

CALLING FOR THE RELEASE OF UNITED STATES
CITIZEN SAEED ABEDINI AND CONDEMNING
THE GOVERNMENT OF IRAN FOR ITS PERSECU-
TION OF RELIGIOUS MINORITIES

MARKUP

BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON
THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA
OF THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED THIRTEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

ON

H. Res. 147

NOVEMBER 13, 2013

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**CALLING FOR THE RELEASE OF UNITED
STATES CITIZEN SAEED ABEDINI AND CON-
DEMNING THE GOVERNMENT OF IRAN FOR
ITS PERSECUTION OF RELIGIOUS MINORI-
TIES**

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 2013

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:30 p.m., in room 2172, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Pursuant to notice, for purposes of markup, I call up H. Res. 147, calling for the release of United States citizen Saeed Abedini, and condemning the Government of Iran for its persecution of religious minorities.

The clerk will read.

Mr. PENA. H. Res. 147, calling for the release of United States citizen Saeed Abedini, and condemning the Government of Iran—

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Without objection, the measure is considered as read and open for amendment at any point.

[H. Res. 147 follows:]

113TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. RES. 147

Calling for the release of United States citizen Saeed Abedini and condemning the Government of Iran for its persecution of religious minorities.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

APRIL 10, 2013

Mr. CASSIDY (for himself, Mr. LABRADOR, Mr. WAXMAN, Ms. BONAMICI, Mr. FRANKS of Arizona, Mr. HARRIS, Mr. MEADOWS, Mr. SIMPSON, Mr. ADERHOLT, Mrs. HARTZLER, Mr. MCHENRY, Mr. BACHUS, Mr. GARRETT, Mr. JONES, Mr. WEBER of Texas, Mr. ROSKAM, Mr. WESTMORELAND, Mr. FINCHER, Mr. HOLT, Mr. MCGOVERN, Mr. BUCLANAN, Mr. BENISHEK, Mr. STOCKMAN, Mr. HURLSKAMP, Mr. CRAMER, Mr. HULTGREN, Mr. BENTIVOLO, Mr. PITTS, Mr. BRIDENSTINE, Mr. NEUGEBAUER, Mr. SCHOCK, Mr. LATTA, Mr. NUNNELEE, Mr. BURGESS, Mr. KING of New York, Mr. WEBSTER of Florida, Mr. JOHNSON of Ohio, Mr. PALAZZO, Mr. SCALISE, Mr. LANKFORD, Mr. OLSON, Mrs. LUMMIS, Mr. MULLIN, Mr. LONG, and Mr. WOLF) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs

RESOLUTION

Calling for the release of United States citizen Saeed Abedini and condemning the Government of Iran for its persecution of religious minorities.

Whereas Saeed Abedini has been sentenced to 8 years in prison in Iran after being tried for his religious beliefs and convicted for undermining the Government of Iran;

Whereas Iran is a member of the United Nations and a signatory of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights;

Whereas Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance”;

Whereas the Universal Declaration of Human Rights lists Iran as one of the countries that remains a chronic and systematic violator of religious freedom; and

Whereas in October 2012, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Iran has stated that a wide range of human rights violations, including illegal limits on freedom of expression, failures of legal due process, attacks on freedom of religion, and the wrongful imprisonment of children: Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved*, That the House of Representatives—

2 (1) condemns the Government of Iran for its
3 persecution of religious minorities, including Saeed
4 Abedini;

5 (2) calls on the Government of Iran to release
6 Saeed Abedini to the United States; and

7 (3) calls on the United States Government to
8 work aggressively for the quick release of Saeed
9 Abedini by designating additional Iranian officials,
10 as appropriate, for human rights abuses pursuant to

- 1 section 105 of the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions,
2 Accountability, and Divestment Act of 2010.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. I thank the author of this bill, Bill Cassidy, for bringing forth this important legislation this afternoon. Despite Rouhani's rhetoric and his charm offensive, every indication is that he continues in his predecessor's footsteps and has not halted or even curbed the regime's systematic and widespread human rights violations.

Since he took office, the Iranian regime has conducted over 200 executions, with nearly 20 being conducted in public, and has renewed its repression of the media and civil society.

Religious minorities have also gotten no reprieve from the regime. Last month, four Iranian Christians were sentenced to 80 lashes for drinking sacramental wine during communion, and this past summer an Iranian Christian convert was sentenced to 10 years in prison for distributing Bibles.

This past August an American citizen, Pastor Saeed Abedini, was convicted and given an 8-year sentence for what the regime said was undermining the government. In reality, he was arrested and convicted for preaching his Christian faith. Earlier this month Iranian authorities transferred Pastor Saeed to a notorious prison that is reserved for Iran's most violent criminals, and where his life is in danger on a daily basis.

These are not isolated incidents, and it is time for the Iranian regime to end its persecution of religious minorities and immediately release Saeed and others like him. By passing H. Res. 147, we will send a strong message to Pastor Saeed, his family, and to the Iranian people who wish to practice their faiths openly and freely. We stand with them during this time of despair, and we will continue to press for respect of human rights in Iran. Let's bring Pastor Saeed home so that he can reunite with his wife and two children, where he belongs.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Ros-Lehtinen follows:]

**Statement by the Honorable Heana Ros-Lehtinen
Chairman, Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa
Subcommittee Markup of H.Res. 147: Calling for the release of United States citizen Saeed
Abedini and condemning the Government of Iran for its persecution of religious minorities
Wednesday, November 13, 2013; 1:50 p.m. – 2172 Rayburn**

I thank the author of this bill, Bill Cassidy, for bringing forth this important legislation this afternoon.

Despite Rouhani's rhetoric and his charm offensive, every indication is that he continues in his predecessors footsteps, and has not halted or even curbed the regime's systematic and widespread human rights violations. Since he took office, the Iranian regime has conducted over 200 executions – with nearly 20 being conducted in public – and has renewed its repression of the media and civil society.

Religious minorities have also gotten no reprieve from the regime. Last month four Iranian Christians were sentenced to 80 lashes for drinking sacramental wine during communion, and this past summer an Iranian Christian convert was sentenced to 10 years in prison for distributing bibles. This past August, an American citizen, Pastor Saeed Abedini, was convicted and given an eight year sentence for what the regime said was undermining the government. In reality, he was arrested and convicted for preaching his Christian faith. Earlier this month Iranian authorities transferred Pastor Saeed to a notorious prison that is reserved for Iran's most violent criminals, and where his life is in danger on a daily basis.

These are not isolated incidents, and it is time for the Iranian regime to end its persecution of religious minorities, and immediately release Saeed and others like him.

By passing H. Res. 147 we will send a strong message to the Pastor Saeed, his family, and to the Iranian people who wish to practice their faith freely and openly that we stand with them during this time of despair, and we will continue to press for respect of human rights in Iran.

Let's bring Pastor Saeed home so that he can reunite with his wife and two children, where he belongs.

Thank you and I now recognize Ranking Member Deutch for his remarks on the resolution.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. I would now like to recognize any member from the Democratic side to speak for Mr. Deutch in support of the resolution if they wish.

Fearless Leader Cicilline.

Mr. CICILLINE. Thank you, Madam Chair, and I would like to also compliment Mr. Cassidy and say what an important piece of legislation this is, and how important it is that we send a very strong message on this issue. And I thank the chair for convening the hearing and calling for the markup.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, sir.

I would like to recognize any members who seek recognition on the Republican side if they wish to speak.

Mr. Cotton of Arkansas is recognized.

Mr. COTTON. I am proud to sponsor this legislation, as well, calling for the release of Pastor Saeed Abedini, who has been arrested

and in prison since last year. Pastor Abedini traveled to Iran many times over the last 4 years to open an orphanage and preach his Christian faith, all with the approval of the Iranian regime. Since he has been arrested, he has been subject to brutal beatings for nothing more than ministering, and now he has been transferred to Karaj, a notorious prison where murder is an all too common occurrence.

I hope that our administration strongly urges the Iranian regime to release Pastor Abedini so he can be reunited with his family. Unfortunately, though, his case is not isolated. The Iranian regime is a totalitarian bureaucracy that persecutes Christians and people of other faiths as well. This is not something that they do just as an accident of the nature of the regime. This is in the very heart of their regime to suppress religious freedom of all people in violation of numerous international obligations and treaties. So we have to ensure that Pastor Abedini is released, but also continue to pressure Iran to respect the natural rights of every one of its citizens.

I yield back.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, sir.

And any other members wish to seek recognition? If not, we would like to turn to the sponsor, the author of this important resolution, so he can be heard. The gentleman is recognized.

Mr. CASSIDY. Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Mr. Ranking Member. Thank you for having me here today to discuss this resolution, and I appreciate the work that the committee has done on this.

Mr. Abedini is an American, an American who, while he lived in Iran, converted from Islam to Christianity. He was arrested in July 2012 when he was visiting family and working in a nonsectarian orphanage. The Revolutionary Guard arrested him on charges of activities disruptive to the state; however, when he was sentenced to 8 years in prison, it was due to missionary activities which took place a decade earlier when such activities were legal in Iran.

During his imprisonment. Mr. Abedini reportedly has suffered constant pain, internal bleeding, and has not received sufficient medical care. On more than one occasion, he was taken to the hospital, where the physician recommended he be admitted and the government would not allow this. On another occasion, a nurse refused to touch him because he is a Christian. As a physician I find that particularly offensive.

To further underline the immediacy of the situation, just last week Mr. Abedini was transferred to the notorious prison, Rajai Shahr, a prison facility where political prisoners simply disappear and/or are killed by other prisoners. He has reportedly been placed in a ward that houses murderers, is in a cell with other death-row inmates and is not allowed visitors. When Mr. Abedini's father went to visit, he was denied entry, and the blankets and medications he brought to treat his son's internal bleeding were taken away. His wife Naghmeh has said that she is more concerned now about his safety than at any other time during his imprisonment.

This is an American being held hostage by the Government of Iran. I ask that you pass this resolution out of committee so that we can increase pressure on Iran to release Mr. Abedini from his wrongful imprisonment and allow him to return back to the United

States where he is a citizen and to be reunited with his wife and his young children.

I yield back.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, sir.

Seeing no further requests for time, and no amendments being offered, the chair now moves that the committee agree to H. Res. 147.

All those in favor, say aye.

All opposed, no.

In the opinion of the Chair, the ayes have it, and the measure is agreed to.

Without objection, House Res. 147 is ordered favorably reported to the full committee, and the staff is directed to make any technical and conforming changes.

Thank you, Mr. Cassidy, for this bill.

[Whereupon, at 2:35 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

**SUBCOMMITTEE MARKUP NOTICE
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6128**

**Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa
Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), Chairman**

November 7, 2013

TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN meeting of the Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa, to be held in Room 2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building (and available live on the Committee website at <http://www.ForeignAffairs.house.gov>):

DATE: Wednesday, November 13, 2013

TIME: 1:50 p.m.

MARKUP OF: H.Res. 147, Calling for the release of United States citizen Saeed Abedini and condemning the Government of Iran for its persecution of religious minorities.

By Direction of the Chairman

The Committee on Foreign Affairs seeks to make its facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. If you are in need of special accommodations, please call 202/225-5021 at least four business days in advance of the event, whenever practicable. Questions with regard to special accommodations in general (including availability of Committee materials in alternative formats and assistive listening devices) may be directed to the Committee.



11/13/13 Middle East and North Africa Subcommittee Markup Summary

The Chair called up H. Res. 147 for consideration.

H. Res. 147 (Cassidy), “Calling for the release of United States citizen Saeed Abedini and condemning the Government of Iran for its persecution of religious minorities.”

H. Res. 147 was agreed to by voice vote and ordered favorably reported to the Full Committee by unanimous consent.

The Subcommittee adjourned.

