

# American-Iranian Pastor Faces Death Penalty for Naming Christ

The American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ), which focuses on constitutional and human rights law, announced Wednesday it is representing the wife of an Iranian-American pastor who is being held in an Iranian prison because of his Christian faith.

Saeed Abedini, who converted to Christianity, has been indicted by an Iranian court and is facing formal charges that could result in a lengthy prison term or possibly even the death penalty. The ACLJ, which is providing legal representation for his family, is also launching an international campaign calling on the United Nations, the U.S. State Department and Congress to demand the release of Pastor Saeed.

“This is a very troubling pattern that we have seen inside Iran—Christian husbands and fathers who are punished for their religious beliefs,” said Jordan Sekulow, executive director of the ACLJ. “What makes this particular case so much more disturbing is that Pastor Saeed, who was born and raised in Iran, has been granted U.S. citizenship. He’s been in prison for nearly three months simply because of his Christian faith.

“Now,” Sekulow continues, “he’s been indicted by an Iranian court—a development that could very well result in a death sentence. In addition to our legal work, it’s important to get this story out to generate global support for Pastor Saeed and to engage the U.N. and the U.S. government in securing his release.”

Abedini, 32, was granted U.S. citizenship in 2010 through marriage to his American wife. He and his wife, Naghme, have

two children, a 6-year-old daughter and 4-year-old son. In 2008, Pastor Saeed became an ordained minister with the American Evangelistic Association. Naghmeh and the children reside in the western U.S. The Iranian government does not recognize his U.S. citizenship, and for three years he traveled freely back and forth from Iran—until this summer, when he was put under house arrest.

Abedini was imprisoned in September and this week an Iranian court indicted him on several charges, which have not been made public. In fact, the government has refused to notify Pastor Saeed, his attorney or his family about what's included in the specific charges. What's clear is that Abedini is in prison because of his Christian faith and his desire to share the gospel with others.

In a recent letter to his family from prison, Abedini said: "Prison is a test of faith. I was always worried that the storms of this life would break the ship of faith, but when you stand in the steadfast ship of faith, the storms are like a nice breeze. Nothing can break the ship of faith. These walls have created more fervor for me to love others through sharing the gospel, but more than that, the walls have deepened my love for my Savior. I feel the prayers of all who are praying for me. I hope to one day meet each one of them face to face and embrace them in my arms."

Abedini underwent a life-changing conversion from Islam to Christianity when he was 20 years old. He has been active in proclaiming his faith and sharing his religious beliefs for many years.

Pastor Saeed has been harassed by the Iranian government for more than a decade. He had faced numerous confrontations with the Iran's Revolutionary Guard and Intelligence police over the years and had been detained in the past. But his current imprisonment puts Abedini in grave danger. He had been held in solitary confinement before a recent move to a general prison

ward. ACLJ sources confirm Abedini has been the victim of both physical and emotional abuse, and there is concern for his immediate state of health.

Naghmeh Abedini, Pastor Saeed's wife, told the ACLJ that this is a very difficult time for her family.

"Our concern is growing with each passing day," she said. "This is a very, very difficult time for our family. What is happening is hard to understand. During this season of our Savior's birth, our family—including our two young children—cannot help but feel a huge gap in our midst. Memories of years past tear at our hearts as we desperately pray for Saeed to come home."

Just three months ago, the Iranian government—facing significant international pressure—released Pastor Youcef Nadarkhani, a Christian pastor who spent nearly three years in prison because of his faith.

The ACLJ launched a global online campaign to demand Nadarkhani's freedom. More than 3 million people agreed to send one Tweet a day in its "Tweet for Youcef" campaign. Sadly, the Iranian attorney who fought for the freedom of Pastor Youcef has been imprisoned for representing him and others oppressed in Iran. Through Twitter, the ACLJ continues to call attention to his plight and demand his release.

In Pastor Saeed's case, the ACLJ is providing legal representation to his family and working with various contacts in Iran on his case. Further, the ACLJ is launching an international campaign urging the United Nations, the U.S. State Department and Congress to get involved and demand Abedini's release.

"We know that the Iranian government is sensitive to international pressure," said Sekulow. "We have seen that in the Pastor Youcef case. Now, we have an Iranian-born Christian, who holds a U.S. passport, being punished for his

beliefs. Pastor Saeed's alleged crime: converting to Christianity and proclaiming his Christian faith. His imprisonment and indictment violates international human rights and religious freedom laws. That's why it is so critical to challenge this imprisonment both legally and in the court of public opinion around the world."