

Intercessors Launch Prayer Vigil at 1-Year Mark of Persecuted Pastor's Imprisonment

Seven-year-old Rebekka Abedini misses her daddy. More than 400 days ago, her father, American pastor Saeed Abedini, traveled back to Iran to continue work on an orphanage he was building with government approval. She hasn't seen him since.

If the Iranian regime has its way, Pastor Saeed will spend each of the next seven years languishing behind bars on charges related to his Christian faith. The American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ), a constitutional and human rights law advocacy group representing Saeed's wife and two children, has called the pastor's eight-year judgment "a virtual death sentence."

"Every minute, every day Saeed is apart from us is more excruciating than the next," says Pastor Saeed's wife, Naghmeh, who lives in Boise, Idaho, with daughter Rebekka and son Jacob, age 5. "This was the second year that Saeed missed Rebekka's birthday [Sept. 12]. We had hoped that this past year would be the last she would ever have to celebrate without daddy. Now I am faced with the painful realization that our kids are growing up without their father. We are praying for a miracle just to be able to see him again."

Naghmeh won't be alone in those prayers. On Sept. 26, the one-year anniversary of Pastor Saeed's imprisonment, thousands will attend prayer vigils in more than 70 U.S. cities—including Washington, D.C., and the Abedinis' hometown of Boise—and 13 countries worldwide to call on Iran to release Pastor Saeed and to pressure their own governments to take

diplomatic action on his behalf.

The vigil participants join more than 620,000 people from around the world demanding the pastor's release. Now thousands more are urging newly elected Iranian President Hasan Rouhani to release Pastor Saeed through an online letter-writing campaign at

"With each passing day in prison, the situation facing this American pastor becomes more grave," says Jordan Sekulow, executive director of the ACLJ. "For one year now, he has been illegally imprisoned—365 days that have been extremely difficult and dangerous for Pastor Saeed and increasingly trying for his wife and children. We realize that international attention—including a statement by President Obama, which has yet to come—is a critical part of a global strategy to keep the spotlight on Iran, to keep this urgent human and religious rights case at the forefront.

"Our legal and diplomatic work continues to free Pastor Saeed. And we are hopeful that on this anniversary of his captivity, governments around the globe will redouble their diplomatic efforts on behalf of Pastor Saeed. Hundreds of thousands of people worldwide already have taken a stand to demand Pastor Saeed's immediate release. On this critical anniversary, we invite people of faith everywhere to join us at ."

To date, President Obama has yet to personally mention or speak publicly about this American citizen held captive in an Iranian prison. Secretary of State John Kerry did, however, issuing two statements, the most recent coming last month "respectfully" asking the Iranian government to "work cooperatively" to return Pastor Saeed to his family in the U.S.

Just last month, the Revolutionary Court in Iran rejected the pastor's appeal, reaffirming his conviction and sentence to eight years in Tehran's Evin Prison because of his Christian

beliefs—beliefs the regime interpret as “crimes against the national security of Iran,” which is Saeed’s actual charge.

During the past 365 days, Pastor Saeed has endured repeated beatings and psychological abuse at the hands of fellow inmates and through interrogations by the Revolutionary Guard. Doctors have confirmed he is suffering from internal injuries that require ongoing medical attention—attention his captors have regularly denied.

More detailed information about the case of U.S. Pastor Saeed Abedini is available in timeline form [here](#).