

COVID-19 Lockdown Ignites 'Spiritual Explosion' as Middle East Clamors for 'Real Hope'

Amid strict coronavirus lockdowns, millions of people across the Middle East and North Africa—"clamoring" for a spiritual and practical lifeline—are finding help right in their own homes through "living television."

In the region where Christianity began but is now a minority faith, Christian satellite television broadcaster SAT-7 () has seen viewer numbers surge and social media interest skyrocket since the COVID-19 stay-at-home orders.

"There's an explosion of spiritual hunger across the Middle East and North Africa right now as people stuck at home seek real hope and real answers," said Dr. Rex Rogers, president of SAT-7 USA. SAT-7 continues to broadcast shows 24/7 that present Christians as "living epistles" who speak to people where they are in life.

"Millions of people in countries like Iran, Iraq and Turkey are clamoring to see and hear in their own language what it's like to be a follower of Jesus in a time of crisis," Rogers said.

In coronavirus hotspot Turkey, where 99% of the population is non-Christian, more viewers have contacted the SAT-7 TÜRK channel daily in the past few weeks than any day in the previous five years since broadcasts began.

In Iran, another virus hotspot, viewers' calls and messages to the live, Farsi-language *Signal* show—beamed into millions of homes across the nation—jumped to seven times the usual number

last month, as Iranians rattled by the pandemic turned to the show's hosts for reassurance and practical advice.

One viewer shared how God was looking after her family, even though "we don't even have any loose change." She told other *Signal* viewers: "We're living in faith, and we're praying for everyone else."

Across the Middle East and North Africa, SAT-7 KIDS Facebook audience has soared more than 500% as children stream videos offering encouragement and hope based on Bible passages.

Total Lockdown, Open Hearts

"Coronavirus has locked people inside their homes, but it's opening hearts to God," said Rogers. "Lockdown and social isolation do not stop our unique satellite and online Christian programs from reaching millions of adults and children where they live."

A total of 30 million viewers are tuning into SAT-7's uplifting Christian live shows and recorded broadcasts that take a holistic view of life, addressing spiritual, emotional, physical and social concerns. Hosted by Christian presenters, shows tackle the topics that most deeply affect everyday life in the volatile region, and invite viewers to join in the discussion.

"When people have hope, they find the strength to carry on," said Lebanon-born SAT-7 CEO Rita El-Mounayer, based at the ministry headquarters in Cyprus. "Our broadcasts and social media channels are needed more now than ever."

The ministry reports 160,000 people watched "God, Fear, and the Coronavirus," one of SAT-7's mental health programs, featuring church leader and psychiatrist Dr. Maher Samuel. An online video—featuring the popular presenter of the ministry's *Family of Jesus* children's show—reached more than 425,000 people and was shared 2,700 times. Meanwhile, the ministry's SAT-7 Academy—a social development and education

channel—doubled its audience on social media.