

Persecuted Pastor's Wife Disappointed With US Government

The wife of an American pastor imprisoned in Iran because of his Christian faith testified before a Congressional committee examining religious persecution on Friday. Naghmeh Abedini, with the backing of the American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ), called for more U.S. involvement in working to secure the freedom of Pastor Saeed Abedini.

The testimony from ACLJ Chief Counsel Jay Sekulow, ACLJ Executive Director Jordan Sekulow, and Naghmeh, came as the U.S. State Department snubbed the Congressional panel—refusing to send anyone to the hearing to testify.

The ACLJ represents Naghmeh, and their two young children, who live in the United States. In her testimony on Friday, Naghmeh revealed the toll this ordeal is taking on her family.

“Saeed is a husband and amazing father,” Naghmeh told the commission. “The kids and I miss him terribly. Our kids hold onto the hope of seeing their daddy very soon. The truth is we do not know if we will ever speak to him or see him again. Every day is a death sentence for him. Many mornings they wake up and start running around the house and in the yard. I ask them what they are doing and they say very disappointed ‘it must have been a dream. We saw daddy was home and he was going to twirl us around.’ I hold back my tears as I tell them that it was a dream. I still do not have the heart to tell them that if we don’t do anything, that daddy might never survive the horrific Evin prison. I do not have the heart to tell them of the eight-year sentence. I do hope we can work together to bring Saeed home and I will never have to tell my kids of the dire situation their father is in.”

Naghmeh also told the Commission about her disappointment with the lack of involvement by the U.S. government.

“I must tell you that I am disappointed with my government,” said Naghmeh. “I am disappointed that our President and our State Department have not fully engaged this case, disappointed that this great country is not doing more to free my husband, a U.S. citizen. I expect more from our government. We should know that as American citizens, our government will stand up for us. I have been told that I have not requested the assistance of the State Department. That is not the case. I have pleaded many times for their help to free my husband. I continue to ask our government to bring my husband, my children’s father, back home.”

Jay Sekulow was also disappointed, saying the State Department was AWOL on Friday—absent without leave.

“The State Department’s refusal to testify at this critical hearing is offensive to the family of Pastor Saeed, a U.S. citizen held hostage in one of Iran’s most deadly prisons,” he said. “Instead of appearing before Congress and calling on Iran to release Pastor Saeed, the State Department’s no-show reflects a stunning lack of concern for an American wrongly imprisoned simply because of his Christian faith.”

The hearing occurred this morning before the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission in the House—a bi-partisan commission that is co-chaired by Representatives James McGovern (D-MA) and Frank Wolf (R-VA).

“Many nations, including the European Union, have highlighted Pastor Saeed’s case and called for his release before the U.N. Our government did not. With an opportunity to condemn Iran and demand his freedom on a global stage, the U.S. government never mentioned him at all and ignored the plight of a U.S. citizen imprisoned in Iran. Today, at this vital hearing, the

State Department was AWOL, they are invisible, and did not show up today. Pastor Saeed and his family deserve more from their government,” said Sekulow.

Jordan Sekulow urged the lawmakers to encourage the White House and the State Department to do more to secure the pastor’s release.

“The fact that the State Department refused to send a representative to this hearing underscores the lack of concern and engagement by the Obama Administration in securing the freedom of a U.S. citizen. Naghmeh came all the way from Idaho to give her testimony here today, but the State Department couldn’t send one person down the street to speak about Pastor Saeed’s case. We believe that there is a great deal more that our White House and State Department can and should do for Pastor Saeed,” said Jordan Sekulow.

“To date, there has been minimal involvement from the White House press secretary and a State Department spokesperson. Their brief statements have come only as responses to questions asked by reporters. There is no formal written statement from either the White House or the State Department condemning Iran and calling for Pastor Saeed’s release. Our President and Secretary of State should lend their voices personally to the growing chorus calling for Pastor Saeed’s release. The fact is that we are extremely disappointed with the level of engagement by the Obama Administration.”

Following the testimony, Chairman Wolf said his Commission had been in touch with Secretary of State Kerry’s office and will be formally requesting that someone designated by Secretary Kerry meet directly with Naghmeh soon to discuss her husband’s plight.

The testimony from Jay Sekulow, Jordan Sekulow and Naghmeh Abedini before today’s Congressional panel is available [here](#).