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DEAN, NEW JERSEY DELEGATION

**‘Americans Detained in Iran’***Rep. Chris Smith (NJ-04)**Chair of the House Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health,  
Global Human Rights and International Organizations  
Foreign Affairs Committee Hearing  
June 2, 2015*

This past February 26th, I co-chaired a hearing with my good friend and colleague, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, on “The Shame of Iranian Human Rights.” Then I noted that Pastor Saeed Abedini had been imprisoned for 1,000 days. It has been more than three months since that hearing, and Pastor Abedini remains imprisoned, prevented from returning home to his remarkable wife Naghmeh, who honors us with her testimony here today, and their daughter and son. Pastor Abedini refuses to deny his Christian faith and has been punished with death threats, solitary confinements, ongoing psychological torture, and beatings to the point of internal bleeding.

Iranian officials permitted the home church movement that Pastor Abedini helped lead between 2000 and 2005, permitted him to return to Iran to build an orphanage in 2012, and then arrested and imprisoned him, first claiming that he was a threat to national security, and then charging him for the activities they had allowed during that period in the early to mid-2000s.

National security has been the Iranian authorities’ favorite justification for imprisoning the three Americans whose families are testifying before us today. The fourth American, Robert Levinson, has been missing in Iran since 2007, although he almost certainly has also been imprisoned. This has hit my home state of New Jersey, because some members of Mr. Levinson’s family live in New Jersey.

I continue to be concerned about the safety and health of these prisoners, who are being held in some of Iran’s harshest, most violent prisons. They languish there in part because Iran’s judicial system lacks consistent independence, fair public trials, due process, privacy for the accused, and is rife with interference from government and religious officials.

That is why so many of us in the House have called on Iran to “release all detained United States citizens immediately and provide any information it possesses regarding any United States citizens that have disappeared within its borders,” as we have in House Resolution 233.

Indeed, many of us are asking why wasn't release of all Americans held by Iran made a precondition for any negotiations with Iran in the first place.

President Obama promised Pastor Abedini's son Jacob that he would do everything he could to secure his father's release by Jacob's March birthday. When I asked Secretary Kerry before that February hearing about what the Administration was actually doing to keep the President's promise, he replied that the U.S. was working quietly to make it happen as soon as possible.

Jacob's birthday passed without his Father. It is a matter of highest priority that the President and members of the Administration keep the President's promise: Do everything possible so that these Americans are able to spend family birthdays with family, instead of in Iranian prisons.