

US Pastor Appeals Directly to Iranian President for Freedom

American pastor Saeed Abedini, serving an eight-year prison sentence in Iran because of his Christian faith, is directly appealing to Iran's newly elected President Hasan Rouhani for justice and freedom.

In a letter written to the Iranian president, Pastor Saeed, a U.S. citizen, called on the new president to follow through on his pledge of moderation and pleads for compassion and justice so he can return to his wife and children in the United States.

Pastor Saeed's letter comes as the American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ), which represents Pastor Saeed's wife and children in the U.S. and has been working to secure his freedom, launches a global letter-writing campaign urging President Rouhani to release him.

The ACLJ has launched a new website at [aclj.org](#)—a voice for the persecuted church. To support Pastor Saeed, you can write a letter directly to the Iranian president and add your name to a petition containing the names of more than 620,000 people who have signed on already demanding the release of Pastor Saeed.

"This is a critical time for this U.S. citizen who has been illegally imprisoned in one of Iran's most dangerous prisons for nearly one year now," says Jay Sekulow, chief counsel of the ACLJ. "With Pastor Saeed's direct appeal to the Iranian president and our global letter-writing campaign to urge him to release Pastor Saeed, the new Iranian president can send an important message to the world—that his promise of moderation can be fulfilled by releasing Pastor Saeed from prison. This American pastor has done nothing wrong—imprisoned only because

of his Christian faith. We call on Iran to release him so he can return to his family.”

The latest developments come as Pastor Saeed’s illegal captivity approaches one year, with Sept. 26 marking the anniversary of his being taken into custody by Iranian authorities.

In his letter to President Rouhani, Pastor Saeed provides details about his work in Iran and the fact that he was completing work on an orphanage when he was taken into custody. He writes about the abuse and internal bleeding he has suffered as a result of his yearlong imprisonment. He also calls on the president to follow through on his promise of moderation and urges the Iranian leader to exhibit compassion and justice so the pastor can return to his family in the United States.

“My wife and children as well as over a billion Christians in the world seek God’s justice and then your consideration of this matter,” Pastor Saeed wrote. “Please take immediate action in this regard and do not let me and a lot of people in my ward become the victims of the fire that extremists have made, those who have turned Iran into a vortex of crisis. Considering the fact that I came to Iran to serve the orphans, please do not let them make my children orphans and my wife without a guardian.”

At , you can draft your own letter to President Rouhani or add your name to a letter than has been written. The goal: Send the president 52,000 letters—1,000 letters for each week that Pastor Saeed has been imprisoned—asking him to save this 33-year-old U.S. citizen.

“Over the last weekend, my family celebrated my daughter’s seventh birthday, the second birthday in a row my precious Rebekkah celebrated without her father,” says Naghmeh Abedini, Pastor Saeed’s wife. “When asked what she wanted for her

birthday, she said she just wanted her daddy home. The reality of his absence is inescapable.”

“In a week from now, the president of Iran will be on U.S. soil,” Naghmeh adds. “And I have to wonder whether my government will use this opportunity to appeal directly to President Rouhani for the release of my husband. I hope President Obama will break his deafening silence and speak out for my husband. But I also ask that everyone join me in appealing directly to President Rouhani by writing letters urging him to release Saeed.”

In his letter, posted here, Pastor Saeed also told the Iranian leader that none of his work in Iran was political or threatened national security in any way.

“Mr. President, I, like you, believe in moderation and, as a spiritual man, have no interest in politics and did not seek actions against national security, propaganda or political groups. My Purpose in all my attempts in my hometown was to reduce pain and suffering as well as compassion for the poor, orphans and unaccompanied children in accordance with religious rules and the sole intention of pleasing my Savior, Jesus Christ.”

Pastor Saeed also conveyed the physical abuse he suffered during the four months he spent in solitary confinement.

“During this extremely difficult, exhausting and tormenting period that cannot be described here, I was in agony from the severity of stomach bleeding and other internal diseases as a result of terrible condition in the detention,” he wrote.

Only last month, an Iranian court rejected Pastor Saeed’s appeal, leaving his eight-year prison sentence in place.

Pastor Saeed was convicted of threatening the security of Iran because he chose to peacefully gather with other Christian believers. On Jan. 27, 2013, Judge Pir Abassi, a judge

presently sanctioned by the European Union for his human rights abuses, found Pastor Saeed's Christian faith and activities tantamount to a national security threat and sentenced him.

While U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry has issued two brief statements urging Iran to release Pastor Saeed, the ACLJ and Pastor Saeed's family continue to call on President Obama to elevate this critical case—to speak out directly on Pastor Saeed's behalf.

On Sept. 26, the one-year anniversary of Pastor Saeed's captivity, prayer vigils will be held in this country and around the world—a united effort to call attention to Pastor Saeed's plight and a very important opportunity to advocate his release.