

Severely Beaten, American Pastor Saeed Abedini Forced Back to Prison

Pastor Saeed Abedini, an Iranian-American, was severely beaten and forcibly transferred from the hospital where he'd been receiving treatment back to prison. The transfer came without warning and again raises concern for his safety as he is returned back to prison.

The transfer came entirely without warning to family members inside Iran. They confirmed that Saeed was beaten at the hospital and then forcibly returned to prison.

"The reason for the transfer is unclear, and according to family members, one of the guards who was involved in the transfer mentioned the Iranian nuclear talks as a possible motive," says Jordan Sekulow, executive director of the American Center for Law and Justice.

The latest round of negotiations between Iran and six world powers (known as the P5+1) concluded on Friday in Vienna. Neither side left the negotiations positive about the talks. Iranian and American officials left the talks saying that "progress was slow and difficult, with serious gaps between the two sides on basic issues," according to *The New York Times*.

There have been serious concerns that Saeed, as an American citizen, would become a bargaining chip in these negotiations. While relations between Iran and the United States are at the highest they have been since 1979, there remains deep distrust on both sides. For the life of an American citizen to be caught in the balance is extremely troubling.

"This is getting so complicated," Naghmeh Abedini, Saeed's

wife, told International Christian Concern (ICC). "I think they are keeping him to see how the negotiations go, which makes all of this very scary to think about."

Saeed had been moved to the hospital in March to receive much-needed treatment for internal injuries he has suffered while in prison. Saeed has been imprisoned for 603 days. He was convicted on January 27, 2013, and sentenced to eight years in prison for "crimes against the national security of Iran" for his earlier involvement in the Iranian house churches. He had returned to the country with government approval to work on a humanitarian project when he was detained.

"Please join me in prayer and fasting," Naghmeh posted on social media this morning. "Saeed is not doing well. He collapsed at the hospital after a severe beating. Without Jesus and your prayers I could not continue. Please keep Saeed and our family in your prayers."

Todd Daniels, ICC's regional manager for the Middle East, says the continued abuse and imprisonment of Saeed Abedini is just further demonstration of Iran's systemic violation of fundamental human rights.

"We continue to urge for President Obama and Secretary of State John Kerry to stand up for the rights of an American citizen who is imprisoned solely for his faith and to secure his release prior to meeting any additional Iranian demands," Daniels says. "It is urgent that the church continue to pray for Saeed, Naghmeh and their family and to continue to raise its voice to call for his release."