

A YEAR WITH COVID-19: IRANIANS SPEAK OUT

The Coronavirus pandemic has taken lives, damaged economies, changed circumstances and created much uncertainty across the world. Christian viewers of SAT-7 PARS in Iran have shared how their faith in Christ is supporting them one year on.

Being cut off from friends and family and experiencing deprivation from meaningful fellowship continues to be a test of endurance for many in Iran and around the world. And yet, messages from Iranian believers offer much encouragement for anyone who feels alone.

“The pressure and difficulties we experience are increasing all the time. We already had problems earning an income and with unemployment, inflation, upsetting news and injustice. All of this, and the Coronavirus got added to the mix,” shares one SAT-7 PARS viewer.

Because of the threat of persecution, Iranian Christians potentially face a greater degree of isolation, in part because they observe the guidelines. “The pandemic has caused me to become more isolated and it has prevented me from being able to embrace and kiss my loved ones,” says Rozita.

Despite the challenging conditions, messages to SAT-7 PARS show that Christians are able to lean on their faith in Christ, and that is making a significant difference to them in facing the problems brought about by COVID-19. “The Coronavirus has brought me much closer to Christ,” Rozita continues to explain. “It has reminded me that as human beings we have no power, and that life itself hangs by a thread and is only sustained by the will of the Lord. So, we must appreciate the value of life and that of our loved ones each moment we are given.”

“The Coronavirus has underscored the need to value and be thankful for one another and not to unwisely judge each other,” writes Yavar, a male SAT-7 PARS viewer from Iran. “After all, the veil between life and death is not substantial. There have been times when there were a lot of people around but because of the emptiness inside we felt alone. But now that vacuum is filled by Christ, and even when you are on your own you don’t feel alone.”

‘I have now reached the conclusion that living with Jesus even whilst facing persecution is better than living without Him.’ - Moziar in Iran



Prayer + News

March 2021



MAKING
HOPE
VISIBLE

SOUTH AFRICA OFFICE:
P O Box 242
Carnarvon NC 8925
southafrica@sat7.org
+27(83)628 6488/+27(84)506 3399
Please contact office for banking details.

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www.sat7.org
www.sat7uk.org

NEW HOPE AT NOWRUZ

On 20 March, the Persian-speaking world celebrated Nowruz, or New Year, under pandemic restrictions. With its celebration of spring and new beginnings, Nowruz has a deeper meaning for Christians as they reflect on their new life in Christ. This year, special programming helps them celebrate in isolation.

“Nowruz celebrates new beginnings,” shares Omeed Jouyandé. “For Iranian Christians, the underlying themes of spring and new life resonate powerfully and are a reminder of the true new life and birth that Christians have in Christ.”

The word *Nowruz* combines two Persian words: *noe*, meaning “new”, and *rooz*, meaning “day”. Celebrating renewal in nature, this ancient festival – marked by Persians, Afghans, Azerbaijanis, Kurds, Tajiks, and even many in the Balkans – marks the first day of spring in the Northern hemisphere.

“As Iranian Christians thinking about the cultural celebrations of Nowruz, we look to the eternal ‘New Day’ (Nowruz), with the ultimate triumph of Jesus, His victory over darkness, and His everlasting rule,” says Omeed, who writes and translates for SAT-7 PARS.

This year, SAT-7 PARS viewers celebrated their second New Year under pandemic restrictions. “Through our programs, we want to inspire, encourage, and support our viewers who have gone through a very challenging year. Above all, we want to guide them to the hope and joy we have in Christ, and to the chance we have for a fresh new start in Him,” shares Panayiotis Keenan, Executive Director of SAT-7 PARS.

Coming together with friends and family is another vital part of Nowruz celebrations. Rev. Tat Stewart, who has presented theological programs on SAT-7 PARS, shared a special Nowruz message with viewers. “Friendships are very important, and so are the relationships we have in Christ. Christ is the one who is able to heal the damage that sin has done to our lives. He can heal broken relationships and broken hearts.”

**• Praise God that He turns death into life!
“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” (1 Peter 1:3, NIV)**



MEET OUR VIEWERS

Please pray for the following viewers
while reading their messages:

FROM A VIEWER IN LEBANON

“Help me overcome my fears of explosions, the virus, and having no money to feed my family. Help me learn to depend on God.

FROM A VIEWER IN SYRIA

“I don’t know anyone in a church or the terms you use like ‘worship’, but this channel is a door of light for me. Pray for this woman to know the Lord.

FROM A VIEWER IN ALGERIA

“I heard Jesus was a prophet for other countries, but he came to me in a dream, and now I follow Him. Pray for me to learn more about Him.

FROM A VIEWER IN TURKEY

“I just learned from your channel that there is a lot of Christian history in Turkey. Pray for my family and friends to learn that too

FROM A VIEWER IN IRAN

“I was arrested for being a Christian. I’m not allowed to work. Our house is my bail, but my case never comes up, so we have no home or money. Pray for me.

FROM A VIEWER IN SAUDI ARABIA

“It would be wonderful to be able to express my beliefs openly. Pray that someday I will have that freedom in my family and my town.



HOPE IN LIFE FOR RURAL ALGERIAN WOMEN “BORN TO DIE”

In this moving blog, SAT-7’s Algerian producer Samia Kessai shares how the challenges of life in North African villages leave women saying, “We were born to die.” Through her programmes, Kessai wants to show that God says these women deserve life – and life in abundance.

I have seen nothing in my life. I first opened my eyes here, in my parents’ house, and 41 years later, I am still here.”

This is the story of a friend of mine. She lives in a village in Algeria, she is not married, and when I first met her, she had never, ever left her parents’ house. Why? She had no opportunity. She is illiterate. She cannot go out to study, to meet anyone or even to go shopping. She is 41 years old. And because she is not married and cannot get a job elsewhere, society obliges her to stay at home.

This life of isolation, of pressure from family and society, is the situation of many, many women in small villages. Early marriage is often the result, with girls accepting the first offer of marriage the family receives, for fear of missing their only chance to leave the house where they were born. For some, there is the constant risk of violence from family.

In addition, most rural women live in poverty. They often cannot read or write, having never attended school and having worked in the fields from a young age. Their families have been subsistence farmers for generations, scratching out a living while unable to grow enough fruit or vegetables to sell.

I cannot express how these women are suffering. They suffer on every level: from isolation, stigma from society, poverty and often health challenges. These women are only surviving, not living. One told me, “We were born to die. Not to live. Not to live a good life.” When we were last in the area, we heard that a woman nearby had killed herself at age 38. The problem was the same – her family did not want her to leave the house.

As for my friend, I shared the Gospel with her four years ago, and praise God – she became a Christian. But even within her home, she faces restrictions. Her mother knows she is a believer, and she burned the Bibles I gave her.

There is no church my friend can access, and she has no internet. She has a lot of questions, but no answers.

My friend tells me that her only refuge is Christian television. This is true for many isolated women – and this is why I produce women’s programmes for SAT-7 ARABIC.

Our new programme, *Despite All*, shares the stories of women believers from Algeria and Tunisia. The subjects are determined by the stories we receive from local women – single motherhood; divorce; child marriage; breast cancer. In each episode, we share a woman’s story and dive deeper into the issue with discussion and facts. Then, we offer encouragement by explaining what the Bible says.

Finally – crucially – we share the testimony of a woman who struggled with the same problems and found hope in Christ.

So many of the women I speak to have no hope. We want to show how God can change these women’s lives “despite all”. When a woman says, “I was born to die,” she is waiting for nothing; she is desperate. This programme will encourage that woman and lead her to find hope in Christ.

One viewer of our programmes, who is blind, said to me, “I cannot see anything, but I can feel everything. I can imagine the woman sharing her testimony on the programme and how God is moving in her life.” I cried when I heard her words.

My prayer is that God will reveal Himself to these women – that He will meet them amid their suffering and struggle, and turn the existence they are living – which is like a form of death – to life.

• **Pray for rural women, like Samia’s friend, who feel totally hopeless and desperate. Ask God to meet with them and give them His hope.**