

Health Failing, Pastor Saeed Abedini Moved to Political Prisoner Ward

American pastor Saeed Abedini, who has been wrongfully imprisoned in Iran for more than a year because of his Christian faith, has been moved from the murderer ward to the political prisoner ward in Rajai Shahr Prison.

Make no mistake: Abedini is still in the deadliest prison in Iran and facing deteriorating medical conditions. This is the first positive step, however slight, since his transfer from Evin Prison last November.

For the first time in six weeks, Abedini's Iranian family was able to visit with him today in his new prison ward. No reason was given for the move, and his family reports that this new ward, still within the dangerous walls of Rajai Shahr, represents a slight improvement in his treatment. Abedini is now receiving better meals.

Abedini's family reports that his medical problems continue to worsen. He continues throwing up on a regular basis and is still experiencing significant pain in his abdomen. Since being moved within the prison, Abedini was able to see a prison doctor who was very concerned about his internal injuries. The doctor recommended that he receive surgery and provided him medication to ease his pain.

Abedini sustained internal injuries from beatings he endured in Evin Prison early in his imprisonment. Those injuries have gone largely untreated, and when Abedini was transferred to Rajai Shahr, Iranian authorities refused to give him the medication he had been prescribed. Though Abedini was provided pain medication recently, he has still been denied the medication that was previously prescribed for his internal

injuries.

Since recently meeting with the prison doctor in Rajai Shahr, Abedini has not yet received the needed surgery. Abedini's family has formally petitioned the Iranian government to allow him to receive this critically necessary surgery at a private hospital.

Despite his move from the worst-of-the-worst ward in the prison, he still faces grave danger, significant medical issues and life-threatening prison conditions.

Abedini's wife, Naghmeh, responded to this latest development, saying, "There is a glimmer of comfort to know that my husband has been transferred out of the murderers' ward, but my heart aches to know the pain he continually suffers and that his injuries necessitate surgery. As a family, it is difficult to be so far away and unable to comfort him in his pain.

"Though we are encouraged by the transfer to the new ward, such a small step is far from an unconditional release, where Saeed is reunited with our family. While this development is welcomed, we desperately await his return home."

Even in this new prison ward, numerous prisoners are complaining that prison conditions are making them sick. Since Abedini's move, the regime has canceled or closed many of the recreational facilities, even the library, that had been available to political prisoners. The authorities have placed two violent prisoners in the political prisoner ward who consistently threaten any semblance of peace. These violent prisoners have already robbed several of the prisoners in the political prisoner ward.

The Iranian regime continues to wrongfully imprison Pastor Saeed—a U.S. citizen—for his Christian faith in the deadliest prison in Iran. Until Abedini is free to return to his wife and two young children in the U.S., we must never give up. We must continue to pressure Iran for his freedom.

When the Obama administration refused to even ask for Pastor Saeed's release during negotiations with Iran, we not only lost a critical opportunity for his freedom but effectively insulated Iran from ever feeling the need to free this U.S. citizen.

His freedom has not been a top priority for Obama administration and the U.S. State Department. We continue to believe that renewed economic sanctions on Iran may now be the best chance we have to bring Iran back to the negotiating table—a key to Abedini's freedom. You can sign our petition demanding a vote in the U.S. Senate to sanction Iran at .

We continue working with world leaders and urging the U.S. government to make Pastor Saeed's freedom a priority. Please continue to pray for Pastor Saeed's release and share his story. He must never be forgotten.