

Iran Delivers ‘Devastating’ Blow to Persecuted Pastor

An appeals court in Tehran rejected the appeal of American pastor Saeed Abedini, a U.S. citizen, and refused to reduce his eight-year prison sentence. Pastor Saeed’s wife, Naghmeh, calls the decision “devastating,” and the American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ) is now exploring all legal and governmental options available.

“While we remained hopeful that Iran would use its own appeal process to finally show respect for Pastor Saeed’s basic human rights, again Iran has demonstrated an utter disregard for the fundamentals of human rights,” says Jordan Sekulow, executive director of the ACLJ, which represents Abedini’s wife and their two children.

“We are exploring all options with Pastor Saeed’s family, including options in this country and abroad to bring more pressure on Iran from the U.S. and other countries around the world. The decision is deeply troubling and underscores Iran’s continued violation of principles of freedom of religion, association, peaceful assembly and expression.”

Sekulow adds, “This legal decision also signals a new level of concern for Pastor Saeed’s safety. By keeping the eight-year prison sentence in place, Pastor Saeed now potentially faces additional beatings and abuse inside Evin Prison—treatment that has significantly weakened him during his first year in prison.”

“The news out of Iran is devastating to our family,” Naghmeh Abedini says. “In the coming days our family will be consulting with legal counsel in Iran to determine the next course of action. The family could appeal the case to the Supreme Court in Tehran or plead for the supreme leader,

Ayatollah Khamenei, to intervene and pardon Pastor Saeed.

"From past cases, we know that the decision to release my husband lies solely at the mercy of the supreme leader. It is imperative in the coming days, weeks and months that we remain vigilant to call for Pastor Saeed's release. This includes continuing to put pressure on Iran from the U.S. government and governments around the world."

Naghmeh Abedini also expressed disappointment in the U.S. government.

"I am disappointed that as a country that was founded on religious freedom, our government has been awkwardly silent as an American citizen is wasting away in an Iranian prison because he chose to practice his God-given right to choose his religion," she says. "My husband is serving eight years in the notorious Evin Prison and facing daily threats and abuse by radicals because he refuses to deny his Christian faith. And yet my president, President Obama, has not spoken a word about him."

"As we commemorate the 50th anniversary of the historic speech defending freedom by Dr. Martin Luther King, a brave American who gave his life to fight for the freedom that is so fundamental to our way of life, I am extremely disappointed that President Obama has chosen to remain silent on this critical human and religious rights case of an American imprisoned in Iran."

She adds, "I do hope and pray that as a nation we realize that if we do not speak out against injustice, it is only matter of time before all our children will have to face what my children are facing today. As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, 'Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.'"

The decision to reject Abedini's appeal came Sunday from Branch 36 of the Tehran Court of Appeals and was handed down by a two-judge panel that refused to provide Pastor Saeed's

Iranian attorney with a written copy of the decision. One of the judges who issued the decision is Judge Ahmad Zargar, who was sanctioned by the European Union for issuing long-term and death sentences for peaceful protestors.

Pastor Saeed, a U.S. citizen, was convicted of threatening the security of Iran because he chose to peacefully gather with other Christian believers. On Jan. 27, Judge Pir Abassi, a judge presently sanctioned by the European Union for his human rights abuses, found Pastor Saeed's Christian faith and activities tantamount to a national security threat and sentenced him to a prison sentence of eight years.

The decision rejecting the appeal of 33-year-old Abedini comes just one month before the first year anniversary of his imprisonment. There will be prayer vigils in this country and around the world on Sept. 26—a united effort to call attention to Abedini's plight and a very important opportunity to advocate for his release. You can learn more about the Sept. 26th prayer vigils at [.](#)

The ACLJ has been working in this country and abroad to secure his freedom and has heard from nearly 620,000 people demanding his release.