

Release of Mihai Calestru and Oleg Savencov

25 March 2016: Released from house arrest (MOLDOVA)

Mihai Calestru and Oleg Savencov, two members of the Unification Church, were both charged with trafficking in human beings and jailed on 30 October 2015. They filed an appeal against the decision made on 28 January 2016 sentencing them to house arrest. However, on 3 February 2016, a Moldovan court denied their appeal.

HRWF and the Forum for Religious Freedom-Europe investigated the charges against the two men in January 2016 in Moldova and found them to be baseless. HRWF published a report about the case titled "[Religious Freedom: Moldova in the Dock](#)" in 2016 and distributed this report worldwide, including in Moldova. Four days later, Calestru and Savencov were released from house arrest.

Release of Pastor Saeed Abedini

16 January 2016: Release of Pastor Saeed Abedini (IRAN)

Saeed Abedini, a U.S. citizen sentenced to 8 years in prison in 2013, was released on 16 January 2016. His release was part of a prisoner exchange between the U.S. and Iran. Four Americans were released in exchange for six Iranians.

Abedini had been sentenced to eight years in prison for

endangering national security by aiding underground Evangelical churches. On 25th August 2014, his appeal for a reduction of his sentence was rejected. Iranian President Hassan Rouhani had previously said that Abedini would not be released until 19 Iranian prisoners held in the U.S. were granted their freedom.

HRWF, together with other NGOs, had campaigned for his release by:

- regularly informing the U.S. State institutions, members of the European Parliament and Parliaments of EU member states about his case
- keeping him on HRWF's [Prisoners' List](#) (p 56)