

News from SAT-7
November 2020

INSIGHT

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FREEDOM IN CHRIST

Sharing the Gospel in the
Middle East and North Africa

MAKING
GOD'S LOVE
VISIBLE



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GOD'S CALL TO A LIFE OF FREEDOM

Dear SAT-7 friend,

In these stormy times, life for many remains far from easy. But through the struggle of COVID-19, our hope in Jesus is the constant that keeps us afloat and living with joy.

Throughout this year marred by the pandemic, SAT-7 has continued to share God's unfailing love and the message of the Gospel with viewers through our wide range of programming. We can do this even when church buildings are closed and other support is restricted or limited.

The pandemic has made our viewers' economic and social struggles more acute, spreading heartbreak, anxiety and grief. It has also further compounded deprivations of rights and freedoms in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) brought on by the on-going conflicts and instability, which have created further restrictions particularly for women, children and minority groups.

As SAT-7 responds to these situations, I am encouraged by Paul's words to the church at Philippi. At a time of distress, Paul calls the believers to "let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5). To see others through the eyes of a Saviour who served, of a God who desires our good in every aspect of our lives.

Throughout Scripture, God calls His people to defend those at the margins and protect human dignity. This call is why SAT-7 has always been a holistic ministry; why our vision includes seeing MENA Christians contribute to the good of our societies. Doing so is an inescapable part of truly loving our neighbour. When we lift up oppressed women or people with disabilities, we live out our belief that all people are made in God's image. When we give a voice to refugees, we fulfil His call to care for the stranger. When we educate viewers on their right to freedom of religion and belief, we help make a way for them to seek God for themselves. And in all these, we witness to the goodness of the God of all compassion.

None of this would be possible without your support and prayer. Thank you so much for your heart for SAT-7's life-giving work. Please know that we are praying for you – especially as these uncertain times affect us all.



Rita El-Mounayer
SAT-7 CEO

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"CHRIST IS THE ANSWER"

JONI EARECKSON TADA

World-changing Christian author and disability advocate Joni Eareckson Tada shares why she endorses SAT-7's ministry to bring hope and freedom in Jesus to people in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).

"I have a very personal interest in the ministry of SAT-7. The MENA is experiencing great upheaval and instability, and our ministry, Joni and Friends, delivers wheelchairs to needy refugees in Syria and in Jordanian camps. The stories of these people, and all that they have suffered, break my heart.

With so much turmoil in that area of the world, people are looking for real hope. In the same way, when I was searching so many years ago – when I broke my neck in a diving accident – I needed rigorous, rugged, and reliable hope. I needed to know that the God of the Bible could fill that void, that empty space. I thought I was looking for answers, but I discovered that Christ was the answer.

People in the Middle East are suffering on so many levels. And suffering always, always reveals the core of who we are. It takes away distractions and exposes how hungry and thirsty people are for more – much more – than this world can give. And this is why the ministry of SAT-7 is so

desperately needed. Who is there in the Middle East that can give hungry and hurting people what their souls require? SAT-7's excellent programming, staff support, and follow-up resources all provide that rigorous and reliable hope. The ministry of SAT-7 is an invaluable partner to struggling churches in the Middle East; our Christian brothers and sisters in that part of the world need to know that we are standing with them, proclaiming the Gospel of the God of all hope.

So I give a "double thumbs-up" to Rita El-Mounayer and her amazing team, working around the clock to make sure the Good News of Jesus is made available in Arabic, Persian (Farsi), and Turkish, all in more than 25 countries across the MENA." ■

“With so much turmoil in that area of the world, people are looking for real hope.

Joni Eareckson Tada

[CLICK HERE](#) TO WATCH THE VIDEO



CHRISTIANS WORLDWIDE UNITE “FOR BEIRUT”

Even as broken glass and rubble filled Beirut's streets, signs of the incredible resilience of the Lebanese people could be seen. SAT-7 ACADEMY's Juliana Sfeir reported from the site of the huge blast that shattered the city on 4 August, showing young people working together to clear the streets.

Thanks to the generosity of our supporters around the world, SAT-7 is also playing its part to help rebuild. Our Beirut studio quickly began both on-the-ground initiatives to distribute provisions and a series of special supportive TV programs, including prayers from church leaders, comfort for children, and mental health resources. *From Heart to Heart* led viewers in worship from the studio's rooftop, while *You Are Not Alone* shared testimonies of bravery and faith. Longer-term initiatives are also planned to help the city rebuild stronger.

Thank you so much to everyone who contributed to our #ForBeirut campaign. Your prayers and donations are making an enormous difference. “I am happy despite the circumstances we are passing through. God is among us. Your songs console us,” says a viewer who watched *From Heart to Heart*, showing how programs can bring hope in impossible situations.

But the need for this hope remains urgent. Lebanon was on its knees before the explosion, and it is also badly hit by severe economic crisis and a spike in COVID-19 cases. Please do keep praying for the people of Beirut and Lebanon. ■

[CLICK HERE »](#) TO WATCH #FORBEIRUT OVERVIEW VIDEO

[CLICK HERE »](#) TO WATCH #FORBEIRUT PRAYER VIDEO



Photos: Elie El Hayek

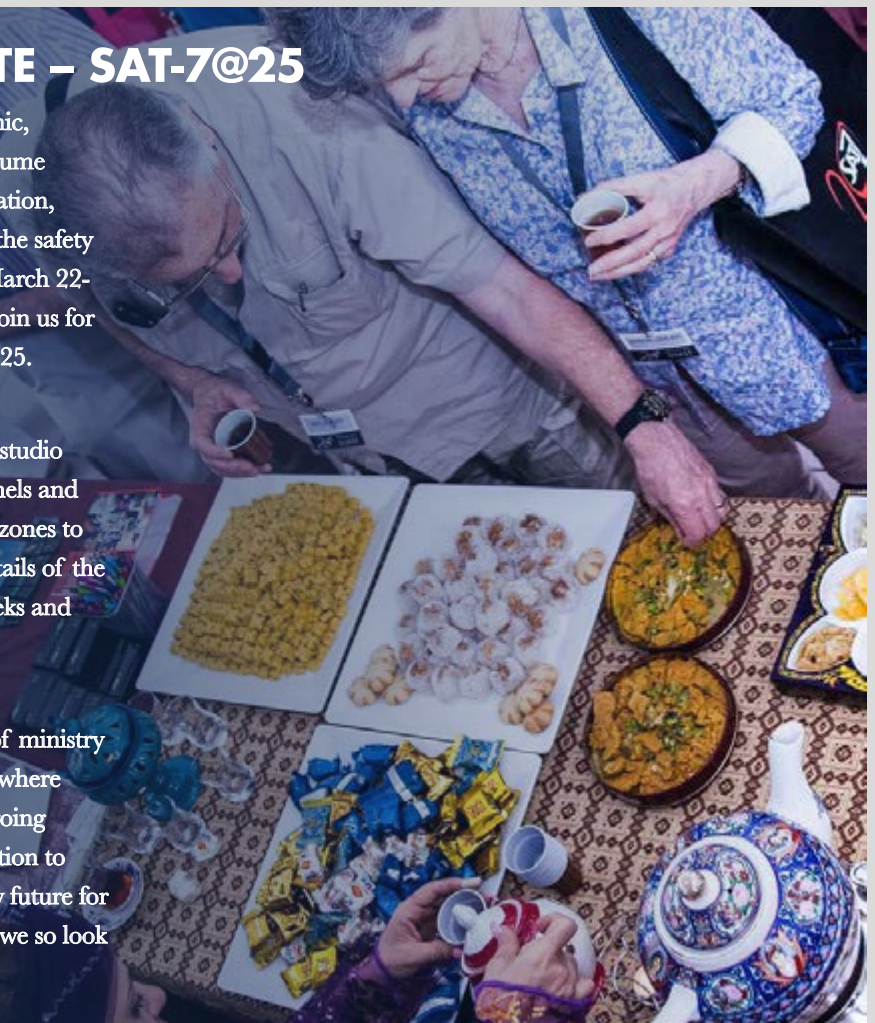


SAT-7 NETWORK UPDATE – SAT-7@25

As the world continues to struggle with the pandemic, we pray that in 2022 our annual gatherings can resume in person but until then, we aim to bring the inspiration, impact, and innovation of our programs to you in the safety and comfort of your homes. During the week of March 22-26 2021, we invite our Partners and supporters to join us for a series of online events to commemorate SAT-7@25.

From flagship programs and guest speakers, to live studio presentations hosted by SAT-7 staff from our channels and offices, each event will be repeated over three time zones to ensure all guests can attend, wherever they are. Details of the events and links will be shared over the coming weeks and months.

Throughout 2021, we will mark SAT-7's 25 years of ministry by looking back at what God has done, examining where we are now, and looking forward to where we are going and how we will continue to help bring transformation to individuals and communities, and encourage a new future for the MENA. It promises to be an exciting year, and we so look forward to sharing it with you. ■



SAT-7 EUROPE AND ASIA DIRECTOR AWARDED PRESTIGIOUS PRIZE

Long-serving SAT-7 staff member Kurt Johansen has been awarded the Danish Bible Society's 2020 Prize for his work as Executive Director of SAT-7 Europe, Asia, and Pacific. The prize awards 10,000 Danish Kroner and a framed original page of the King Christian IV's Bible to a person who deserves special recognition for their work to make the Bible present in society.

Receiving the prize with characteristic humility, Johansen said, "I don't belong on this list of winners, but I accept it on behalf of SAT-7 – the staff, producers, and supporters, and all those who have worked together for the glory of God."

The award was presented in a surprise ceremony during SAT-7's European Vision Meeting in Copenhagen. ■



BERBER BELIEVERS SHARE TESTIMONIES



A new program with inspiring testimonies from Algeria is airing in the North Africa program block on SAT-7 ARABIC. *It is Written* shares the stories of Amazigh (Berber) new Christians in short, 3-5-minute episodes.

One episode shares the story of a new believer who accepted Christ in his life after reading a Bible in an Amazigh dialect. "I used to be very sick," he says. "While I was praying for healing, my faith helped me to see God as bigger than my sickness and even bigger than death. I did get better, but I trust God regardless of my circumstances."

In another encouraging episode, a man shares how believers in his area live in peace with their Muslim neighbours and communicate openly about their new identity as Christians. ■

UNMASKING MISCONCEPTIONS OF ARAB WOMEN

The Secret Within, a new SAT-7 ARABIC women's program, is set to help viewers of both genders break down harmful beliefs and misconceptions about women and see them instead through God's eyes.

The program invites three generations of women – grandmother, mother, and daughter – to come together and discuss key topics that impact women across the MENA. Made in Egypt, the program offers unique insights from guests from across the Arabic-speaking world and guides women through the struggles they face from a biblical perspective. ■



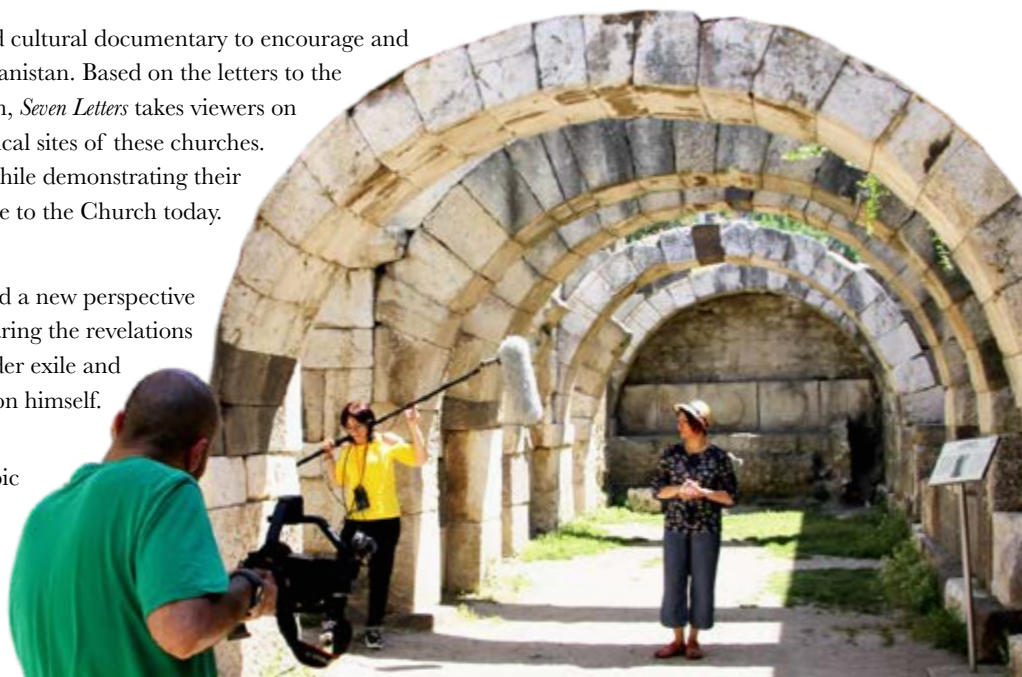
NEW DOCUMENTARY FOR PERSECUTED CHRISTIANS

SAT-7 PARS has created a new historical and cultural documentary to encourage and support persecuted churches in Iran and Afghanistan. Based on the letters to the seven ancient churches in the Book of Revelation, *Seven Letters* takes viewers on a journey through Turkey and the archaeological sites of these churches.

The documentary contextualises the letters while demonstrating their continued relevance to the Church today.

The program will offer teaching, inspiration, and a new perspective to Christians struggling under pressure by sharing the revelations the Apostle John received while living under exile and persecution himself.

The documentary will also be dubbed in Arabic and Turkish for broadcast across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) by SAT-7 ARABIC and SAT-7 TÜRK. ■



SAT-7 ACADEMY BRINGS JOY TO YOUNG FANS

For the SAT-7 ACADEMY brand's three-year anniversary, a special contest was launched inviting viewers to participate. The winners, twins, brother and sister Charbel and Lamita, were delighted to visit SAT-7's studios in Beirut, Lebanon and meet their favourite teachers from the program *My School*.

"We love *My School* and *Reuse with Azzouz*. *Bloom Boom* taught us to dance and sing, and how to do the right thing and not the wrong thing," says Lamita on a special clip shared by SAT-7 ACADEMY on social media. ■



SAT-7 TÜRK AND THE ARMENIAN CHURCH GROW TOGETHER

SAT-7 TÜRK is developing a closer relationship with the Armenian Church. His Eminence Archbishop Sahak Masalyan, Patriarch of the Armenian Church in Turkey, expressed a keen desire to develop a long-term association with the channel during a meeting with its leadership. "The relationship between the Patriarchate and SAT-7 TÜRK should continue flourishing for many years to come," the Archbishop said.

The strengthening of this connection is an important step for SAT-7 TÜRK as it endeavours to support and encourage all denominations and Christian ethnic minorities in Turkey.

The closer relationship will open doors for SAT-7 TÜRK to produce and film programs at Armenian Orthodox churches, and to invite Armenian church leaders to host programs. ■



LIVE SOCIAL MEDIA EPISODES INCREASE IN 2021

For 2021, a special budget has been set for the Arabic channels' social media strategy. Both SAT-7 ARABIC and SAT-7 KIDS live programs will have one special live episode, per program, a month on social media in addition to their popular satellite broadcasts. This is part of SAT-7's initiative to reach more youth between the ages of 12-19, who are spending increasing hours on social media. ■

FREEDOM IN CHRIST

As in many places in today's world, countless people in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) are in pain. And it is marginalised people – those denied rights and freedoms simply because of who they are – who often hurt the most.

From women in rural North Africa whose lives are so restricted they feel they were “born to die”; to impoverished children in Iran made desperate as the pandemic destroys their chance for education; to people with disabilities denied a place in society and refugees that live in stateless limbo -without rights, across the region – a lack of freedoms destroys hope, and it destroys lives.

But in God's eyes, no human being is relegated to the margins; to Him, every person is precious. So, He calls and equips His children to “proclaim freedom for captives” (Isaiah 61:1). SAT-7's holistic programming is an answer to this call in three ways.

First, as we share the Gospel across the MENA, our viewers of all backgrounds find **freedom in God**: true, lifechanging freedom from spiritual darkness and despair. Our programs also give marginalised people the **freedom to be heard** – meaning

millions encounter the otherwise side-lined voices of women, children, Christians and members of other religious and ethnic minorities.

Finally, SAT-7's channels help viewers find **freedom to seek change**. Programs offer the safe, taboo-breaking space for discussion needed for transformation to begin in homes, families, and communities. They provide educational content on human rights, and they walk with viewers through stigma and struggle as they take steps – where they safely can – to realise their rights.

In this section, you can read how SAT-7 programs support minority Christians (p.10-11), refugees and members of ethnic minorities, (p.12-13) people with disabilities (p.14-15) children, (p.16-17) and women (p.18-19) to find freedom. Please pray for our viewers as you read. ■





6 in 10

women in the region
don't have a bank account

Afghanistan is the world's
2nd most dangerous
country for Christians

source: Open Doors' 2020 World Watch List

More than

1/3



of children in Yemen are
engaged in child labour

source: ILO'

474



women were victims of
femicide in Turkey in 2019

The unemployment rate
for Lebanese women
has risen by



63%

this year

1 in 5

marriages in the Middle
East are child marriages



FREE TO BELIEVE

“Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion,” states Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Yet this right is denied to many across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). In response, SAT-7 supports minority Christians facing a lack of freedom and fellowship, creates space for others seeking truth, and seeks to open conversations about freedom of belief.

“Thank you for answering my questions. Please don’t share my messages on live programs, as it is very dangerous for me,” says Shahrad*, a SAT-7 viewer in Afghanistan who asked about Jesus. It is Shahrad’s right to seek answers, and freely to make his own decisions about faith and belief. But in Afghanistan, and in other Middle East countries where these rights are not protected in practice, seekers like Shahrad are often not free to struggle towards truth publicly – or even openly in their own homes.

Standing in the gap

In these contexts, those who become Christians risk a range of consequences, from harassment by the authorities to ostracism or violence from their family or community. In Iran and Turkey, where religious identity and national identity are closely interlinked, new Christians can be regarded as disloyal to the nation or a risk to national security. Meanwhile, even members of Christian denominations, and other religious minorities, with long histories in the region can face government restrictions, discrimination, and hostility within society.

Through SAT-7’s unique position as a media ministry with the potential to reach millions of people across the MENA, our programs can stand in the gaps created by the lack of freedom of belief. Our teaching, and prayer, and televised church service programs offer encouragement and discipleship to Christians who may have no church to attend, no safe way to find fellowship, and no Christian materials. Meanwhile, live programs and conversations with Audience Relations staff give isolated believers an invaluable opportunity to engage as Christians, as well as a safe space for seekers to explore the Christian faith and express themselves.

Foundations for the future

As well as supporting believers and seekers today, SAT-7 programs seek to create understanding and awareness that can help form the foundations for a better tomorrow. “It is SAT-7’s view that when everyone can access their right to freedom of thought, conscience, and belief, this not only brings freedom for Christian minorities – it benefits everyone by strengthening societies as a whole,” says George Makeen, SAT-7 Arabic Channels Programming Director.

Through discussion programs such as SAT-7 PARS’ *Insiders* and SAT-7 ARABIC’s *Enlighten Us*, and innovative dramas including *The Wall*, SAT-7 helps break taboos and open conversations about the right to choose and live one’s faith. On SAT-7 PARS, which broadcasts in Iran, educational videos also directly inform viewers about their rights.

The next generation

In Lebanon, where there is greater freedom of expression, SAT-7 ACADEMY’s children’s rights game show *Puzzle* invites children of different cultural and religious backgrounds to play and learn together. The experiences they gain help them reject preconceived judgments and stereotypes of others – and the show offers these lessons to viewers at the same time.

Through such programs, SAT-7 helps the next generation grow up with an understanding of their human rights, including freedom of religion, and an attitude of acceptance towards different cultures and faiths that will help them contribute to a strengthened society. ■

* Names have been changed

5 of the world’s 10

most dangerous countries for Christians are in the MENA

source: Open Doors’ 2020 World Watch List

In 2019, 4 months to 5 years

was the prison sentences for Iranian Christians imprisoned for their faith

“

I realise that there are so many things I don't know about Jesus Christ, and I see no harm in learning more, but I'm watching SAT-7 TÜRK in secret from my husband and my son.

Ceyda*, from Turkey



“

My brothers prohibited me to return to church and even threatened to kill me if I go back. But I discovered that on SAT-7, I am able to attend church in my room.

Nabila*, a SAT-7 ARABIC viewer in Algeria

“

My sister and I recently made the decision to follow Christ. We live in Afghanistan, and we fear for our safety. It is challenging and frightening to attend Christian meetings here or to try and find other Christians.

Hooman*, a SAT-7 PARS viewer



“

For many years we have tolerated derision from others, but we can't put up with it any longer. Even our lives have been threatened if we tell others of our Christian faith.

Anonymous viewer of SAT-7 PARS

FREEDOM FOR ALL

Enjoying rights and freedoms, including access to basic services such as healthcare and education, is a challenge in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). In a region characterised by economic crisis, ethnic and religious division, and gender inequality, life for many – including refugees, people with disabilities, and vulnerable children – has never been tougher.

MINORITIES

Already pushed to the margins and vulnerable to human rights violations, refugees are feeling the additional effects of tensions and instability caused by the pandemic.

“Our circumstances are dire. We are surviving on the bare minimum. Before the pandemic, our fear was 100 percent. Now, it’s 200 percent,” shares a Syrian refugee in Lebanon, describing on SAT-7 ARABIC’s *You Are Not Alone* his struggle to access prevention measures. Recounting the discrimination her children faced at school, a Syrian refugee mother adds, “I just want my children to have their rights.”

WATCH SYRIAN REFUGEE SHARES STRUGGLES ON SAT-7 ARABIC



[CLICK HERE »](#)

Members of ethnic and religious minorities in the region are also often confronted with racism, and face discrimination, and have their rights violated. During lockdowns, female migrant workers who experience multidimensional discrimination were subject to particularly egregious treatment, including being abandoned on the streets with nothing and nowhere to go or imprisoned in the home of their employer.

By offering a platform for all voices, including those of refugees and minority groups, SAT-7 seeks to increase awareness of these issues and to encourage acceptance and understanding of the innate, God-given value of every person.

Christian refugee family in Zahle, Lebanon.







PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Societal stigma and shame around disability continues to force families to feel they must keep their family members with disabilities hidden away. Even if they do seek inclusion, support structures at both the local and national level are very limited.

“In that part of the world, when you have a disability; when you suffer a life-altering injury; when your child is born with a chronic condition – there’s just not much support. At least not the kind that meets the real need, that shows hope and compassion,” explains disability advocate Joni Eareckson Tada.

SAT-7 KIDS raises awareness and promotes inclusion by inviting children living with and without physical and mental disabilities together on the program *City of Stars*. SAT-7 TÜRK’s *Overcomers* and SAT-7 ARABIC’s *You Enlighten Us* offer people with disabilities the opportunity to tell their stories on air.

In a recent episode translated by a sign language translator, SAT-7 ARABIC’s *You Are Not Alone* highlighted the struggles of people in the MENA with hearing impairment. The program included a hearing-impaired guest speaker who called on the Lebanese government to improve inclusion.

80%
of rural women with disabilities in most MENA countries do not finish primary school *

*Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

12 million
people live with disabilities in Egypt



WATCH LIVING WITH DISABILITY ON *YOU ARE NOT ALONE*



[CLICK HERE »](#)

“
Thank you so much
for your care and love.
You are a true witness
and a light for our
children in a world
full of darkness.
A viewer of *You Enlighten Us*

CHILDREN

The right to education; the right to choose when to marry; the right to grow up in safety. The right to play and simply be a child. Many children in the MENA have long been denied these freedoms, and the chance to grow into all God has for them. Now, COVID-19 has further affected their education, mental health, and family life.

Markus Kashouh, a 16-year-old SAT-7 KIDS Presenter, describes the frustration of children who have no say in their own life decisions, such as when to get married or whether to continue education. "They are often not aware that they have the right to make their own choices – or that hope in Christ can shift their lives in a better direction," he says.

SAT-7 KIDS presents viewers with role models like Markus, who both guide children to know their rights and help them find the peace in Jesus that surpasses all circumstances. Now, both Markus and Grace Al Najjar – known for her work as a teacher on *My School* – are involved in new programs joining the channel's line-up of life-giving children's shows.

Markus' new show *By the Way*, which is especially for preteens, speaks through comedy and skits about important topics including cyber-bullying, self-expression, and debunking the misleading information children encounter. "Today's situations bring children a lot of fear and anxiety," he says. "With their parents stressed as well, kids may not have someone to talk to. Lockdown and inactivity have affected their mental health, too, so through the program, we want to inspire them to have faith in change."

Meanwhile, Grace's new program was developed in the wake of the Beirut Port explosion, which re-emphasised the need to support young children unable to sleep after traumatic experiences.

Bedtime Stories – an updated version of a popular previous program – aims to bring peace to children's minds and hearts through the stories of Jesus, while also helping them become more self-aware and expressive.

"These stories will also help children develop strong value systems, to look at challenges through a biblical perspective and think critically," says Grace, who writes the program. "My prayer is that through SAT-7, more children will know their rights, feel free to express their needs, and lean on Christ for the vision He places in their hearts for a better life." ■

35%
of Syrian refugee
children are still
out of school

source: UNICEF

More than
1/3
of children in Yemen
are engaged in
child labour

source: ILO

CLICK HERE ►

TO WATCH SAT-7 KIDS' MARKUS KASHOUH
– FOR A BETTER LEBANON



① During COVID-19 lockdown and following the Beirut Port explosion, young viewers felt supported and encouraged by *My School* Facebook Live broadcasts, including the weekly Language Medley Saturday in which beloved teachers such as Grace Al Najjar engaged and comforted children during tumultuous times. ② In 2020, SAT-7 ACADEMY's program *Puzzle* celebrated its one-year anniversary of teaching children about their rights through games and play, showing them how to embrace each other's differences and respect one another's rights.

FREE TO BE EQUAL: ENDING THE SILENCE

“A voice inside of me refuses to be silenced,” says a woman who called in to SAT-7 ARABIC. As the pandemic brings a deepening crisis for already vulnerable women, SAT-7 aims to be a platform to bring them together, to amplify their voices and show how the lives of women and girls are impacted by inequality, violence and lack of access to support that is and now compounded by the pandemic.

“It is as if we are in a war. Women are being killed in their hundreds,” says Presenter Şemsa Deniz Baker who joined local voices during the height of the pandemic lockdown in an impassioned cry for justice on the SAT-7 TÜRK women’s program *Homemade*. “I really call out to government leaders – there are laws; please, we want these laws to be applied!”

Women and girls have disproportionately borne the worst impacts of the coronavirus pandemic in the Middle East and North Africa, including an increased risk of child marriage and a disturbing spike in domestic violence.

The pandemic has also magnified existing inequalities in families, in the workforce, and in wider society that limit women’s choices and ability to express themselves. But, says Maggie Morgan, Producer of SAT-7 ARABIC’s program *Needle and New Thread*, “There are no voiceless people. They are simply silenced or not heard.” From Egypt to Turkey to Algeria to Iran, SAT-7’s women’s programs make these voices heard – challenging female and male viewers to examine and discuss the role of women and their rights.

“All my life, I was told I don’t count”

“The Glory of God is a human being fully alive.” This slogan has guided the team and led to *Needle and New Thread* successfully broadcasting for seven years.

The words of viewers who have called in show the program’s deep impact on numerous women and families. “After I watched the program, my life changed. Being encouraged to calmly and persistently object to family abuse made a big difference. Now, I can speak up,” says Nadine.

Another viewer says, “I have been watching *Needle and New Thread* since I was in high school and through my university years. This program is the place where I can be myself. I keep trying to make the world a more beautiful place. I volunteer in my community to help young girls to think for themselves. All my life, I was told that as a girl I don’t count, but now I feel like I matter.”

Growing up silenced

On a recent episode, a women’s right expert, Gender Specialist Ghada Mostafa, explains that women’s “journey of silence” begins early. Girls are raised to fear and obey their parents without questioning, she says, and pushed into the background of decision-making and life events. Parents often choose if a daughter completes her schooling or not, continues to university, or gets married. All the opposition is deterred with the threat of a spectrum of punishments from verbal mockery to pressures, and physical abuse such as beating and seclusion.

As MENA women grow up in shame-based cultures, many are afraid to speak out when they face widespread harassment, sexual abuse, and domestic violence as adults.



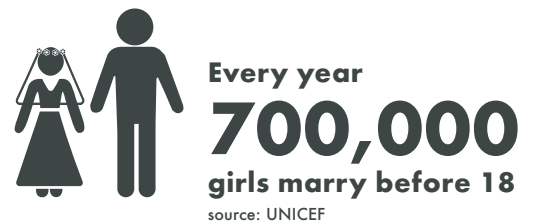


“Someone tried to physically assault me in one of my jobs, but I couldn’t make a complaint,” a caller says. “My parents silenced me on this issue. I had to remain quiet, but a voice inside of me refuses to be silenced.” Maggie Morgan explains that women may support freedom of expression and have a desire to speak out, but that they know doing so may come at a high cost. “They wonder whether voicing their true opinions would cost them the freedom that they do have,” she says, highlighting the example of a victim of harassment who will not tell her father for fear he will force her to stay at home.

Breaking the mould

For Maggie Morgan, another piece of the puzzle is helping women apply what they take away from SAT-7 with small, workable changes they can make in their own lives.

Maggie is preparing a new program called *Journeys of Joy*, to continue walking with women, particularly viewers’ in rural Upper Egypt, as they journey together to realise the glory of God in their lives. ■



WATCH SAT-7 ARABIC'S NEEDLE AND NEW THREAD ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS TO OWN PROPERTY



CLICK HERE ►

WATCH SAT-7 TÜRK'S HOMEMADE PRESENTER CALLS FOR ACTION ON FEMICIDES



CLICK HERE ►

WHEN DOES FREEDOM OF THE PRESS GO TOO FAR?

By Dr Terence Ascott - SAT-7 Founder and President

Following satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo's republication of caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad in early September 2020 there have been two shocking terrorist attacks in France, protests in Muslim-majority nations and the boycott of French goods. The current tensions began when a young Islamist beheaded a teacher near Paris in October 2020, and another brutally attacked and fatally stabbed a worshipper inside a church in Nice in the same month.

But French officials have not only defended the right to publish such cartoons, but some are apparently pouring fuel on the fire, announcing that a booklet, including those images of the prophet, would be handed out to high school students as a commitment "to defend the values of the Republic."

Just because you can, does not mean you should!

These events once again raise the public debate about what press freedom really means. Is it a license (even, in these days, a provocation) to say whatever we want, or are there some universal laws of decency and respect that also need to be adhered to?

In one sense the answer is obvious – in most societies we do not consider it acceptable to mock people with disabilities or, more recently, those of African descent. But it seems that there is still an open season on Arabs and, by association, Muslims. This will inevitably change over time.

But we also need to understand that the offence taken by Muslims over cartoons depicting their prophet goes beyond a reaction to lampooning. In Islam it is widely considered unacceptable to depict a prophet in any way, whether it be Mohammed, Adam, Noah or any other.

What's the point?

Apart from what is allowed, or even considered by the majority in a given society as acceptable in terms of criticising or poking fun at different segments of society, there is also the issue of strategy: what is the point of making fun of someone's religion? It might make some feel good. It might be genuinely funny and thought-provoking. Or, it might be designed to shock and embarrass specific individuals so that certain kinds of behaviour are discredited and eventually discontinued.

But if we consider the Muslim community in Europe, is giving offence going to help change the extremists or instead deepen their feelings of being marginalised and belittled? Will attacking their religion or prophet lead to them learning to better respect Western democratic and secular values and personal and press freedoms? Or will it create stronger resentment and rejection of the perceived excesses of liberty – a liberty that appears to have thrown away any sense of decency, respectfulness or personal and civic responsibility for minorities in our society?

"We were able to bypass all the usual censorship"

When we were launching SAT-7, the first Christian satellite television network for the Middle East, we wrestled with such issues as we drafted our founding documents and programming policies. At that time, some 20 years ago, we recognised that satellite television presented us with the unprecedented opportunity to go into millions of homes across the Arab World and to say what we like. Satellite broadcasts enabled us to bypass all the usual censorship that is imposed on the press, radio and television in the Middle East. But, did this mean that we should then use this to attack other people's faith, in order to promote our own and thereby win

“

Just because we have the right to free speech, does not mean that we have a licence to pointlessly offend religious and moral sensitivities or incite others to hatred.



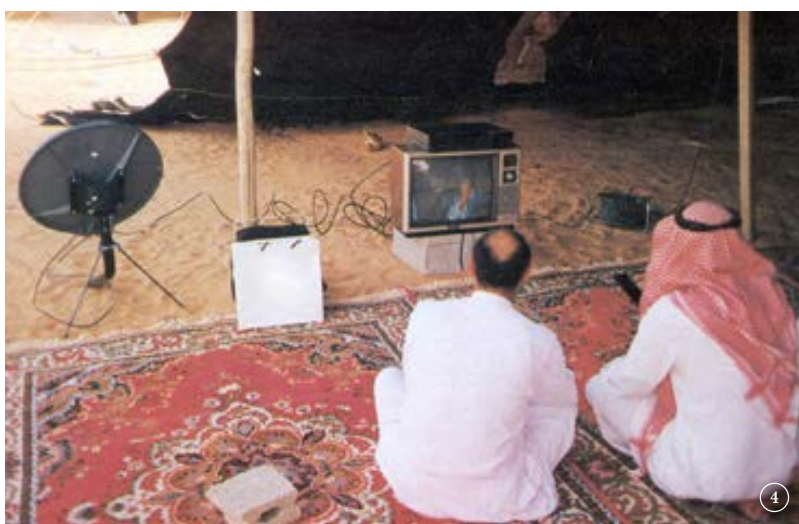
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converts? For sure, some have since chosen this path but, from the beginning, SAT-7 recognised that not only would such a strategy provoke a backlash on local “soft target” Christian communities (as we have just seen in Nice) but it would also be unproductive.

The power of television and radio to change lives lies in their ability to build long-term relationships with audiences, to be “invited” into closed homes in closed countries day after day, to share positive messages – to present the wonderful and good news of the Gospel. Attacking someone else’s beliefs, in any way, simply offends them and helps ensure that they do not again tune into your channel, or allow their family to tune it in – even by accident!

As we look at our measured audience today, we find that it is the countries with virtually no churches that are the most responsive and where people are tuning into SAT-7 in huge numbers. Why? Because we are able to offer hope, help, and the Good News without causing unnecessary offence or turning people away from our message by insulting or belittling what they have believed and held sacred for generations.

So, just because we have the right to free speech, does not mean that we have a licence to pointlessly offend religious and moral sensitivities or incite others to hatred. Freedom of the media is a precious commodity and should be fiercely protected, but so that it can act as salt and light in our society, always seeking the greater good for that society. ■

- ① 90% of the population in the MENA have satellite television. ② Dr Terence Ascott (left) and Archbishop Paul Sayah (right) in Lebanon 1994 discussing the founding documents and policies for SAT-7. ③ SAT-7 founding meeting, November 17-18, 1995. ④ Bedouins watching satellite television.

GROWING UP AS A CHRISTIAN IN TURKEY

Stefanie Mitchell, now a Communications Officer at SAT-7, reflects on growing up in a Christian family in Turkey, a country in which Christians make up less than one percent of the country's population.



Stefanie Mitchell, 1996/1997, Istanbul, Turkey

As a child, I remember coming home from school feeling frustrated that I was not Turkish – because in my mind, I was. I was born in Istanbul. I went to a Turkish school, had Turkish friends, and spoke Turkish. Nevertheless, I was different. I looked like a foreigner – and I was, and am, a Christian.

I don't remember ever having problems with my friends regarding faith; mine or theirs. We were children, and we had other, "more important" issues to deal with, like classes, tests, and what games to play. The only times I remember faith coming up were when our class congratulated a couple of classmates on their circumcisions, and when I was kindly excused from participating in the religious classes introduced in our fifth year.

With my family and a few Turkish friends, my church life resembled a house church. This part of my life was a huge blessing. It was beautifully simple. In the beginning we would gather at an old, abandoned Armenian church. Surrounded by scaffolding and white sheets, we would stand in the middle of the church singing and listening to our worship echo through the hall.

Gradually, as a few friends joined us, we started meeting at the café that my parents had opened. My dad taught from the Bible, and we used Turkish hymnbooks. It may not have been perfect, but it was rich.

When I attended a Christian summer camp, I discovered what a freeing experience it was to be surrounded by children my own age with whom I shared my faith. Arranged by Kucak Yayincilik, a ministry serving Christian parents and children in Turkey, these camps were where I could freely pray, worship, and learn about my faith with other kids. It was a chance to be free to be me – a freedom I will never take for granted. In fact, it was at one of these camps that I made the decision to follow Christ.

As Christians, our faith is our identity and we can find freedom within it. However, isolation, ostracism, and persecution can take their toll on believers who are not free to live and express their faith. My experience in Turkey gave me a glimpse into the challenges many SAT-7 viewers face today and why SAT-7's ability to connect with them is so vital. It is important that they have the chance to connect with other Christians, to grow in faith through teaching, and to know that in Christ they have a new identity, one in which they are loved beyond measure. ■

Right: Families together on a weekend in Ortakoy, near the Bosphorus, in Istanbul, Turkey





HELP THEM FIND FREEDOM IN CHRIST

People in the Middle East and North Africa need your help. Through SAT-7's Christ-centred programming, we help viewers find freedom in God. We give those whose voices go unheard the freedom to speak. And by opening conversations, educating about human rights, and modelling inclusion, we give viewers the opportunity to seek truth and find freedom.

Will you partner with SAT-7, so we can continue to create relevant programs that equip the region with hope and faith? Your donation can help isolated believers access Christian resources that will aid them to grow in their walk with Christ.

It can help us show women, minorities, and people with disabilities who live with discrimination, stigma, or shame their inherent value in the eyes of God. It can help us show children they are loved by God, and provide them with positive role models and access to education.

Your donation of any amount can change someone's life today. Will you partner with us in this work?

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