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Rankin: 'Break down wall of Islam'

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PHOENIX-International Mission Board President Jerry Rankin sent out an urgent plea to help "break down the wall" of Islam during the closing session of the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting June 18.

Using video presentations and interviews with IMB representatives, volunteers and friends, Rankin told how missionaries and missions volunteers are needed to reach the Muslim world for Christ.

"It is God's time for the gospel to penetrate those barriers in the Muslim world," Rankin said. "It is the providence and power of God, moving to fulfill his purpose that he will be exalted among all nations and people and tongues. The only question is: Will we be found faithful?"

Jerry Rankin calls Southern Baptists to take the gospel to the Muslim world. "We have 5,545 doctrinally sound missionaries who are fully responsible to the churches that support them."

At the same time, Rankin reported the IMB will appoint only 100 long-term missionaries for the rest of the year due to financial constraints. The 100 will be chosen from among 308 applicants, he said.

"The \$115.1 million given to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering last year was the most ever given, but the increase in giving (has) not kept pace with the numbers God is calling from our churches," Rankin said. "Southern Baptists gave \$9.4 billion (to their churches) last year, but less than 2.5 percent was channeled into overseas missions through the International Mission Board.

"How will we give an account to God for our failure to send those called out

of our churches for such a time as this?” Rankin asked.

Noting the recent termination of missionaries for not affirming the Baptist Faith & Message 2000, Rankin said: “Much has been published about missionaries being terminated, but the largest number of missions personnel to serve is right now. We have 5,545 doctrinally sound missionaries who are fully responsible to the churches that support them.”

Those missionaries are engaged in successful ministries, he added.

“Last year, your missionaries gained access to 146 new people groups who had the opportunity to hear the gospel for first time and planted congregations of indigenous believers as an ongoing witness and ministry,” he reported.

Rankin also noted that through the ministry of IMB workers and their ministry partners, 421,436 new believers were baptized in 2002, and 8,369 churches were started in Eastern Europe.

During a question-and-answer time, Tom Higginbotham of Judson Baptist Church in Walker, La., asked for clarification about whether Scripture was included on the food boxes recently collected for distribution in Iraq. During the convention sermon, O.S. Hawkins had referenced “liberals” protesting Scripture citations in the boxes.

“Dr. Hawkins said the liberals did not want Scripture in them,” Rankin responded. “He did not say we did not accompany them with Scripture. Scripture is on the box, and there are wonderful opportunities to share the gospel.”

Bob Arthur of First Baptist Church in Springdale, Ark., also talked about the Iraqi food boxes live via satellite from Baghdad. With a group of 30 volunteers in Iraq, Arthur asked Southern Baptists to send teams to Iraq during the next 120 days.

“Food cartons are going to arrive in late July or early August,” Arthur said. “We need Southern Baptist teams there to distribute those boxes in Baghdad and surrounding communities.”

Arthur cited needs for volunteers to help with cell-church training, structural repairs and water filtration systems.

“There are 100,000 people living without an operating sewer system in one area,” he said.

The pastor of the Protestant Evangelical Church of Baghdad told Arthur there are 2,500 born-again believers in Baghdad, he said.

“The military liberated Iraq externally, but only Christ can liberate it internally,” Arthur said. “The needs are phenomenal. We cannot fail at this point in history. We must respond as God leads us as individuals and churches.”

News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Texas Baptist churches, in the BGCT, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and around the world.