

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

15 January 2013

The Honorable Hillary Clinton
Secretary of State
United States Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Clinton,

We write to you on behalf of Saeed Abedini, a 32-year-old American citizen with dual Iranian citizenship, who is presently imprisoned in Iran for exercising his fundamental human right of religious freedom. Iran systematically persecutes its Christian community and has sentenced many Christians to steep prison terms, sometimes even death, under the notion that practicing one's Christian faith is a threat to national security. It is with great urgency we request your swift engagement with the international community to advocate for his release before his trial date on January 21st.

On July 28, 2012, as Mr. Abedini lawfully entered Iran through Turkey, the Revolutionary Guard stopped his bus and detained him. After his interrogation, the authorities confiscated his Iranian and U.S. passports and told him to remain in Iran to face trial for his Christian activities. On September 26, 2012, five members of the Revolutionary Guard raided Mr. Abedini's parents' home, ransacked it and confiscated all religious materials. Mr. Abedini was then thrown into solitary confinement in the notorious Evin prison, before being placed in a general prison cell where self-identifying Al Qaeda members repeatedly assaulted him while the guards turned a blind eye. Mr. Abedini has been interrogated intensely, beaten on at least one occasion, and denied access to legal counsel. The regime also confiscated Mr. Abedini's Iranian bank account, which contained 130 million toman in donations to be used to build an orphanage. Saeed has broken no codified law in Iran; instead he is being persecuted for his Christian faith.

As a teenager, Saeed converted from Islam to Christianity. Before moving to the United States with his American wife, he established in Iran a network of underground churches. In 2009, while Saeed was visiting his family in Tehran, the intelligence police arrested him and asserted these activities undermined Iran's national security. At one point during his interrogations, the police threatened him with death. Mr. Abedini was eventually released on bail with the understanding that if he ceased working with the underground house churches, the regime would not prosecute him in court. He agreed and has complied with the terms of his release, instead focusing his work on humanitarian efforts, such as starting an orphanage in Rasht, Iran. Since then, Mr. Abedini has traveled numerous times to Iran to visit his family, and although he was frequently interrogated regarding the purpose of his visits, he never faced detention or the threat of trial – until July 28, 2012. The Iranian regime asserts that Saeed must face trial next week under Judge Pir-Abassi, also known as the “hanging judge”, of Branch 26 of the Revolutionary Court.

According to his lawyer in Iran, Mr. Abedini will face trial for actions against the national security of Iran. However, documents show that the basis for the charge is Mr. Abedini's leadership in a house church movement, indicating the regime's unjustified rejection of their 2009 agreement with Mr. Abedini.

Saeed's charges and arbitrary detention violate numerous Iranian laws and international obligations. Articles 13, 14, and 23 of the Iranian Constitution guarantee Mr. Abedini his right to freely practice his religion of choice. Furthermore, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, both of which Iran is a party to, firmly secure one's right to practice one's religion of choice and be free from arbitrary detention.

We are grateful for your consistent condemnation of the Iranian regime's actions that violate religious freedoms and we believe your voice can motivate countries and international organizations that have diplomatic relations with Iran to action. Although the United States does not have diplomatic relations with Iran, we strongly encourage the State Department to exhaust all efforts to secure Mr. Abedini's prompt return. Saeed's efforts to provide humanitarian relief and exercise fundamental human rights should be applauded not condemned. We should not stand idly by while the Iranian regime arbitrarily persecutes a U.S. citizen who has committed no crime.

Thank you for your urgent attention to this matter; we look forward to working with you.

Respectfully,

Jim O'Rourke

Roy Hunt

James McChesney

Rand Paul

John Boozman

Mike Johanns

Mike Crapo

Kelly A. Ayotte

Clay Kirk

Jerry Moran

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