

American Pastor Saeed Abedini Handed Over to Iran's 'Hanging Judge'

American **Pastor Saeed Abedini**, who is being held in one of Iran's most abusive prisons because of his Christian faith, faces a new challenge. His case was just transferred to a judge who is notorious for violating **human rights**.

Over this past weekend, the case of American Pastor Saeed Abedini was referred by the local Iranian prosecutor to Branch 26 of the Tehran Revolutionary Court. The case was assigned to Judge Pir-Abassi, a judge notorious for his harsh sentences against those who exercise their fundamental freedoms. In the international law arena, Judge Pir-Abassi is often referred to as one of Iran's "hanging judges" for the numerous individuals he has sent to the gallows.

In April 2011, the European Union named Judge Pir-Abassi as an individual subject to sanctions for human rights violations. According to the Official Journal of the European Union, Judge Pir-Abassi presided over numerous unfair trials of human rights activists following the 2009 election, handing down long prison sentences and several death sentences to those convicted.

Additionally, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom recommended to the State Department in its 2012 Annual report that the U.S. government similarly issue sanctions against Judge Pir-Abassi. The Commission stated that Judge Pir-Abassi is "responsible for particularly severe violations of religious freedom" and the U.S. should "continue to bar from entry into the United States and freeze [his and his immediate family members'] assets." The U.S. State Department has not, to date, sanctioned Judge Pir-Abassi.

And although the State Department is aware that an American citizen's fate lies in the hands of a noted human rights abuser, it remains inactive. To date, the State Department, while acknowledging the case, has thus far refused to take decisive action on this American citizen's behalf. It is an absolute travesty that the U.S. government would standby idly while an American citizen, detained for his exercise of a fundamental human right, deteriorates in an Iranian prison.

This new development is highly troubling—it appears Iran is determined to remove any chance of the American pastor receiving any semblance of a fair trial. Even more troubling is that the U.S. government has remained silent, essentially abandoning this American in his search for justice.

We will continue to bring you the latest developments in Pastor Saeed's case while urging the action of the U.S. State Department. Join our efforts to free Pastor Saeed by signing the petition demanding the State Department take action on his behalf.