

Influential World Leaders Contacted to Help Secure Pastor Brunson's Freedom

As American pastor Andrew Brunson's second day of trial on May 7 is fast approaching, we have been reaching out to influential leaders of several international bodies requesting assistance in securing his release.

Seen as a bargaining chip for Turkey, pastor Andrew has been imprisoned for over 18 months, and caught in the government's political ploy to silence Christians within its borders.

This was further proved just days ago when Turkey's President Erdogan confirmed that pastor Andrew's detention, trial, and persecution is not about justice but politics—demanding the U.S. arrest and extradite Muslim cleric Fethullah Gulen. In an interview he said, "The U.S. should look at the steps it has taken and comply with the extradition treaty if it wants American pastor Brunson." These statements echo those he made in September 2017, "The U.S. wants a pastor from us. You have a pastor of your own; you give him to us, then we return pastor to you."

Turkey's Foreign Minister, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu is at the United Nations this week, so we asked U.S. Ambassador Nikki Haley to take all actions necessary to encourage the immediate release of Pastor Andrew, as well as encourage all of our allies at the U.N. to do the same. We reminded her that the last paragraph of Article 74 of Turkey's Executive Order 694 gives Çavuşoğlu and President Erdoğan the authority to release Pastor Andrew outside of the current ongoing legal case, as it states that:

With the exclusion of Turkish citizens, those who are prisoners or convicts, upon assurance that they will not be

punished because of their race, ethnic origin, religion or citizenship, that they will not be subjected to demeaning punishment or treatment, or be subjected to torture or mistreatment, can be returned to another country or exchanged for prisoners or convicts in another country when national security or the country's interests so require and upon request of the foreign minister, with the recommendation of the Justice Minister and the approval of the president.

In addition, as Turkey is a NATO ally, we wrote each of the 28 other member states of the Council of NATO urging them to take action, stating:

Turkey, as a member State of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), has undertaken international commitments to respect and apply human rights within its territory. In the past, NATO has both chastised and condemned member nation for violations of their commitments. NATO is in a uniquely powerful position to take a public stand against Turkey's blatant disregard for the human rights of pastor Brunson and deliberate attempts to begin a hostage negotiation with the United States. In light of the following information and legal analysis, we urge you, and all Members of NATO, to demand the immediate release and safe return of pastor Andrew Brunson back to the United States and take all other steps available to ensure the same.

NATO has stated that the member states are "firmly committed to the purpose and principles of the Charter of the United Nations." The Charter states that one of its purposes is to "promot[e] and encourag[e] respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all" Moreover, in its journal, it stated that "NATO member states form a unique community of values, committed to the principles of individual liberty, democracy, human rights and the rule of law." As such, we requested that NATO hold Turkey accountable for this breach of NATO's commitments.

Furthermore, in letters to both the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers and the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), we asked that a respective representative pay a visit to Turkey to attend and observe—in person—pastor Andrew's trial on May 7, 2018, in order to "ensure that the administration of justice is carried out in full compliance with standards of international law." The ICJ seeks to promote the establishment of legal systems that protect individuals against violations of their human rights through country visits and accompanying reports, and thus, we insisted that:

The Turkish legal system's treatment of pastor Brunson threatens his human rights. The protections of due process, the right to an attorney with confidential preparation and the right to call and confront witnesses must be offered to pastor Brunson in order to safeguard the integrity of legal systems and individual human rights in Turkey and around the world. Because of the fabricated nature of the charges pastor Brunson is facing, the emblematic nature of his trial, the serious risk that the Turkish judicial system will fail to conduct a fair trial, and the magnitude of the human rights at stake, I am requesting that the ICJ conduct expert observation at pastor Brunson's approaching trial.

We requested that, in their situation reports, the U.N. Special Rapporteur and the ICJ express their concerns to Turkey, and request clarification of the legal procedures used by Turkey as well as an explanation of its inhumane treatment of Pastor Andrew in his captivity. The United Nations has the ability to request that all of pastor Andrew's charges be dropped as a result of their investigation—an investigation that will without a doubt reveal that the charges against pastor Andrew are ludicrous and that his trial is a sham.

Additionally, we sent letters imploring the national leaders in the International Panel of Parliamentarians for Freedom of Religion or Belief (IPPFoRB) to not only to send a letter to

Turkey advocating for Pastor Andrew's release, but to encourage each of their members to press for his release from their own countries. The IPPFoRB is committed to the promotion and protection of freedom of thought, conscience and religion or belief for all people. As such, the IPPFoRB is in a uniquely powerful position to take a public stand against Turkey's blatant disregard for the human rights of pastor Andrew and deliberate attempts to persecute him for his Christian faith.

Hope is not lost, and these letters will bring a new wave of international support for pastor Andrew. The highest levels of the U.S. government are engaged in this matter and increasing international pressure will send a message to Turkey that the world is watching as it continues its shameful persecution of pastor Andrew. Here at the ACLJ, we do not cease to fight for his release. Will you fight along with us?

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