



## Christian group barred from sidewalk handouts at Arab festival



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**AP** Associated Press DETROIT, MI - A federal judge has denied an evangelical group's request for permission to hand out Christian literature on sidewalks at an Arab festival in Dearborn, Michigan.

U.S. District Judge Nancy Edmunds denied Anaheim, Calif.-based Arabic Christian Perspective's request for a temporary restraining order. The group describes itself in its court filing as "a national ministry established for the purpose of proclaiming the Holy Gospel of Jesus Christ to Muslims ...(that) travels around the country attending and distributing Christian literature at Muslim festivals and mosques."

A lawyer for the group said it would seek a permanent injunction against the city of Dearborn. "It's not over," said Robert J. Muise of the [Thomas More Law Center](#), an Ann Arbor-based Christian rights advocacy group.

Another lawyer on the case said the Dearborn officials action could be part of what he described as a broader Muslim legal attack on critics of Islam in our "Judeo-Christian nation."

"Muslims are using the courts in this country to stop our free speech rights," said William J. Becker Jr., a Los Angeles attorney who has represented a number of prominent critics of Islam.

The 14th annual Dearborn Arab International Festival is expected to draw hundreds of thousands of visitors Friday through Sunday to the city that has the Detroit area's greatest concentration of Arab-Americans.

Festival organizer Fay Beydoun said the evangelical group was being offered a good spot in an area with a number of other religious, nonprofit and political groups. "You have to pass right in front of it to get anywhere," said Beydoun, executive director of the American Arab Chamber of Commerce.

Southeastern Michigan has about 300,000 people with roots in the Arab world. It includes large numbers of both Muslims and Christians.

The group sued Dearborn after police told the Rev. George Saieg members would need to restrict literature distribution to a designated table-and-booth section of the festival site.

The city said safely accommodating the 150,000 daily festival-goers requires limits on where people can leaflet. It said other Christian and Muslim groups already have tables and booths for distributing material at the festival.

City officials say anyone is free to have conversations — but not leaflet — on sidewalks within the festival's barricades.

"It appears to be a legitimate governmental interest for crowd control and safety," Edmunds said in denying the request. "The festival area is more akin to a fair than a normal city street."

Becker said the case is similar to one he handled in Los Angeles, in which Jews for Jesus member Cyril Gordon won about \$250,000 after being arrested for trespassing in 2006 outside an Israel Independence Day event in a park. "This is a case where your right, my right and anybody's right to walk down the street and express their views is being disrupted by a police action," he said.

An official of the Council of American-Islamic Relations said Arabic Christian Perspective was asking for special treatment. "They should abide by the rules and purchase a booth like the other religious groups," said Dawud Walid, executive director of the group's Michigan chapter. "Christians can talk about Christianity and Muslims can promote Islam. This is the right we have as Americans."



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