



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on October 12, 2018

Turkey Releases U.S. Pastor Imprisoned for Two Years

The Turkish government released American pastor Andrew Brunson October 12 following months of negotiation and the involvement of the Trump administration and Congress. Brunson, a North Carolina native, had been imprisoned by the Turkish government since 2016 after he was accused of participating in an attempt to overthrow the government of Turkey's president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Hours before his release, a Turkish court sentenced Brunson to three years and one month in prison, but then released him based on his time already served.



Brunson had lived in Turkey for more than 20 years, serving as a pastor in the Turkish city of Izmir before his arrest. Shortly before his release, the 50-year-old Brunson was able to meet with his wife, where they held hands and spoke of their ordeal. "I am an innocent man," Brunson told reporters. "I love Jesus. I love Turkey."

Following his release, Brunson thanked those involved in negotiating his release, including President Trump. "We are grateful for the president's commitment and efforts in securing my release," said Brunson, as he prepared to leave for the United States. "My entire family thanks the president, the administration, and Congress for their unwavering support. This is the day our family has been praying for — I am delighted to be on my way home to the United States."

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Brunson also thanked U.S. attorney Jay Sekulow and the American Center for Law and Justice, which took the lead over the past two years in seeking Brunson's release. In a statement Sekulow emphasized the important role of the Trump administration and others in the U.S. government. "President Trump and his team have been tenacious in seeking the release of Pastor Brunson," noted Sekulow. "We're grateful to the president, members of Congress, and diplomatic leaders who continued to put pressure on Turkey to secure the freedom of Pastor Brunson. The fact that he is now on a plane to the United States can only be viewed as a significant victory for Pastor Brunson and his family."

Shortly before Brunson's release was announced, Vice President Mike Pence spoke on behalf of the Trump administration, emphasizing that gaining the pastor's freedom was a priority of the president. "Our administration has made very clear that we will continue to stand strong until Pastor Andrew Brunson is free and back home in the United States with his family and with his church," Pence said.

U.S. Representative Chris Smith (R-N.J.), who had championed Brunson's plight before Congress, said that he was "overjoyed" at the pastor's release. "For almost two years he was the victim of efforts by President Erdogan and the Turkish state to crack down on religious freedom as he languished in prison — and was then transferred to house arrest in July — on absurd charges of espionage and supporting a terrorist group, while his family suffered enormously."



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Family Research Council President Tony Perkins, who serves as a commissioner on the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, attended the October 12 court hearing in Izmir, Turkey, that culminated in Brunson's release. "The prayers of thousands were answered today when Pastor Brunson was released by the Turkish government and told he could go home to the United States," said Perkins in a statement. "Those prayers combined with the unwavering resolve of President Trump, Vice President Pence, Secretary Pompeo, and Ambassador Brownback brought tangible help to Pastor Brunson and hope to those around the globe who are being persecuted because of their faith."

Perkins added that "America seeks the well-being of all peaceful, freedom loving people. But this administration has made clear America will not sacrifice religious freedom and the well-being of Americans on the altar of globalism."

Image of Andrew Brunson: Screenshot of a [youtube video by Wochit News](#)



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