

US Pastor Faces Psychological Warfare, Death Threats in Iranian Prison

The American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ), which focuses on constitutional and human rights law, said today American Pastor Saeed Abedini—a U.S. citizen facing a lengthy prison sentence in Iran because of his Christian faith—is speaking out in a letter from prison where he says he’s facing “horrific pressures,” acknowledging continuing physical and psychological abuse—including troubling “death threats.”

In his first letter since his conviction and sentencing in January, the 32-year-old Abedini says the conditions inside Evin Prison are “so very difficult that my eyes get blurry, my body does not have the strength to walk, and my steps become very weak and shaky.” Abedini also says he is facing significant pressure to recant his Christian faith.

“The torture, the beatings, the death threats never end,” said Jordan Sekulow, executive director of the ACLJ, which represents Abedini’s wife and children, who reside in the U.S. “The Iranians continue to do everything they can to break Pastor Saeed—both physically and psychologically. The abuse he continues to face is nothing less than brutal. It’s our hope that this latest communication only intensifies efforts in this country and abroad to pressure Iran to release this U.S. citizen.”

In the letter, posted here, Abedini said he knows that “he’s not been forgotten,” but also provides astonishing details about the abuse he faces: “Various (bullying) groups, the psychological warfare, a year of not seeing my family, physical violence, actions committed to humiliate me, insults, being mocked, being confronted with extremists in the prison who create another prison within the prison walls, and the death threats.”

Pastor Saeed's wife, Naghmeh, expressed her concern: "It is heart-wrenching to hear of Saeed's continued abuse and torture in the Iranian prison. We have known for some time that he is facing physical and psychological abuse. Now our worst fears have been confirmed. He continues to face life-threatening abuse at the hands of the Iranian officials simply because of his faith in Jesus."

Naghmeh, who has been prohibited from speaking with her husband by phone, knows that what her husband calls the "dark house of Evin Prison" is taking a significant toll on him. "Our primary concern is for his health and well-being with each passing day. We know that while he is very weak physically, Saeed is strong in his faith. His situation is dire and with the continued abuse and death threats, we are not sure how long Saeed will survive these horrendous conditions in prison."

For the first time, Saeed confirmed that Iranian officials are trying to get him to recant his Christian faith—something he says he will never do. "They are only waiting for one thing ... for me to deny Christ," wrote Pastor Saeed. "But they will never get this from me."

Pastor Saeed said he continues to live out his faith in prison and despite facing what he calls "horrific pressures" that are sometimes "unbearable," he offers encouragement to others who face difficult challenges. "Maybe you are also in such a situation, so pray and seek God that He would use you and direct you in the pressures and difficulties of your lives," Abedini wrote.

The ACLJ, along with its European affiliate, filed a document last week with the U.N. Human Rights Council (HRC) calling on Iran to immediately release Abedini, citing Iran's violations of international law and human rights abuses.

Also last week, more than 80 members of Congress—in a strong bi-partisan move—sent a letter to Secretary of State Kerry urging him to "exhaust every possible option to secure Mr.

Abedini's immediate release." The letter stated that "[a]s a U.S. citizen, Mr. Abedini deserves nothing less than the exercising of every diplomatic tool of the U.S. government to defend his basic human rights."

"This new letter from Pastor Saeed could not be more clear or direct—he continues to face life-threatening abuse simply because of his religious beliefs," said ACLJ Executive Director Jordan Sekulow. "The letter also underscores the need to move quickly. A U.S. citizen is in failing health from beatings and abuse—a menacing scenario that should command the full attention and engagement of the U.S. government. It's our hope that Secretary Kerry will act without delay—doing all that can be done by the State Department to save this U.S. citizen."

As Abedini's wife, Naghmeh put it: "The most important thing we can do is pray, continue to raise awareness of his case and continue to work for his freedom."

The ACLJ is working with the U.S. government, the United Nations, and the European Union to secure Pastor Saeed's freedom.

The ACLJ's #SaveSaeed campaign continues to gather momentum—as thousands upon thousands of people all over the world are tweeting, Facebooking, and signing our petition, which focuses on bringing additional international pressure on the Iranian government.