



Reaching the New Arab Generation



Popular uprisings in Arab lands have brought down regimes in Egypt and Tunisia and tipped Yemen close to civil war. They provoked military intervention to crush rebellion in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Algeria, and Syria. In oil-rich Libya, Western nations intervened militarily to defend a rebellion. Violent wrestling for power continues in Iraq.

The Costs

The turmoil and accompanying changes are raising new challenges and concerns. So far, the “revolutions” have primarily brought economic and security losses—not gains. MERF’s Egyptian broadcast staff and volunteer teams were unable to work for eleven consecutive days. Church services were cancelled for two weeks.

Twice in April, many Egyptian women feared to leave home due to widely-proclaimed threats of attacks on women not wearing the Islamic head-covering. Dozens of young women are reported missing, some from Christian backgrounds. A number were returned for huge ransoms; others may suffer worse. Generally, crime has risen dramatically in Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Tunisia, and Syria.

Islamists

In Libya, most leaders of the rebellion are known to be militant Islamists. The

two organized churches in Tripoli and Benghazi have closed down. In Syria, if the Sunni majority rises to power, Christians and other minorities are likely to suffer. In Bahrain, the Shiite rebellion identifies with Iran, but the minority Sunni monarchy is supported by Saudi Arabia and the West.

Many of the loud voices for “freedom” long for an Arab and worldwide Islamic theocracy. Others call for secularism. It is too early to tell which dream will be realized. Islamic movements are more established and bet-

Clockwise: Tens of thousands of Egyptians demonstrating in Tahrir Square in Cairo to demand the end of Mubarak’s regime; Coptic Christians grieve in Cairo after Muslim fanatics attacked and burned their church; Anti-government protesters confronted police in Egypt.

ter organized than the new youth movements, but higher education and growing secularism among the young majority makes a return to traditional Islam less likely.

But what will be the impact on Arab Christians and the work of the Gospel? Regular, fervent prayer is needed for the Lord’s protection, peace, and guidance to Arab believers so that they might wisely and boldly seize opportunities to overcome evil with good—through loving the lost and proclaiming Christ in the youthful, fast-changing Arab world.

Reaching the Young Majority

About two-thirds of the Arab population is under thirty-six years of age. In God’s providence, MERF’s Arabic electronic-media staff is mostly in this age group. Some of their acquaintances participated in demonstrations. For several years, our strategy has focused on reaching youth. By God’s grace, the Arabic ministry teams have been in the forefront of using information technology for gospel proclamation. They use themes in tune with the questions, concerns, and aspirations of young people.

“Dardasha” (chatting), MERF’s Arabic radio broadcast, daily receives responses from listeners via SMS (text) and email



messages. The Arabic ministry website, dardasha7.com, is visited by many every day. Some download the broadcasts in MP3 format to listen and share with others. Others download reading materials—Scripture portions, articles, books, or broadcast texts.

The website has also organized a forum (chat room) which already includes

more than 700 members from Muslim backgrounds, most under 36! One of the recent forum discussions revolved around the question: “What major change do you wish to see taking place in your society, country, or your personal lives?”

Responses

Here are some quotes sent by SMS, email, or on the site:

From Saudi Arabia: *“I wish to see my family open to other religious ideas...”*

From Algeria: *“The best thing for the Arab World is to adopt the principles of freedom which operate in the developed world.”*

From Yemen: *“Already my life is enriched by the beautiful teachings of Issa al-Masih (Jesus Christ)... His glorious teachings is needed by all people.”*

From Morocco: *“...for many years I thought Christian people held a false view about Issa*

(Jesus). Now I have doubt about our Muslim opinion on this...”

A joint text message from two young Egyptians, both Muslim university students: *“...we find firm certainty in the discussion we heard about the new humanity. We need to learn more about that idea...”*

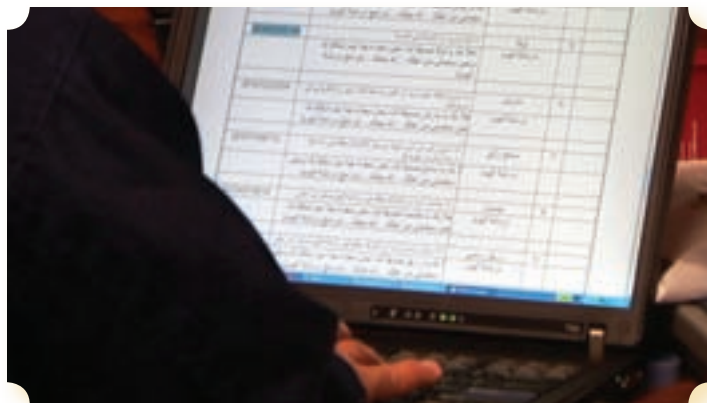
Prayer and the support of God’s people are vital for MERF’s continuing gospel work in Arab and Muslim lands.

Top: Brainstorming by Arabic broadcast teams about reaching young Muslims. Bottom: SMS text messaging enables speedy contact with young people.

MERF-Canada

Thank you from the heart for your faithful support. Please make cheques payable to MERF-Canada and send them to the address at the bottom of the page.

Yours in Christ’s service, Rev. J. DeGelder, chairman (jdegelder@cogeco.ca Tel. 905.690.0253); Joanne VanDam, secretary; Aafke Spithoff, treasurer



*“But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.”
—Matthew 5:44*