

February 13, 2013

The Honorable John F. Kerry
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry,

We write as an informal group of organizations and individuals who are scholars, religious leaders, human rights advocates and practitioners to express our deep concern about the imprisonment and trial of American citizen Saeed Abedini, who was wrongfully detained in Iran and was recently convicted and sentenced to eight years in prison.

We understand that 12 Senators and 37 Representatives signed letters to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in mid-January, and that a new congressional letter is now being addressed to you. We join these members of Congress in urging you and the State Department to exhaust every possible option to ensure Mr. Abedini is fully and immediately released.

As members of Congress have indicated, it is incumbent on us to defend basic human rights and stand against persecution. Mr. Abedini has been traveling to Iran for the humanitarian purpose of opening an orphanage in Rasht, and on his most recent trip he was detained and subsequently tried and convicted of criminal charges relating to his Christian faith. He has suffered solitary confinement, beatings, and aggressive interrogations while being detained in the notorious Evin Prison.

Iran is a signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which clearly recognizes the fundamental human right to choose one's own religion and freedom from arbitrary detention. Yet Mr. Abedini was detained and then stood trial before Judge Pir-Abassi of Branch 26 of the Revolutionary Court. This judge is known as the "hanging judge" and has been sanctioned by the European Union for numerous human rights violations committed against activists who were tried following the 2009 Iranian election.

We thank you for statements you have made to condemn Iran's continued violation of the universal right of freedom of religion, and for your commitment to call on the Iranian authorities to respect Mr. Abedini's human rights and release him. And we join members of Congress in respectfully requesting that you continue to use every diplomatic avenue possible to secure Mr. Abedini's unconditional release.

Thank you.

Respectfully,

ORGANIZATIONS

AMERICAN HUMANIST ASSOCIATION

AMERICAN ISLAMIC CONGRESS (AIC)

CHRISTIAN SOLIDARITY INTERNATIONAL (CSI-USA)

CHRISTIAN SOLIDARY WORLDWIDE (CSW-UK)

CHURCH OF SCIENTOLOGY, NATIONAL AFFAIRS OFFICE

HUMAN RIGHTS LAW FOUNDATION (HRLF)

INSTITUTE ON RELIGION AND DEMOCRACY

INSTITUTE ON RELIGION & PUBLIC POLICY

INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN CONCERN

INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS LIBERTY ASSOCIATION

JUBILEE CAMPAIGN

LAW AND LIBERTY TRUST

MIDDLE EAST CONCERN

NORTH AMERICAN RELIGIOUS LIBERTY ASSOCIATION (NARLA)

UNITED METHODIST CHURCH, GENERAL BOARD OF CHURCH AND SOCIETY

THE VINE

WORLD RELIEF

Individuals

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International Christian Concern

Dr. Richard Land
President
Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission

Brent McBurney
President & CEO
Advocates International

Faith J. H. McDonnell
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The Institute on Religion and Democracy

Greg Mitchell
President
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Institute for Gilgit Baltistan Studies (IGBS)

Anthony Vance
Director, Office of Public Affairs
Baha'is of the United States

CC: Dr. Suzan Johnson Cook, Ambassador-at-Large, International Religious Freedom