

Gross Ends Hunger Strike

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U.S. government subcontractor Alan P. Gross, jailed in Havana for more than four years, called off a weeklong hunger strike late Friday but said there will be “further protests” against his treatment by the Cuban and U.S. governments.

“My protest fast is suspended as of today, although there will be further protests to come,” Gross was quoted as telling his Washington lawyer, Scott Gilbert, in a statement released by the family’s public relations firm.

“There will be no cause for further intense protest when both governments show more concern for human beings and less malice and derision toward each other,” the statement quoted Gross as saying.

Gross added that he had suspended his hunger strike, launched April 3, because his mother asked him to stop, according to the statement. She will be 92 years old on April 15, the first day of Passover. He had told Gilbert earlier this week that he was not eating food but was taking liquids, and that he had lost 10 pounds, on top of the 100 pounds he shed after his arrest in Havana on Dec. 3, 2009.

The 64-year-old development specialist from Potomac, Md., is serving a 15-year sentence for delivering communications equipment , paid for by the U.S. Agency for International Development to Cuban Jews. The equipment would have allowed direct access to the Internet, bypassing government filters and monitors.

Gilbert reported Tuesday that Gross had told him he started the fast after learning of an Associated Press report that USAID had launched a secret Twitter-like platform after his arrest, despite the risk that it would complicate his situation in Havana.

A Cuban foreign ministry official said the next day that her government was “concerned” about the hunger strike, saying he was imprisoned in a hospital to ensure proper medical care.