

Missionary Andrew Brunson Thrown Back Behind Bars in Disturbing Trial Twist

Andrew Brunson, an American pastor on trial for his Christian faith, is being sent back to prison following his hearing Monday.

"The judge late today said the trial will be continued until May 7 and ordered Pastor Andrew Brunson to return to prison. Instead of being returned to the prison he was at prior to this hearing date, he's been sent back to a prison that is notorious for its overcrowding and it is a prison where eight prisoners are to be held in one cell. Instead, there are 22," said American Center for Law and Justice Chief Counsel Jay Sekulow on his podcast.

Sekulow called this latest development "disturbing" and is calling on the international community to continue to call for the pastor's release.

"The next three weeks are critical to turn up the pressure on Turkey," he said.

Sekulow encourages believers to join more than half a million others in a petition calling for the pastor's release.

Sam Brownback, United States Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, attended the trial and said the Trump administration will continue to fight for the pastor's release.

"The administration is deeply concerned about this case. We completely believe factually he is innocent. Andrew Brunson is innocent. We are hopeful that the judicial system will find that, that he will be released, released soon," he said.

Turkey accuses the 50-year-old North Carolina native of helping orchestrate a coup that threatened President Recep Erdoğan's leadership in 2016.

The 62-page indictment also charges the pastor with committing an act of terrorism by spreading the gospel in the majority Muslim country.

"Turkey has literally taken the position that Christianization is terrorism," ACLJ Senior Counsel Cece Heil told CBN News. "They have no specific evidence that Pastor Brunson has committed any crime. The fact that he is a Christian, and specifically a Christian pastor, is what they are equating as terrorism."

A group of Christians gathered just outside the White House gates Monday to pray for his release and protest his captivity.

"Hebrews 13:3 says this: 'Remember those in prison as if you were in prison with them and those who are suffering, you suffer along with them,' " Rev. Pat Mahoney, director of the Christian Defense Coalition, told CBN News at the prayer vigil. {eo}

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