Billy Graham Writes Iran's President for Persecuted Pastor Saeed

Editor's Note: *The Rev. Billy Graham has joined tens of thousands of Americans in writing a letter directly to Iranian President Hasan Rouhani. The full text of the letter is below.*

Dear President Rouhani,

I have been watching with great concern about the case of Pastor Saeed Abedini, an American citizen who is currently a prisoner in your country. He was in Iran working to build an orphanage when he was arrested and later sentenced to eight years in prison. His situation has been receiving an increasingly high level of attention in the United States. Unfortunately this publicity has been entirely negative for Iran, with the belief that the primary reason for Pastor Abedini's imprisonment was because of his Christian faith.

As you may know, as a religious leader I have often spoken (both publicly and also privately with your national leadership) about the need for greater understanding and peace among the nations of the world. As you come to the United States this week for the U.N. General Assembly in New York, it is my sincere hope that ways may be found to reduce the current tensions between the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The announcement on Monday that your country has freed 80 political prisoners is very encouraging. I fear, however, that the current publicity surrounding the continued imprisonment of Pastor Abedini, and American citizen, may further harm the already fragile relationship that presently exists between our two nations.

On Sept. 26, the one-year anniversary of Pastor Abedini's imprisonment, thousands will attend prayer vigils in more than 70 U.S. cities, calling on your country to release this husband, father and servant of God. I join them by respectfully asking you to release Pastor Saeed Abedini from prison. Such an action would, I believe, have a positive impact in our nation, and might well be perceived by our leadership as a significant step in reducing tensions.

Respectfully yours,

Billy Graham