

BREAKING: Pastor Andrew Brunson Set Free

A North Carolina pastor who has been imprisoned in Turkey for two years has been released from house arrest, according to published reports. A Turkish judge freed pastor Andrew Brunson Friday and sentenced him to time served. President Donald Trump, who has been working diligently for Brunson's release, tweeted his relief.

My thoughts and prayers are with Pastor Brunson, and we hope to have him safely back home soon!

– Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) October 12, 2018

Since Brunson was arrested in October 2016, millions of believers have been praying for him to be set free during his two-year ordeal. Those prayers were answered Friday.

"This has been a long road of persecution for pastor Andrew Brunson," says founding Coalition member and Save the Persecuted Christians Director Dede Laugesen. "We are joyful and so thankful for pastor Brunson's long-awaited freedom. We praise God for this wonderful turn of events and thank the many people who worked on his behalf, including high-ranking officials within the Trump administration and influential and committed attorneys. Despite the joy we feel today, we must never forget there are millions of Christians who are not free to believe in Christ. Many remain jailed, persecuted in their own communities or even shunned in their own homes. We pray all will someday experience the freedom Andrew Brunson is savoring today."

According to the *The Washington Post*, Brunson was released under a "secret deal" that lifted sanctions on Turkey in

exchange for Brunson's release. The missionary has been used as a political pawn by Turkish president Tayyip Erdogan. The Trump administration levied multiple tariffs against the Middle Eastern country in an attempt to get them to release the pastor.

Brunson was charged with committing crimes on behalf of terror groups without being a member," in reference to outlawed Kurdish militants and the network of a Muslim cleric blamed for a failed coup attempt. If convicted, he faces up to 35 years in prison, or the equivalent of a life sentence.

"For two years, Christians in America and across the world have hit the floor with their knees in prayer for Andrew Brunson's release from his Turkish imprisonment. Today, our prayers were answered," says Ronnie Floyd, the president of the National Day of Prayer and senior pastor of Cross Church.

"I'm so thankful we have an administration that not only has made religious freedom one of its top priorities but has fought day and night for people who, like Brunson, have been imprisoned for their faith. As we celebrate Pastor Brunson's release, let us continue praying for the men and women who are still behind bars and facing persecution for their faith. As Scripture says, 'Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body' (Heb. 13:3, ESV)."

Other persecution watchdog groups were thrilled at the announcement, as well.

"Open Doors USA is relieved to hear of Pastor Andrew Brunson's release from house arrest to freedom. Turkey has done the right thing in allowing him to return to his home country. I applaud President Trump for the unrelenting pressure his administration applied to Turkey on this matter, in part through tariffs and sanctions. The president has rightly recognized that economic leverage can help bring positive

change for human rights and can convey a powerful message of solidarity with oppressed religious minorities, especially persecuted Christians. In this case, it worked and was helpful in the release of an American Christian,” says David Curry of Open Doors USA.

“Pastor Brunson was wrongly imprisoned for his faith and work as a Christian pastor. Turkey’s latest attack on faith, which underscores why the Open Doors World Watch List ranks it as the 31st most dangerous place to be Christian, is a clear message that religious minorities are increasingly imperiled in Turkey,” Curry says. “Pastor Brunson’s case serves a reminder to us all that tens of thousands of Christians worldwide remain in prison simply because of their faith. Open Doors will continue to advocate for religious freedom around the world, and I urge others to join in the fight. Everyone should have the opportunity to choose their faith or no faith. As a lead indicator of a country’s stability, freedom of religion benefits more than religious adherents—it benefits an entire nation, and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan should recognize this fact more clearly today than before.”

Dr. Jerry A. Johnson, president & CEO of NRB, rejoiced at news that American Pastor Andrew Brunson has been released by Turkey.

“I thank God for Pastor Brunson’s release and look forward to his return to the United States,” says Johnson. “I am also grateful that President Trump, Vice President Pence, Secretary Pompeo, Ambassador Brownback, Senator Tillis, and other U.S. officials refused to take ‘no’ for an answer for this man’s release. This administration stayed true to its citizen.”

“May the Lord strengthen Pastor Brunson and his family as they work to turn the page on this difficult chapter in their lives. And may God protect and give peace to our other brothers and sisters in Christ who continue to endure hardships and severe persecution around the world because of

their faith in Him. Let us never forget them!" Johnson says.