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## IRAN | Iranian-American Pastor Sentenced to Eight Years in Prison

Saeed Abedinialangashi, a convert to Christianity with dual United States/Iranian nationality, was sentenced to eight years in prison on Jan. 27 for “actions against the national security of Iran.” His lawyer told Mohabat News that the charges against him concern the planting of house churches that are “intended to undermine national security.”

Abedinialangashi, also known as Mr. Abedini, was arrested in September 2012 while in Iran on a family visit. His case was heard at the Revolutionary Court Branch 26 in Tehran on Jan. 21 by Pir-Abbassi, a notoriously harsh judge who is on the Council of the European Union’s list of Iranian officials and agencies against who sanctions were instituted. There was no public access to the courtroom, and Abedini had limited access to his legal representative. According to Abedini’s wife, his lawyer will appeal the charges within 20 days.

The accusation against Abedini dates back to 2000, when he converted to Christianity. According to the official case file, which his lawyer only received in January 2013, despite the fact that his client has been detained since September 2012, the charge is based primarily on Abedini’s past leadership position in a house church network.

Abedini was detained on Sept. 26, 2012, after security officers raided his parent’s home and was taken to Evin prison. He was held in solitary confinement before being moved to a general prison within the political section of Evin Prison in November 2012. He is reported to have suffered physical assaults on several occasions and has also been subject to psychological pressure.

On several occasions, Abedini’s family was promised he would be released on bail. This never happened. The authorities had earlier demanded 400 million Tomans (equivalent to approximately \$330,000) for his release.

Andrew Johnston, Advocacy Director at Christian Solidarity Worldwide, said, “CSW is deeply concerned by the lack of due process in Mr. Abedini’s case. There should be no doubt that while the charges against Mr. Abedini are couched in political terms, in reality these charges stem from his conversion and from exercising the freedom to worship in communion with others in accordance with article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. We urge the Iranian authorities to uphold the rule of law, review the sentence handed down to Mr.

Abedini, and respect the principle of freedom of religion and belief, as outlined in the ICCPR, to which Iran is signatory.”