Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 25, 2013

The President
The White House
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. President:

America was birthed in the flames of religious persecution. Our forbearers yearned to worship in their own way, to live their lives in accordance with their own religious creed, and to pass on to their posterity the ability to do the same. Their struggle for religious liberty is one of the enduring strengths of America and we must be diligent in preserving this liberty around the world.

America must be the unwavering light of religious freedom to the world, and our stance on issues relating to religious freedom must be resounding. The undersigned Members of Congress ask you to take a more prominent role in our Nation's condemnation of Pastor Saeed Abedini's imprisonment by the Islamic Nation of Iran and make clear the call for his release.

Pastor Abedini, an American citizen, was detained by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard on July 28, 2012, during a lawful entry into Iran. Mr. Abedini's passport was confiscated and he was subsequently sentenced to eight years in prison at the notoriously brutal Evin Prison on charges of intentionally undermining the national security of Iran. The judge handed down this verdict after denying Mr. Abedini full access to his attorney, and after barring both Mr. Abedini and his attorney from the court for much of the proceedings.

Since being held in prison, Mr. Abedini has been subjected to brutal conditions and his health is suffering significantly. On March 3, 2013, Mr. Abedini was able to contact his family with complaints of possible internal bleeding from the many beatings he had suffered. From a recent discussion with Pastor Abedini's wife, we learned that he was taken to a private hospital twice, but not afforded the right to any treatment until July 20, 2013, when a physician was able to examine Mr. Abedini and prescribe medication for his injuries. The physician found a large internal wound with scar tissue in his digestive track, indicating the wound had been reopened several times.

An American citizen is being held in prison, abused, and denied basic rights, all because he is of the Christian faith, yet you have remained silent on the issue. White House Press Secretary, Jay Carney, has barely discussed Pastor Abedini, and neither time condemned Iran with a serious violation of human rights. Secretary of State John Kerry has not issued any statements regarding Pastor Abedini since March, 2013. In his most recent statement,

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Secretary Kerry only said he was "deeply concerned" and "disturbed." This brutal and inhumane treatment requires an American response which makes clear our dedication to protecting religious freedoms around the world, especially with regards to an American citizen.

Americans, as do all people of the world, have the inalienable right to practice the religion they so choose. Mr. President, the world is waiting for you to step forward and condemn Iran for their actions, taking a stand not just for Pastor Abedini, but for religious freedom.

Sincerely,

Robert Pittenger
Member of Congress