

NGO name: European Centre for Law and Justice (ECLJ)

Speaker: Naghmeh Abedini

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For nearly a year, the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran has tried to silence my husband, Saeed Abedini, through illegal imprisonment, torture, and threats against our family. Why is he being held – because he exercised his rights of religious freedom, expression, and peaceful assembly. This past week and today, this Council has called on member states to recognize and uphold these fundamental freedoms. I hope that my presence here today will put a face to those who suffer when a government does not uphold its obligation to protect these freedoms.

A pastor by trade, Saeed went to the Islamic Republic of Iran as part of an ongoing project to build an orphanage for children in need. In September, I received a phone call in the middle of the night notifying me that members of Iran's Revolutionary Guard had placed him in solitary confinement in Evin Prison. Upon arrest, Iran neither informed him of his rights or the charges against him.

After months of physical and psychological torture, an Iranian Revolutionary court convicted my husband of attempting to undermine the national security of Iran because he had peacefully gathered with fellow Christian believers in private homes and had expressed his religious beliefs. Without a fair trial, the court sentenced him to eight years.

On at least two known occasions, Iranian officials have physically tortured my husband. These instances of torture have caused my husband to have symptoms of internal bleeding. To date, Iran has denied my husband medical care to treat these injuries.

My husband has broken no Iranian law – he simply exercised fundamental rights that Iran has acknowledged before this body that it would uphold. Iran has kept Saeed imprisoned because he believes that Jesus Christ died on the cross for forgiveness of sin and to reconcile humanity to God.

While I do not know the outcome of my husband's case or whether he will live or die in Evin prison, I do know that the international community must do more to ensure that Iran upholds its obligations to protect all human rights for every individual, regardless of religious creed, nationality, or ethnic background. I call on this body to do more. Each member state here has an obligation, and I respectfully ask that you join me in this fight. Please help bring my husband home to me and our two young kids.