



PREPARED WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF

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Daughter of Imprisoned American Pastor Andrew Brunson

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“Prisoners of the Purge: The Victims of Turkey’s Failing Rule of Law”

Chairman Wicker, Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Cardin, Ranking Member Hastings, and distinguished Commissioners, thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of my father.

Having grown up in Turkey, it has been so hard for me to understand the current state of events. My parents moved to Turkey in 1993, so that’s where my brothers and I grew up. In fact, my brothers were born there. We even went to Turkish grade school because my parents wanted us to learn the language and feel comfortable in the culture. To me, it was home. My family, school, and friends were in Turkey. I grew up in the mix of Turkish and American culture, and loved seeing the beauty in both. On holidays, we sometimes hung a Turkish flag from our balcony, as our neighbors did. We loved and respected the Turkish people, and my parents were dedicated to serving the Turkish people for as long as they could. My brothers and I used to joke that we would have to bring our future children to Turkey to see their grandparents.

As I grew up, I saw how my father poured himself into his work, and how willing he was to sacrifice his needs and wants for the sake of others. He believed – as I do – in a greater purpose in life, and actively lived out his life with the purpose of showing people the love and grace of God. He taught this message in the home, too. Their continued commitment to serving God and the people of Turkey was such a wonderful example for my brothers and me to see. We were truly blessed to be raised by such faithful parents.

I know my dad and his character, as only a daughter can, and I know the charges against him are absurd. My father is not an armed terrorist trying to overthrow any government, my father is a pastor who went to Wheaton College, then on to seminary, and got a Ph.D. in New Testament. He has selflessly served Turkey for 24 years now. Everything in his life is centered on his faith. For my family, who has loved, served, and prayed for Turkey and its people, seeing these absurd charges brought against my father has been an extremely painful experience.

Previously, the worst case scenario for Christian pastors, who were not nationals, in Turkey was deportation, which is why I never could have guessed my father would be imprisoned there for over a year. This is unheard of. My family has been shocked and deeply hurt during the past year. The past year of our lives has been filled with uncertainty, worry, tears, and countless unanswered questions.

I didn't even know when my parents were detained in October last year. I only found out several days after the fact because they took their phones and did not let them contact anyone. For what felt like weeks, I was in a state of panic. This hadn't happened before. I couldn't find out any information about what the charges were. There was no communication for two weeks, although we tried desperately to find out any information. Then, my mother was released. I

called her the moment I got her message. I will never forget how shocked and brokenhearted she was because my father was still detained and no one knew why.

My family kept assuming this situation would end soon. But it kept dragging on, month after month. My brothers and I didn't get to spend Christmas with my mom because she was scared of what might happen to us if we flew into Turkey. I missed a last Christmas as a single woman with my family. I was about to transition into a different phase of life, and I wanted that one last family Christmas before things changed.

In February I got married. We didn't want to get married without my parents present, but because my husband is in the military, we could not postpone it. We had received my father's blessing, but we felt so terrible about getting married while he was imprisoned. Neither of my parents were present when I got married. I will never get that moment back. For those of you who are fathers to daughters, I'm sure you would want to walk your daughter down the aisle. My father didn't get that. I didn't get that. My husband and I decided to have a civil ceremony and to postpone our wedding ceremony until my father is home. I'm still waiting for my wedding. I'm still waiting to wear the wedding dress that I got almost a year and half ago. I'm still waiting for my dad to walk me down the aisle. I'm still waiting for that father-daughter dance.

I'm graduating from college in December. My dad doesn't want to miss seeing graduate. He invested a lot in helping me find a career path. However, unless a miracle happens, I will be achieving yet another life milestone without my parents.

In his letters, my father says that the hardest part of his imprisonment is missing out on being with his family. That is what he most wants. He has missed his only daughter getting married, and might miss my college graduation. He has missed helping my older brother make career choices and witnessing his accomplishments at Cornell. He has missed being with my

younger brother who has so badly needed his dad and mom in the last year. These are the things that pain my dad the most, not being able to be with us.

In August, I took a risk and flew to Turkey to visit my father and support my mother. I never really processed that visit because it makes me too emotional. I will never forget any moment of the day we got to visit. I remember hearing my dad's voice for the first time in a year as they brought him into the room. I remember how broken, tired, and desperate he sounded as he tried to fight to meet in a room where he could hug and hold us for the only hour he would have seen us the whole year. We sobbed the entire visit. It was hard to fit words in because the emotions were too strong and only led to more tears. It was hard to see my father so broken, so thin, so desperate. He hated having us kids see him that way.

During my summer visit, he was already talking about how fearful he was of facing the cold winter in that poorly insulated prison. That he was already concerned about the winter in the middle of August shows how hopeless he was. And now, the cold that he feared so much has started. My father is now dealing with anxiety and depression. Seeing him in that much pain broke me. He's been changed by this experience. My whole family has been changed

In a recent visit with my mother, my father said "I plead with the Lord to release me by Christmas so I can be with our son in his last year in high school and at our daughter's graduation before she moves to Germany. But if I'm still here at Christmas, I'll thank God for sending Jesus to be born. If I'm still here at New Year, I'll thank him for helping me make it through this year. If I'm here on my birthday, I won't be like Job and curse the day I was born. I'll give thanks for the life I've lived." My father is handling his situation better than he was before. But we still want so desperately for him not to have to face Christmas imprisoned again. We want him to be home again, with his family.

My family has suffered greatly because of these absurd and false charges. Please, make any and all efforts to secure my father's release and bring him home for Christmas. He's been falsely imprisoned for far too long.