



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on September 26, 2013

Wife of Imprisoned U.S. Pastor Has Encounter With Iranian President

September 26 marks one year that Saeed Abedini, a pastor and U.S. citizen from Idaho, has been imprisoned in his native Iran for his work among that country's underground church. As family, friends, and supporters continued to pray and petition for Abedini's release, his wife had a chance encounter September 23 with Iran's president, Hassan Rouhani, in a New York hotel lobby, and was able to pass on a letter from her husband addressed to the president.



Naghmeh Abedini, who continues to reside in Idaho with the couple's two children, had traveled to New York to appear on various TV network news shows to talk about her husband's plight and what she is doing to secure his release. According to the [American Center for Law and Justice](#) (ACLJ), which is representing Saeed and his family, Naghmeh was staying in the same hotel as Iran's president, who was in town for the United Nations General Assembly. As Naghmeh and ACLJ attorney Tiffany Barrans were speaking with a news reporter from *World* magazine, President Rouhani and his delegation passed them on their way to the elevator.

According to *World* magazine, when Rouhani — who was dressed in a business suit rather than his traditional garb — walked by, Naghmeh grabbed the letter her husband had written and “walked over to the bank of elevators, where Rouhani was surrounded by Iranian and American security. He stepped onto an elevator, but some of his Iranian aides stayed behind. Abedini approached one of the Iranian aides and said in Farsi, ‘I’m the wife of Saeed Abedini, who you have in Evin Prison.’ She said the aide looked shocked and recognized the name. She asked him to give the president the letter, and the aide said he would.”

In his [letter](#), Pastor Saeed recounts the injustice he has faced at the hands of Iran's Islamic legal system, and appeals to the Iranian president to review his case. He reminds Rouhani that, according to Iran's constitution, “choosing the religion and participating in religious meetings and activities are totally legitimate in Iran, but staying in prison for me and other people like me is for sure illegal.”

Just days before the chance encounter with Abedini's wife, Rouhani had penned an op-ed in the *Washington Post* in which he recalled his campaign promise to replace the atmosphere of antagonism and intimidation that has long surrounded the Iranian government with one of “prudence and hope.” Wrote the Iranian president: “I'm committed to fulfilling my promises to my people, including my pledge to engage in constructive interaction with the world. Gone is the age of blood feuds. World leaders are expected to lead in turning threats into opportunities.”

Two days after the encounter with Naghmeh Abedini, Rouhani was questioned about the case by [CNN's Christiane Amanpour](#). The CNN commentator reminded Rouhani that Secretary of State John Kerry had asked for help in securing the release of Abedini and two other Americans held in Iran. While not



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specifically addressing Saeed's case, Rouhani conceded that his country "should assist those people who have American citizenships that are incarcerated in Iran."

The ACLJ's Jordan Sekulow noted recent reports indicating that Iran had released some 80 prisoners of conscience as Rouhani was departing for the United States. "Unfortunately, it appears that Pastor Saeed was not among those reportedly released," Sekulow said. He added that "as long as prisoners of conscience, including a U.S. citizen, suffer torment in Iranian prison, President Rouhani's claims of change will remain unsubstantiated. President Rouhani is clearly seeking international approval. He is listening. And now he has Pastor Saeed's letter."

Meanwhile, across the nation and the world, prayer vigils have been organized to mark the one-year anniversary of Abedini's arrest on September 26, 2012, and to intercede for his release. Thus far an international petition calling for his release has reached nearly 625,000 signatures. 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."

Additionally, a number of high-profile leaders have added their voices to those asking for Abedini's release, among them the [Rev. Billy Graham](#), who wrote a personal letter to President Rouhani. Noting the tense relationship that has existed between the United States and Iran for many years, Graham appealed to Rouhani for help in securing Abedini's freedom. "Such an action would, I believe, have a positive impact on our nation," he wrote, "and might well be perceived by our leadership as a significant step in reducing tensions."

During his one year of imprisonment in Iran, Abedini has suffered through solitary confinement and has been refused medical treatment for months for internal bleeding that resulted from beatings he received by prison guards trying to force him to deny his Christian faith.

But as he has written from prison, the sufferings he has faced have also provided opportunity for Abedini to testify of his faith in God. "The reality of Christian living is that difficulties or problems do arise in our lives," Abedini wrote in a rare letter allowed out of the country. "Persecution and difficulties are not new occurrences, but are seen often in the Christian life. It is through the suffering and tribulations that we are to enter the Kingdom of God."

In a blog posting on [DesiringGod.org](#), Naghmeh said that her husband's imprisonment has given both of them opportunities to share their faith in Christ — Saeed in prison, where he has reportedly led at least 30 men to Christ, and she in such venues as the United Nations.

"At the United Nations Human Rights Council, appealing for Saeed's release," she wrote, "I shared the gospel with representatives from over 100 countries." She added that "members of the Iranian Diaspora have told me how they have heard from former Evin prisoners that Saeed had been showing the love of Christ to his fellow prisoners."

Naghmeh Abedini reflected that "Saeed and I always asked God for opportunities to share the gospel with the nations. We never anticipated it would be this way, but God has graciously heard and answered our prayers."



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