

BREAKING: Pastor Andrew Brunson to Be Released From Turkish Prison

American pastor Andrew Brunson will be released from the Turkish prison where he has been held. Details of when and where the transfer will occur have not been readily accessible.

The missionary, who has been used as a political pawn by Turkish president Tayyip Erdoğan, will be under house arrest until his next court date in October. In a July 18 hearing, Brunson's trial was again stayed, and Brunson was ordered back to prison. Brunson was arrested in December 2016.

According to Turkish news sources, the same court ruled on July 25 to move Brunson from prison to house arrest, citing the "health excuse" that was stressed in the plea.

"A total disgrace that Turkey will not release a respected U.S. Pastor, Andrew Brunson, from prison. He has been held hostage far too long. @RT_Erdogan should do something to free this wonderful Christian husband & father. He has done nothing wrong, and his family needs him!" President Donald Trump tweeted just before the release announcement.

The American Center for Law and Justice, who advocates for Brunson, announced:

We have confirmed that the Turkish government has issued an order releasing pastor Andrew from prison and allowing him to be returned to his home in Turkey. This is a critical first step that we believe will result in the freedom of pastor Andrew so he can return to the United States and be reunited with his family.

The president has played a critical role in securing the freedom of pastor Andrew. We have worked closely with the president on this matter and are grateful for his efforts. We look forward to the ultimate release of pastor Andrew.

In the ACLJ's representation of pastor Andrew's family, we have mobilized our international resources—including ACLJ-affiliated offices in the region—seeking pastor Andrew's freedom. The ACLJ launched a global campaign to generate awareness of pastor Andrew's plight and called on the U.S. State Department, as well as international organizations—including the United Nations as well as NATO member countries—to demand Turkey—a NATO member—release pastor Andrew.

The ACLJ has been advocating for the protection of Christians and other religious minorities for years. The ACLJ also has been very active in working to bring an end to the persecution of Christians taking place in many parts of the world.

We will keep you updated as the situation progresses. Please continue to pray for Pastor Andrew and his family.

On July 19, the Facebook page "Andrew & Norine Brunson" called for a three-day fast after Turkish authorities announced they were sending Brunson back to prison.

"On the positive side, the name of the Lord was absolutely glorified!!! I will post his full statements when I get them," Norine posted after the hearing July 18. "As he explained why he was here, he gave the gospel. He publicly forgave all those who have come against him, forgiving as he has been forgiven. He said "It is a privilege to suffer for the sake of Christ. Blessed am I, as I suffer for him. Blessed am I, as I am slandered. Blessed am I, as I am being lied about. Blessed am I, as I am imprisoned. Blessed am I, as I share his suffering." I am incredibly proud of him as I am quite sure he

doesn't feel that blessing at this point. There have been many prayers for the legal side of things, but let's just pray for a miraculous release."

Though house arrest is a step in the right direction, some international advocates argue it is not enough.

"Open Doors USA is heartened to hear of Pastor Andrew Brunson's release from prison to house arrest. This progress gives us hope, but we remain adamant that Turkey drop all charges against Pastor Brunson," says David Curry, president and CEO of Open Doors USA. "As Pastor Brunson has said, and as Turkey's sham trial has borne out, he is in prison for his faith and work as a Christian pastor. It's another attack on faith by Turkey, which the Open Doors World Watch List ranks as the 31st most dangerous place to be Christian. President Recep Erdogan must face the reality that his government's persecution of Christians won't be tolerated on the world stage, and I continue to call on the U.S. government to do everything in its power to pressure the Turkish regime to drop all charges against Pastor Brunson immediately. As I attend the State Department's Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom this week, it is inspiring to feel renewed excitement for Pastor Brunson as we heard firsthand from his daughter Jacqueline last night. My hope is the U.S. government will leverage this movement to put an end to the public persecution of an innocent man. Open Doors joins millions of Christians worldwide in praying for and calling for Pastor Brunson's full release."

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.