

Pastor Abedini's Wife to Congress: Don't Forget My Husband

Pastor Saeed's wife, Naghmeh, and I testified before Congress Thursday about the American pastor's worsening plight.

The U.S. government must make Pastor Saeed a priority.

Pastor Saeed's wife told Congress about the dire situation facing her husband in Iran: "After he endured more than a year in one of the world's worst prisons, Evin Prison in Tehran, on Nov. 3, 2013, the Iranian regime transferred my husband to Iran's most deadly prison, Rajaï Shahr. The Iranian regime sends prisoners to Rajaï Shahr to disappear. It sends prisoners to Rajaï Shahr to deny them their human rights. It sends prisoners to Rajaï Shahr to die.

"While he was in Evin Prison, I feared for his life because he was brutally beaten by guards and interrogators, which resulted in internal injuries. But at least in Evin Prison he was in a ward with fellow prisoners of conscience. When Iranian officials transferred him to Rajaï Shahr, he was surrounded by some of Iran's most violent criminals, rapists and murderers.

"Since he arrived at Rajaï Shahr, he has been repeatedly threatened and robbed at knifepoint. At times he has awoken to find a knife-wielding prisoner standing over him at his bed.

"Prisoners have murdered other prisoners while prison officials stood by and did nothing. In that place, nothing but the hand of God keeps him from being killed. Each day he remains in that dreadful place could mean a death sentence; any day could be execution day."

She also told members of Congress how her husband's torment in Iran is affecting their family here in the U.S.

"As Christmas quickly approaches," she said, "it is just another painful reminder of life without Saeed for our family. When I ask my children what they want for Christmas, their answer is simple. It's the same thing they wanted for their birthdays this year. It's the same thing they want every day. They just want Daddy. They want Daddy home. They want Daddy to be able to tuck them into bed, to sing them a song, to hold them in his embrace.

"Most nights they cry themselves to sleep, wanting Daddy home. I have not had the heart to tell them of the eight-year sentence. I am hoping that I will not have to tell them of the eight-year sentence. I am hoping that we can bring Saeed home soon.

"If we don't do everything within our power as a nation to bring him home now, I fear he will be left to die. I fear my children will never see their father again."

Naghmeh Abedini also used this opportunity to highlight the increased **persecution of Christians** all over the world and the need to give each of them a voice.

"It is unfortunate that Christians are the No. 1 persecuted people in the world," she said, "but not much attention and effort is taken to protect their religious liberty.

"I am standing here before you today because religious persecution is real. And until we stand up as one—as Americans, as political leaders and government officials, as people who have been endowed by our Creator with certain unalienable rights—we will not truly embrace the responsibility that comes with that freedom."

She thanked members of Congress for their efforts thus far on her husband's behalf and urged her government to do more to

bring her husband home safely.

"I cannot express how grateful I am to the members of Congress who have refused to let my husband be forgotten," she said.

"While I am thankful for President Obama's willingness to express concern about my husband and the other imprisoned Americans in Iran during his recent phone conversation with Iran's new president, Hassan Rouhani, I was devastated to learn that the administration didn't even ask for my husband's release when directly seated across the table from the leaders of the government that holds him captive.

"My husband is suffering because he is a Christian. He is suffering because he is an American. Yet his own government, at least the executive and diplomatic representatives, has abandoned him. Don't we owe it to him as a nation to stand up for his human rights, for his freedom?

"As I have said, I am very thankful for the actions our government has taken for Saeed. I am thankful that the Senate unanimously passed a bipartisan resolution just last month calling for my husband's freedom. I understand that there is a similar resolution being considered here in the House of Representatives. I urge you to pass this resolution quickly."

You can read Naghmeh Abedini's complete statement submitted to Congress [here](#).

I focused my testimony on not only his plight but also on what more we must do for Pastor Saeed. I told the subcommittees, "Pastor Saeed Abedini, a dual citizen, has been unnecessarily separated from his wife and two children for 17 months. The Islamic Republic of Iran has arbitrarily detained and imprisoned Pastor Saeed—subjecting him to violence and abuse. Violating both Iranian law and international norms, his trial lacked transparency and due process, and yet the appeals court in Tehran upheld his conviction and eight-year prison sentence.

“Pastor Saeed has exhausted all legal remedies in Iran to appeal this arbitrary conviction and detention—his freedom now rests solely on the success of diplomatic efforts by the U.S. government and world leaders dedicated to human rights.”

I explained how the Obama administration abandoned Pastor Saeed and how this abandonment has had disastrous effects on the fight for his freedom: “In addition to the horrific abuse and torture Pastor Saeed has faced at the hands of his brutal Iranian captors, Pastor Saeed has not had the full backing of his own government. When the Iranian government initially detained Pastor Saeed, the U.S. government excused its lack of assistance because the United States lacked diplomatic ties with Iran.

“But even now, when the U.S. has historically communicated with and sat across the table from the Iranian government, the U.S. government has still failed to secure the release of Pastor Saeed and the other imprisoned Americans.

“We are grateful that President Obama expressed his concern about the Americans imprisoned in Iran on his historic phone call with Iranian President Hassan Rouhani back in September. And though we are grateful that **Pastor Saeed** has been raised on the margins of discussions in Geneva, it falls far short because Pastor Saeed is still suffering solely for exercising his fundamental human rights. It is beyond comprehension that the U.S. is prepared to relax sanctions on and release humanitarian aid for Iran at the same time that an innocent U.S. citizen remains imprisoned for his faith and threatened with death.

“In fact, it was while our government sat across the table from the Iranians disbursing humanitarian aid that Iranian guards transferred Pastor Saeed to a more deadly prison and denied him his necessary medications. It is upon this backdrop that I come before you today expressing my concern about the level of support that this U.S. citizen has received from his

own government.”

The margins are no place for a U.S. citizen. We must do more. I asked that our government—his government—do exactly that: “It is my hope that through the continued interest of Congress, Pastor Saeed’s case will be elevated to the highest levels of priority for our executive branch, that he will no longer be discussed on the margins, but rather that our government would truly do everything within its power to bring this U.S. citizen home to his wife and children.

“I view today’s hearing as representative of your commitment to that cause, and I ask all members of Congress to encourage our president and secretary of state to elevate the priority of Pastor Saeed’s case. As Americans, we call on our government to do everything within its power to bring this husband and father home to his children.”

You can read my entire prepared statement as submitted to Congress [here](#).

Please continue to stand with us as we stand for Pastor Saeed. Sign the petition today.