FRANKLIN GRAHAM
P.O. BOX 3000, BOONE, N.C. 28607

August 5, 2013

The Honorable Robert Pittenger
7730 Baltusrol Lane
Charlotte, NC 28210-4922

Dear Congressman Pittenger,

I am writing to express my concern for an American pastor who has now spent more than 300 days imprisoned in Iran because of his Christian faith. My hope is that you will share my concern and help convince President Obama to demand the release of our fellow American citizen so that he can return to his wife and family here in the United States.

Pastor Saeed Abedini was in Iran to help children. A 2009 agreement between Pastor Saeed and the Iranian government was supposed to have allowed him to come and go freely from his country of birth to do humanitarian efforts. When he was arrested last year he was working to help build a government-sanctioned orphanage. The Iranian government claims he was convicted of endangering national security, but Pastor Saeed's family and attorneys say this is an obvious case of religious intolerance and that he was actually arrested, convicted and sent to prison for one simple reason—because he is a Christian.

In January of this year, Pastor Saeed began serving an eight-year sentence (although he has been detained in prison since September 26, 2012). He is being held in Iran's notoriously brutal Evin Prison, where his family reports that he has been the victim of repeated beatings and torture. In March, Pastor Saeed sent a letter to his family and told them Iranian officials are threatening him and trying to force him to recant his faith. In that letter he wrote: "Deny your faith in Jesus Christ and return to Islam or you will not be released from prison...These are the threats that prison officials throw at me."

I have spoken on multiple occasions with Pastor Saeed's wife, Naghmeh, who has lived in Idaho for most of her life. She believes that eight years in Evin Prison is a virtual death sentence. She shared how frightening it is to hear about the abuse her husband is enduring and worries that she and her two young children may never see Saeed again. Naghmeh also told me how discouraged she is because she feels our own government seems to have abandoned them.

I'm thankful that Secretary of State John Kerry finally called on Iran to release Pastor Saeed six months after his imprisonment. Sadly, our government appears to have done little since then and our own President has been silent on the issue as an American Christian continues to endure the horrors of Evin Prison because of his faith.

Many in the international community are expressing outrage over this blatant example of religious intolerance. As Americans I hope we will do the same to protect one of our citizens. I ask that you do whatever you can to exert pressure on Iran. I also urge you to help persuade President Obama to join us in bringing even more attention to this tragic situation and to insist that the Iranian government release Pastor Saeed Abedini and allow him to return home to his wife and two young children.

Thank you for your consideration and support.

Sincerely,

Franklin Graham

FG/jd