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Iranian-American imprisoned in Iran given 4-day leave after hospitalization

By Elise Labott

(CNN) Baquer Namazi, an Iranian-American who has been imprisoned in Iran since February 2016, has been discharged from an Iranian hospital and granted a four-day leave by the Iranian government, according to his family and the State Department.

Namazi is the father of American businessman Siamak Namazi, who has been detained in Iran since October 2015.

Namazi's family said the 81-year-old had been rushed to the hospital on January 15 after a severe drop in his blood pressure, an irregular heartbeat, serious depletion of energy and coloring turning white. This was the fourth time, the family said, he had been transferred to a hospital in the last year. He underwent emergency heart surgery to install a pacemaker.

Namazi has been held in Iran's notorious Evin prison when not in the hospital. His family has said imprisonment there would exacerbate the condition of his health.

Babak Namazi, Baquer's son, issued a statement expressing gratitude for the temporary leave and asking for a permanent release.

"While I am grateful the Iranian Government has granted a four day leave for my father, a return to prison would be life threatening for him. My father is in very poor health and has been hospitalized four times. I beg the Iranian authorities to show compassion and grant my father a permanent release so he can spend his remaining time with his family before we face an irreversible tragedy," Babak Namazi said in a statement.

Senior administration officials tell CNN that the Trump administration is working "at the highest levels" to make this release permanent and get Namazi home. Top United Nations officials are also involved.

Undersecretary of State Steve Goldstein called the temporary leave "a first step but Mr. Namazi is 81 years old and is in poor health and needs to come back to the United States for treatment."

"We welcome the release of Baquer Namazi given his deteriorating health but we note that his release is only temporary. We call for the immediate and full release of the Namazi family, including his son Siamek, as well as other Americans unjustly held by the Iranian government," State Department spokeswoman Heather Nauert said in a statement.

American officials said the father and son did nothing wrong and do not deserve imprisonment.

Baquer and Siamak Namazi were sentenced to 10 years imprisonment, and Siamak Namazi was fined \$170,000, according to Jared Genser, an attorney for the Namazis.

"We do not know why the Iranian Government has released Baquer Namazi for only four days. But what is clear is that returning him to Evin Prison would be a death sentence that would be carried out quickly," Genser said. "On humanitarian grounds his leave must be made permanent. And it is urgent that Siamak Namazi and the rest of the wrongfully imprisoned Americans also have their cases resolved."

A senior State Department official who spoke to CNN said Undersecretary of State Tom Shannon had raised the health of Baquer Namazi with his Iranian counterpart on the sidelines of a meeting in December in Vienna, Austria, discussing implementation of the Iranian nuclear agreement. The Iranian said he would look into the issue.

About two weeks before the US presidential election in 2016, then-candidate Donald Trump took to Twitter in response to the news that the Namazis were both convicted and sentenced to 10 years each in jail.

"Well, Iran has done it again. Taken two of our people and asking for a fortune for their release. This doesn't happen if I'm president!" Trump tweeted.



The Trump administration redoubled efforts to secure the release of the Namazis after the death of Otto Warmbier last June shortly after he was released from more than 16 months of captivity in North Korea. In September at the UN General Assembly, Trump called on Iran to free all Americans in detention, without mentioning their names.

"It is time for the regime to free all Americans and citizens of other nations that they have unjustly detained," he said.

That same week, UN Secretary-General António Guterres raised Baquer Namazi's case, urging his release on humanitarian grounds during a meeting with Iranian President Hassan Rouhani. Guterres and his deputies have continued to raise their case with the Iranians, and the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention issued an opinion last fall declaring that the Namazis are being held illegally and demanding their immediate release.

This story has been updated to reflect the fine amounts given to the Namazi family.