

Persecuted Pastor Taken to Hospital in Shackles, Then Refused Treatment

American pastor Saeed Abedini's case has taken a turn for the worse. He has been shackled and refused medical treatment at a hospital, as Iranian guards forcibly ban visitors.

A little over a week ago, Abedini—a U.S. citizen—was moved from Rajai Shahr Prison to a private hospital in Iran. He was told he would receive further tests on his deteriorating medical condition and would undergo surgery to address chronic pain in his stomach area—the result of numerous prison beatings.

For the past week and a half, Abedini has undergone various tests and received much-needed nourishment. This had been a very positive development and has offered him a much-needed reprieve.

On Tuesday, that all changed. Iranian guards lashed out violently against Abedini and an elderly relative who had been able to visit him in the hospital Tuesday morning. Abedini was pinned down and shackled. His elderly relative was roughly handled and expelled from the hospital.

The guards stated they had a court order banning visitors and instructing that he be shackled at all times. Hospital doctors also told Abedini that he must leave the hospital and return to prison. They are refusing to provide him with anything more than mere pain medication. They have denied him surgery—the only treatment that will help. They have even denied him test results.

The timing of both of these moves is very suspect. In what appears to be a move to put Iran in a favorable light, Abedini

was moved to the hospital, something his Iranian family has been actively seeking for months, at a time that coincided with the arrival of the high representative of the European Union, Catherine Ashton, in Iran. However, as soon as Ashton departed Iran, Abedini was informed he would be moved back to prison without receiving any real treatment.

The EU has been faithfully raising Abedini's case for some time, and this move would allow Iranian officials to report that he was receiving medical treatment if his case was brought up during the EU's visit to Iran.

This disturbing turn of events reiterates the need to keep pressure on Iran. As soon as pressure lets up, the situation gets worse.

Iran must not be allowed to continue to abuse and mistreat Abedini out of the public spotlight. The Iranian government is wrongfully imprisoning him and denying him needed medical care because he is a Christian. Each day he spends apart from his family and away from the care of physicians is another human rights abuse.

While Iran's actions seem to undercut the sincerity of Iran's leaders in promising the world change in Iran, there is still an opportunity for President Rouhani and Iran's supreme leader to act.

March 21 marks the Iranian new year, a time when clemency is often granted to prisoners of conscience. If Iran wants the world to see it in a new light, now is the time to grant clemency for Pastor Saeed. Iranian Foreign Minister Zarif says clemency could be possible. Now would be the time.

We are continuing to fight for Abedini's freedom. Right now a legal team from both our U.S. and international offices is meeting with world leaders at the United Nations office in Geneva.

Please continue to pray, share Pastor Abedini's story, and sign the petition for his freedom.

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