



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on March 18, 2013

Wife of Imprisoned Iranian-American Pastor Appeals to Congress

Naghmeh Abedini, the wife of Iranian-born American pastor Saeed Abedini, testified before a congressional commission March 15, expressing her disappointment that the U.S. State Department hasn't done more to secure the release of her husband, who was sentenced in January by an Iranian court to eight years in prison for Christian work in his native country.

Abedini told the House of Representatives' bipartisan [Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission](#) that she was "disappointed in our government, that the President and the State Department have not fully engaged in this situation." She said that her children have been unable to understand what has happened to their father. "They kept saying, 'Does daddy not love us anymore?'" she testified. "And I had to tell them that he was in prison because he loved Jesus."

As reported by [The New American](#), the 32-year-old Saeed Abedini, a U.S. citizen through his American-born wife, has been imprisoned in Iran since he was taken into custody last September. He was convicted in late January by Islamic Judge Pir-Abassi of Iran's Revolutionary Court for supposedly threatening Iran's national security via his leadership in the country's underground church movement. Pir-Abassi is known throughout the country as the "hanging judge" for his legal brutality toward non-Muslims who face him, and he quickly sentenced Abedini to eight years in prison. Abedini is being held in Iran's notorious Evin Prison, where in one of his few notes out of Iran he said he has been treated with brutality.

"There are those who are enemies of the Living Bible and do not want to hear," wrote Abedini in a [letter dated February 18](#). "They are trying to put me under such horrific pressures (that are sometimes unbearable) so that they can show me that my faith is empty and not real. And after all of these pressures, after all of the nails they have pressed against my hands and feet, they are only waiting for one thing ... for me to deny Christ. But they will never get this from me. This is why the Bible is Truth and they are in the way of destruction."

Naghmeh Abedini called it "heart wrenching" to hear of her husband's treatment in the prison — especially knowing that the American government has remained largely a neutral observer rather than a help in securing his release. "We have known for some time that he is facing physical and psychological abuse," she said. "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 told the congressional Human Rights Commission that while "not all Americans are Christians," all Americans want the assurance that their government will come to their aid when being





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held hostage by a foreign power. "Saeed is a husband and amazing father," she told the commission. "The kids and I miss him terribly. Our kids hold onto the hope of seeing their daddy very soon." She added, however, that the "truth is we do not know if we will ever speak to him or see him again. Every day is a death sentence for him."

She told the commission that "I expect more from our government. We should know that as American citizens, our government will stand up for us. I have been told that I have not requested the assistance of the State Department. That is not the case. I have pleaded many times for their help to free my husband. I continue to ask our government to bring my husband, my children's father, back home."

Attorney Jay Sekulow of the [American Center for Law and Justice](#), which has taken the lead in trying to get Abedini released, criticized the U.S. State Department for its apparent lack of interest in the American pastor's plight, calling it "AWOL" in the effort on Abedini's behalf. "The fact that the State Department refused to send a representative to this hearing underscores the lack of concern and engagement by the Obama Administration in securing the freedom of a U.S. citizen," he said.

"Naghmeh came all the way from Idaho to give her testimony here today, but the State Department couldn't send one person down the street to speak about Pastor Saeed's case. We believe that there is a great deal more that our White House and State Department can and should do for Pastor Saeed."

Sekulow noted that throughout the Abedini family's ordeal "there has been minimal involvement from the White House press secretary and a State Department spokesperson. Their brief statements have come only as responses to questions asked by reporters. There is no formal written statement from either the White House or the State Department condemning Iran and calling for Pastor Saeed's release. Our President and Secretary of State should lend their voices personally to the growing chorus calling for Pastor Saeed's release. The fact is that we are extremely disappointed with the level of engagement by the Obama Administration."

Testimony from witnesses at the congressional hearing appeared to show the Obama Administration changing its own story about its efforts on behalf of Abedini. While the White House claimed that it had been pressing for the pastor's release before his trial and conviction by the Iranian court, witnesses said that a State Department desk officer had called Naghmeh and told her that "there is nothing the United States government can do for you." According to Sekulow, the same officer called Naghmeh March 14 as she was boarding a plane for Washington D.C. to insist that "you've never asked us for help."

The State Department was asked by Rep. Frank Wolf (R-Va.), co-chairman of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, to appear at the hearing, but the department called at the last minute to claim that no one was available. "The very fact that the United States government is not speaking out sends a very powerful message," said Wolf.

Sekulow noted that the ACLJ has filed a petition with the UN Human Rights Council pressing for Abedini's release, and many lawmakers have joined the effort to pressure the State Department to engage. "We have seen tremendous support from more than 100 members of Congress who understand the growing problem of religious persecution and have called for the release of American Pastor Saeed Abedini," Sekulow said March 12.

He said the hearing before the House Human Rights Commission represented "a significant opportunity to elevate Pastor Saeed's plight and to encourage our State Department and White House to engage this case at the highest levels. We're grateful for the opportunity to present Pastor Saeed's case and stand up for the human rights and religious freedom of those who are facing similar situations because of their faith."

Meanwhile, an international [petition calling for the release of Abedini](#) has reached over 525,000



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signatures in the wake of the congressional hearing. The petition — addressed to the United Nations, the European Union, and the Council of Europe — reads: “Violating its treaty obligations and its own constitution, the Islamic Republic of Iran has sentenced an American pastor, Saeed Abedini, to prison for eight years for merely exercising his fundamental human right to religious freedom.” The petition asks the three bodies to take “all available diplomatic action to press Iran to respect human rights and release Pastor Saeed.”

Photo of U.S. Capitol building in Washington, D.C.



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