

Tortured American Pastor Sentenced to Eight Years in Iranian Prison

In a travesty that sadly underscores Iran's brazen violation of international law and a tragic reminder that Iran is one of the world's worst offenders of religious freedom, an Iranian court on Sunday convicted and sentenced American Pastor Saeed Abedini for his Christian faith.

In an unexpected development and without family present, Judge Pir-Abassi of Branch 26 of the Iranian Revolutionary Court—known as the “hanging judge”—verbally convicted and sentenced Abedini to eight years in prison for threatening the national security of Iran through his leadership in Christian house churches.

“This is a real travesty—a mockery of justice,” said Jordan Sekulow, Executive Director of the American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ), who represents Abedini's wife and children living in the U.S. “From the very beginning, Iranian authorities have lied about all aspects of this case, even releasing rumors of his expected release. Iran has not only abused its own laws, it has trampled on the fundamentals of human rights. We call on the citizens of the world to rise up in protest. We call on governments around the world to stand and defend Pastor Saeed.”

Abedini and his attorney were permitted to attend just one day of his trial, which began Jan. 21. They were barred from attending and participating in further proceedings. During his imprisonment, Abedini has been beaten and tortured raising serious concerns about his medical condition.

Abedini's conviction and sentence in the Iranian Revolutionary Court had to be approved at the very top—The Supreme Leader

Ayatollah Khamenei had to sign off.

The ACLJ represents Abedini's wife and children who reside in the U.S. This statement from Abedini's wife, Naghmeh, after learning about today's court action:

"The promise of his release was a lie," said Naghmeh. "We should not trust the empty words or promises put out by the Iranian government. These false hopes amount to psychological torture. You don't want to trust them, but they build a glimmer of hope before the crushing blow. With today's development I am devastated for my husband and my family. We must now pursue every effort, turn every rock, and not stop until Saeed is safely on American soil."

The ACLJ has been working with the U.S. Government and at the United Nations to generate support for Pastor Saeed. Both the White House and the U.S. State Department have condemned Iran and called for Pastor Saeed's release.

"Here's the troubling reality: we have a U.S. citizen, who has been beaten and tortured since his imprisonment last fall, now facing eight years in Evin Prison, one of the most brutal prisons in Iran," said Sekulow. "A harsh sentence in a notorious prison—likely facing life-threatening torture and abuse at the hands of the Iranian regime. Simply because of his Christian faith."

Abedini, 32, was granted U.S. citizenship in 2010 through marriage to his American wife. He and his wife, Naghmeh, have two children, a 6-year-old daughter and 4-year-old son. In 2008, Abedini became an ordained minister with the American Evangelistic Association. Naghmeh and the children reside in the western U.S. The Iranian government does not recognize his U.S. citizenship and for 3 years he traveled freely back and forth from Iran until this summer when he was put under house arrest. He was imprisoned in September.

The ACLJ is providing legal representation to his family and

working with various contacts in Iran on his case. Further, the ACLJ launched an international campaign urging the United Nations, the U.S. State Department and Congress to get involved and demand Pastor Saeed's release. The ACLJ also has heard from nearly 250,000 Americans demanding Abedini's release.