

No Word From Obama as Persecuted Christians Caught in Iran's Crosshairs

An Islamic terror campaign against Christians in Egypt should be headline-grabbing news. Not so. Few media outlets are focusing on the story behind the story in Egypt—a calculated assault against Egypt's ancient Christian community.

In recent weeks, the violence in Egypt—fueled by hate-filled **radical Muslims**—has resulted in the murder of **Coptic Christians** and the destruction of dozens of churches. Radical Islamists have even paraded Christian nuns through the streets like prisoners of war.

Supporters of the **Muslim Brotherhood**, an anti-American, anti-Israel terrorist group, put red paint on Christian homes and businesses – marking them as targets.

The attacks are so unrelenting that even one **Egyptian church**, which has been open for 1,600 years, had to close its doors – canceling services for the first time ever – because of the violence.

The assault on Christians is not confined to Egypt. We see it in our work in Pakistan, where Christians are also singled out and face grave dangers because of their faith.

And, just this week, an American citizen experienced **religious persecution** first-hand when a court in Iran rejected his appeal. Christian pastor **Saeed Abedini** faces eight years in prison. He's been imprisoned now for nearly one year, subjected to beatings and torture, simply because of his Christian faith.

The disturbing decision by Iran's judiciary violates the

universally-respected principles of protecting human rights and **religious freedom**. And, the decision seems to indicate that it is business as usual Iran—even under the new President Hasan Rouhani.

In fact, one of the judges who rejected the appeal, Judge Ahmad Zargar, was sanctioned by the European Union for issuing long-term sentences and the death penalty against peaceful protestors.

At the American Center for Law and Justice we represent Pastor Saeed's wife, Naghmeh, and their two young children. The family lives here in the United States.

The latest news out of Iran is devastating for Saeed family and raises two even more important questions: Why is the Obama administration largely silent on this topic? Why isn't President Obama forcefully speaking out, condemning this assault on Christians?

Let's go back to Egypt for a moment. As the **anti-Christian violence** there escalates, President Obama has said very little about the slaughter.

Here's what he said just days ago: "We believe that ... the rights of ... religious minorities should be respected."

That's it?

Where's the outrage? Where's the condemnation?

President Obama won't even use the word "Christians" to address the fact that it is, indeed, Coptic Christians—who make up approximately 10 percent of Egypt's population, who are in the crosshairs in Egypt.

What's worse, the president's spokesman used the assault on Christians to make an awkward joke.

When the White House was asked directly about this disturbing

situation by Fox News' Ed Henry, "With people being killed, Christians in particular being targeted, churches being destroyed, what's the president's red line in Egypt?"

The White House's official response was "Well, I didn't bring my red pen out with me today."

This is what we get from the White House? A flippant, tasteless joke about the murder of Christians in Egypt.

And when it comes to the imprisonment of an American Christian, a U.S. citizen, in Iran, there is not a peep out of President Obama. Not a word.

Secretary of State Kerry did express his concern about Pastor Saeed on two occasions, the most recent statement coming Wednesday from the State Department.

But with an American imprisoned in Iran, the president should be out front, using the influence of his office, his bully pulpit, to condemn Iran's actions and demand the release of Pastor Saeed. Especially now that the Iranian judicial system has rejected Pastor Saeed's appeal.

"I am extremely disappointed that President Obama has chosen to remain silent on this critical human and religious rights case of an American imprisoned in Iran," said Naghmeh Abedini, Pastor Saeed's wife.

"My husband is serving eight years in the notorious Evin prison and facing daily threats and abuse by radicals because he refuses to deny his Christian faith. And yet, President Obama has not spoken a word about him."

The United States should be leading the way for human rights and religious freedom.

The president has a real opportunity, in fact, a responsibility, to take the lead in defending religious freedom, whether it's Coptic Christians being murdered in the

streets of Cairo, or a U.S. citizen facing life-threatening conditions in a prison cell in Tehran simply because of his Christian faith.

Jay Sekulow is Chief Counsel of the American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ). Follow him on Twitter@JaySekulow.