowerPoint slide:

- Is it persuasion or coercion? Why?
- If it is coercion – who are the victim(s) of the violations, and who are the perpetrators?

- **PLENARY DISCUSSION** (25 MIN)

Invite participants to return to their seats. Ask them to share their thoughts on each scenario. Add any missing points, using the facilitator's notes to help you.

Ask:

- How did you find this exercise?
- Are any of the scenarios similar to situations that occur in your context?

TIP! Be careful with time management! Creating some time pressure with the use of an alarm or bell helps participants to focus their attention on the task at hand.

HOW TO CONCLUDE THE EXERCISE 2 MIN

Conclude by saying something along the following lines:

- One of the most important skills we need to have to work for freedom of religion or belief for all is the ability to recognise violations.
- Sometimes violations are obvious, but sometimes they are complex, taking more subtle forms. This is particularly true in relation to the dividing line between persuasion and coercion.
- Whether an act is coercive or not depends greatly on the power dynamics between those involved and on the ability of the person being persuaded to walk away or refuse to continue to listen, without risking the loss of something of value e.g., healthcare, education, humanitarian aid.

Source

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'Persuasion or coercion'