

Saeed Abedini's Wife: My Husband Will Not Deny Christ

Iranian American Pastor Saeed Abedini has been imprisoned in Iran since September 2012 where he has suffered intense physical and psychological torture.

As the United States and other Western countries are negotiating with Iran regarding its nuclear program, the continued confinement of Saeed, along with three other Americans, raises serious concerns about the trustworthiness of Iran's negotiations. Prior to reaching any final agreement with Iran, the House Foreign Affairs Committee is investigating the continued detention of Americans in Iran.

On July 28, 2012, Saeed Abedini was taken off a bus in northern Iran and held under house arrest until September 26, 2012 where he was taken to prison. Then, on the morning of January 27, 2013, Pastor Saeed stood before Judge Pir-Abassi in Tehran to receive his verdict from a show trial.

He was convicted of "undermining national security" for his work among house churches in Iran from 2000-2005 "Mr. Abedini's attorney had only one day (January 21) to present his defense, so we remain deeply concerned about the fairness and transparency of Mr. Abedini's trial," State Department representative Darby Holladay reported shortly after the trial.

"My message is to show a glimpse of the pain we go through as a family torn apart," Naghmeh Abedini told International Christian Concern prior to her address to the House Foreign Affairs Committee. Saeed has now been imprisoned for 980 days in Iran. "My children have lost both their father to a prison in Iran, and also their mother as I travel to advocate on behalf of my husband," Naghmeh said in her testimony. "It is

hard to go back [to] them without solid answers, I hope this will be the time that we can bring Saeed home," she continued.

"What has sustained me through this and what I hope to share before Congress," Naghmeh told ICC, is "the message of the Gospel, of how a relationship with God (not religion) has gotten us through this."

Saeed has faced intense abuse during his imprisonment. "He has been tortured, especially the first few months he was beaten badly when internal bleeding started," Naghmeh testified. "He refuses to deny his Christian faith; they are putting him in and out of solitary to break him. I'm not worried just about his physical pain, but his psychological. They want, when they release Saeed, to release a very sick person," Naghmeh said. "Time is of the essence."

Also joining Naghmeh Abedini in the hearing were Mr. Ali Rezaian, brother of Jason Rezaian, Ms. Sarah Hekmati, sister of Amir Hekmati, and Mr. Daniel Levinson, son of Robert Levinson, all testifying of the pain that they have experienced as family members of those detained in Iran.

Opening the hearing, Committee Chairman Edward Royce (R-CA), told them, "This Committee stands in solidarity with each of your families. We can't imagine the living hell that your families are going through. And we share your anger and frustration with the position you have been put in. Immediately after our hearing today, the Committee will be passing a resolution that calls for Iran to release all detained U.S. citizens immediately and provide information it possesses regarding any who have disappeared within its borders."

In House Resolution 233, sponsored by Rep. Daniel Kildee (D-MI), some 145 members of Congress have co-sponsored the resolution calling on Iran to release these U.S. citizens will

now proceed out of committee to the full House of Representatives, but even more important is that the Obama Administration and its negotiators take the lives of these citizens into account before pursuing other ends.

Organizations and departments across the world are advocating on behalf of Pastor Saeed. Secretary of State John Kerry first called for his release on March 22, 2013 and again on July 28, 2014 in addition to citing Saeed's case in the U.S. State Department's most recent report on international religious freedom. President Obama mentioned the case in his first phone call with Iranian President Hassan Rouhani but additional steps have not been taken, despite international pressure.

"We echo the call of Naghmeh Abedini before Congress that time is of the essence. Saeed Abedini is in prison solely for his Christian faith and languishes in an Iranian prison because he has refused to recant," says ICC's Regional Manager, Todd Daniels. "The protection of American citizens ought to be of first priority in the concerns of the White House and it is essential that President Obama insists on the freedom of Saeed and the other Americans unjustly imprisoned.

Daniels again called for the Iranian regime to immediately release Saeed Abedini.

"His only crime is his faith in Jesus Christ and that he met together with others who share that faith, activities that are legal under the Iranian constitution," he said. "President Rouhani can follow through on his promises of a new Iran by showing respect for the fundamental rights of all people, and the United States should demand this from them before further negotiations take place."