

Religious Freedom Eroding Fast, Warns U.S. Group

Multimedia ministry SAT 7 USA says freedom of religious expression under threat -7

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SITUATION CRITICAL: RELIGIOUS FREEDOM UNDER SIEGE: Media ministry SAT-7 USA (www.sat7usa.org) warns religious freedom is under increasing attack. Globally, an estimated 80%

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EASTON, Md. -- A U.S. media ministry warns religious freedom is under increasing pressure -- fast reaching a tipping point it describes as "situation critical."

Globally, an estimated 80% of people of all faiths face restrictions on freely expressing their religious beliefs, says SAT-7 USA (www.sat7usa.org), a Christian media broadcaster in the Middle East and North Africa.

The multimedia ministry says Christians in that region, especially, face growing efforts to silence them.

"It's situation critical," said Rex Rogers, the organization's president. "Pressure is mounting on Christians in countries like Iran, Algeria and Turkey, where churches are being closed and believers driven into hiding, with many facing severe treatment if discovered."

Hostility against Christians in Egypt – where Jesus took refuge as an infant – has ramped up recently, he said, with reports of violent attacks and kidnappings.

Christians Vastly Outnumbered

Across the Middle East and North Africa – stretching almost 4,000 miles from Morocco to Afghanistan – Christians are hugely outnumbered, making up less than 3% of the region's population.

SAT-7 broadcasts live Christian programs in local languages with local presenters via satellite and online video-on-demand, encouraging viewers to call in and participate. Incredibly, the presenters and many of the viewers are eager to share their faith and experiences on-air and online, even though by doing so they're putting themselves at risk.

'Persecution Is A Crown'

"(They) are not afraid to show their faces on the screen," said Middle East-based SAT-7 CEO Rita El-Mounayer. "They say, 'persecution is a crown we wear every day. Please don't take it from us.'"

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One 16-year-old Algerian girl living on the streets was thrown out of her parents' home because she became a Christian, said El-Mounayer.

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"I feel my own faith is so small in front of these people," El-Mounayer said. "They want to be an example to other Christians, to say 'you're not alone.'"

Making 'God's Love Visible'

The network's satellite and online programs are virtually uncensorable, "making God's love visible" to thousands in their homes and on their phones. "It's the right of everyone to be exposed to the love of Christ," El-Mounayer said.

Viewers gain confidence from others' experiences – including the courage of believers in Afghanistan, who participate in SAT-7's live programs via their phone apps despite continued oppression of Christians by the Taliban.

"There's a growing church in the Middle East and North Africa, and it could change the (region) forever," El-Mounayer said. "I see more people in the Middle East worshipping Jesus, despite all the restrictions."

About SAT-7

Launched in 1996, SAT-7 (www.sat7usa.org) -- with its international headquarters in Cyprus -- broadcasts Christian and educational satellite television and online programs in the Middle East and North Africa. Its mission is to make the gospel available to everyone, and support the church in its life, work and witness for Jesus Christ. SAT-7 broadcasts 24/7 in Arabic, Farsi (Persian), Dari, and Turkish, using multiple satellite channels and online services.