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Son of Iranian-American Detainee Asks Tehran 'To Show Mercy'

WASHINGTON (AP) — The health of an Iranian-American dual national held in Tehran is rapidly deteriorating, his family and attorney warned Thursday as they appealed to Iranian authorities to allow him to leave for medical treatment.

"I'm here today to beg the Iranian government," said Babak Namazi, the son of 81-year-old Baquer Namazi who has been held in Iran for over two years. The younger Namazi called on the Iranian government to "show mercy" and give his father permission to leave for medical treatment.

Baquer Namazi has been diagnosed with epilepsy in addition to battling a heart condition in prison. Since his detention his health has deteriorated sharply. Earlier this year he was initially allowed a medical furlough from prison for surgery to install a pacemaker after suffering low blood pressure and an irregular heartbeat.

In March he was again granted a short-term medical furlough that has been extended a number of times on a discretionary basis.

Babak Namazi and the family's attorney Jared Genser spoke to journalists in Washington D.C. after meeting with officials from the White House and State Department.

Direct engagement between the U.S. and Iranian government is "critically important" to secure the release of the elder Namazi, Genser said and he emphasized that time was running out.

"At the end of the day we want something positive to happen here and we need it urgently," he said.

A son of Baquer Namazi is also being held in Iran. Siamak Namazi, also a dual national, has been held for over three years after he was convicted of collaborating with a hostile power in a closed-door trial in 2016 and sentenced to 10 years in prison. Baquer Namazi was convicted of the same charge and is also serving a 10-year sentence.

Baquer Namazi is a former UNICEF representative who served as governor of Iran's oil-rich Khuzestan province. Siamak Namazi is a businessman who promoted closer ties between Iran and the West.

Both Genser and Babak Namazi emphasized that their appeal Thursday was humanitarian in nature not political, but Genser, the attorney added that "it's clear that two years of what has been tried so far hasn't worked."

The administration of U.S. President Donald Trump has taken a hard line against Iran, withdrawing from a landmark nuclear deal and reimposing punishing sanctions on Tehran.

At least three other American citizens or permanent residents are believed to be held in Iran. In March the United Nations condemned the arrests, describing them as part of an "emerging pattern" by Tehran targeting dual nationals.

Analysts believe Iran is holding the dual-nationals as bargaining chips for future negotiations with the West.

When asked why Iran has so far refused to free his family members, Babak Namazi said "I don't know."

"What I do know is that my family is innocent," he added.