

RELEASE IN FULL

From: Sullivan, Jacob J <SullivanJJ@state.gov>
Sent: Friday, September 9, 2011 12:38 PM
To: H
Subject: Fw: Hopes cool for freedom of American jailed in Cuba

FYI.

From: Kurtz-Phelan, Daniel
Sent: Friday, September 09, 2011 12:09 PM
To: Sullivan, Jacob J
Subject: FW: Hopes cool for freedom of American jailed in Cuba

Richardson doing his Richardson thing. The highlight: "Richardson said he had no deadline for leaving. He noted he likes baseball and said he was looking forward to the Cuban season, which starts in November."

From: Reynoso, Julissa
Sent: Friday, September 09, 2011 12:08 PM
To: Brennan, Peter M; Kurtz-Phelan, Daniel; Erikson, Daniel P
Subject: FW: Hopes cool for freedom of American jailed in Cuba

See below. Classic.

From: NewsDesk@sosimosaic.com [mailto:NewsDesk@sosimosaic.com]
Sent: Friday, September 09, 2011 12:02 PM
To: South And Central America Lists
Subject: Hopes cool for freedom of American jailed in Cuba

Date: September 9, 2011

Hopes cool for freedom of American jailed in Cuba
 PAUL HAVEN, Associated Press

HAVANA (AP) — A staredown between former New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson and the Cuban government stretched into a second day Friday, with the U.S. statesman insisting he will not quit the island until he is allowed to meet with a jailed American he says is ailing and ought to be sent home.

Richardson said Friday that he was concerned about the health of 62-year-old Alan Gross, who has reportedly lost 100 pounds since his arrest in December 2009, and had no timetable for leaving Cuba unless he sees him.

"There are reports of Mr. Gross's health deteriorating," Richardson said. "I have decided to stay in Cuba until I see Alan Gross."

Richardson, who had described Gross as "an American hostage" in an interview with The Associated Press on Thursday night, toned down his remarks somewhat on Friday.

"He's been in detention for two years. He is sick," Richardson said. "It's important that, however we discuss Alan Gross and refer to him, that he be released."

The New Mexico politician said he had been invited to come by the Cuban government, adding that he did so "in good faith." His arrival Wednesday raised hope that Gross might soon be freed. The Maryland native is serving a 15-year sentence for bringing communications equipment into the island illegally as part of a USAID-funded democracy building program that Cuba sees as a thinly veiled attempt to overthrow the government.

Richardson has decades of experience negotiating prisoner releases around the world, and he had enjoyed warm relations with the island's communist leaders in the past. He also has been in close contact with the Obama Administration, though he is here as a private citizen.

But optimism for the trip quickly faded when Richardson said Cuban leaders had told him he would not be allowed to even see Gross at a military hospital where he is being held, a courtesy that has been extended to virtually every delegation of visiting Americans in recent months.

Richardson, a former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, gave more details of his efforts on Friday, saying he had spent hours discussing Gross's case with Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez, but had so far been unable to change the Cuban official's mind.

"I want this to be a constructive dialogue with the Cuban government. I have always had a constructive dialogue with them," he said. "My hope is that this wish will be granted."

There was no immediate reaction from Washington, or from Gross's family. But the showdown could have diplomatic repercussions, particularly if there is a sense that Richardson was duped into coming to the island by false promises.

Relations between Washington and Havana were already in the deep freeze, with U.S. officials saying repeatedly that better ties are impossible while Gross remains in jail.

It was not clear whether Richardson had any further meetings scheduled Friday.

Gross' conviction in March was upheld last month by the country's Supreme Court.

Gross has insisted he was only trying to help Cuba's tiny Jewish community improve Internet access, and says he had no desire to offend Cuba's communist government. In court testimony that was released last week by his own lawyer, Gross described himself as a "trusting fool."

His legal options closed, efforts have turned to winning Gross's release on humanitarian grounds.

Those who have met and spoken with him say Gross, who was portly at the time of his arrest, has lost 100 pounds (45 kilos) while in custody and is now gaunt and clearly unwell. In addition, both his elderly mother and adult daughter are suffering from cancer, and his family has endured financial hardships.

It was not clear what Cuban officials would do if Richardson refuses to leave. Physically kicking him out of the country would be public relations setback, particularly given the Democratic politician's previously good relations with Cuban leaders.

Richardson said he had no deadline for leaving. He noted he likes baseball and said he was looking forward to the Cuban season, which starts in November.

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