



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on January 15, 2013

Imprisoned American Pastor to Face “Hanging Judge” in Iran

An Iranian-American pastor who has been imprisoned in Iran for the past several months is set to face a religious judge in Iran who has a record of sending people to the gallows. The Rev. Saeed Abedini, who grew up in Iran and was training to be a suicide bomber before becoming a Christian, resides in the United States with his American-born wife and their two children. As reported by [The New American](#), Abedini was a leader of Iran’s underground church before leaving for the United States, and while he had worked out a deal with Iranian officials that allowed him to return to the country for humanitarian purposes, he was taken into custody in September 2012, and only in recent days was he indicted on as-yet unspecified charges.



Jay Sekulow, executive director of the [American Center for Law and Justice \(ACLJ\)](#), which has stepped forward to advocate for Abedini’s release, told the [Jerusalem Post](#) that the American citizen and minister has been transferred to Branch 26 of the Tehran Revolutionary Court, and is now in the hands of Judge Pir-Abassi, who is “notorious for his harsh sentences against those who exercise their fundamental freedoms.” Sekulow said that Pir-Abassi “is often referred to as one of Iran’s ‘[hanging judges](#)’ for the numerous individuals he has sent to the gallows.”

In 2011 the European Union placed Pir-Abassi on a list of individuals subject to sanctions for human rights violations. In April of that year the [Official Journal of the European Union](#) noted that, following Iran’s 2009 elections, Pir-Abassi presided over several trials in which he handed down lengthy prison terms, as well as several death sentences, to individuals identified by the EU as Iranian human rights activists.

In its 2012 annual report, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom also recommended that the U.S. government apply similar sanctions to Pir-Abassi and his family, noting that he is “responsible for particularly severe violations of religious freedom.” Sekulow said that while the State Department is well aware of Pir-Abassi’s human rights record, it has not acted on the recommendations, nor has it moved to help Pastor Abedini. “It is an absolute travesty that the U.S. government would stand by idly while an American citizen, detained for his exercise of a fundamental human right, deteriorates in an Iranian prison,” said Sekulow.

Sekulow called Abedini’s case “highly troubling,” noting that “it appears Iran is determined to remove any chance of the American pastor receiving any semblance of a fair trial. Even more troubling is that the U.S. government has remained silent, essentially abandoning this American in his search for justice.”



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Abedini's wife, Naghmeh, said that her husband's passion is "to reach the people of Iran," and his role in leadership of the underground church has made him a target of the country's Muslim leadership. "They see the underground churches as a threat and they see Christianity as a tool from the West to undermine them," she told [Fox News](#). "They think if the country becomes more Christian, they are no longer under Islamic authority. That's why it's a threat."

The ACLJ also released a [letter by Pastor Abedini](#), written to his family and friends from his cell in Iran's notorious Evin Prison. While the letter reveals some of the torture and abuse the American citizen is facing as he awaits the zealotry of Iran's religious judiciary, it is also a profoundly moving testament to the power of faith in God.

"The Word of God says that when we are persecuted for our faith, we are to count it all joy," writes Pastor Abedini. "When I think that all of these trials and persecutions are being recorded in heaven for me, my heart is filled with complete joy."

Noting the scriptural admonition that the joy of the Lord is the foundation of a Christian's strength (Nehemiah 8:10), Abedini advises that without Christ's strength "we cannot live. It is this joy in our life that gives us strength to continue in this life. Without strength, we cannot continue the work of the Lord and without joy there is no strength."

Abedini recalls that he always wanted God "to make me a godly man. I did not realize that in order to become a godly man we need to become like steel under pressure. It is a hard process of warm and cold to make steel."

Describing his day-to-day existence, he relates that "one day I am told I will be freed and allowed to see my family and kids on Christmas (which was a lie) and the next day I am told I will hang for my faith in Jesus. One day there are intense pains after beatings in interrogations, the next day they are nice to you and offer you candy. These hot and cold days only make you a man of steel for moving forward in expanding His Kingdom."

Abedini concludes by counseling that "what is in us [as Christians] is stronger than what is in the world and it has conquered the world." He signs the letter, "Pastor Saeed Abedini, in chains for our Lord Jesus Christ."

Among those commenting on the powerful letter was George O. Wood, general superintendent of the Assemblies of God denomination, who received a copy of the letter from Abedini's wife.

"Saeed's letter is nothing short of a modern-day Pauline epistle," reflected Wood. "As I read his letter through several times, I could only marvel at how God's faithfulness transcends time as the same Holy Spirit that was with Paul in his times of desperation is fully evident in the words of our brother Saeed."

Wood said he was amazed by how the letter from the imprisoned pastor "inspires and ministers to me when he — it would seem — is the one who needs our prayers. I encourage believers to allow this letter to inspire them to greater things, to pass it on to friends and to continue to uplift Saeed, Naghmeh, and their two young children to God in prayer."

Earlier this year Jay Sekulow and the ACLJ were instrumental in gaining the release of another imprisoned Iranian pastor, [Youcef Nadarkhani](#), whom Iranian officials had threatened with execution for his efforts to convert Muslims to Christianity. Sekulow said that Abedini's situation is dire because the Iranian government does not recognize his U.S. citizenship, which he received through his marriage to Naghmeh, who is American."



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“We continue to press the Obama Administration to engage this case — to speak out forcefully on Pastor Saeed’s behalf and put pressure on Iran’s allies to free this American,” said Sekulow. “Time is of the essence.”



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