

CUBA

Lawyer Says Gross Wants Out At Any Cost

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U.S. government subcontractor Alan P. Gross is “not doing well” after 4 1/2 years in a Cuban prison and has vowed that he will “return to the United States before his 66th birthday, dead or alive,” his lawyer said Wednesday.

“He told me yesterday emphatically that May 2, which marks his 65th birthday, will be the last birthday that he marks in Cuba, one way or the other,” attorney Scott Gilbert said in a telephone interview from Havana with MSNBC’s Andrea Mitchell.

Asked what Gross meant, the Washington attorney said, “Alan means that he does not intend to endure another year of this solitary confinement and that he will return to the United States before his 66th birthday, dead or alive.”

Gross’s family later issued a statement quoting the prisoner as saying that his vow that May 2 will be his last in Cuba “means what it means. It’s not a threat, it’s a statement of hope, a statement of determination and a statement of impatience.”

Gross is serving a 15-year prison sentence for violating Cuba’s national security by delivering satellite phones to island Jews so they could bypass government controls on the Internet. Havana alleges the equipment, paid for by the U.S. Agency for International Development, is part of a USAID effort to undermine the communist government.

Gilbert said Gross “is not doing well” because he has lost 110 pounds — the last 10 in a hunger strike earlier this month — and spends 23 hours a day in his pajamas in a small room with two other inmates.

He is allowed out for one hour a day to exercise in a courtyard and his food is “limited, and mediocre,” the attorney said. Gross is being held in a Havana military hospital.

Gilbert said he also met for nearly two hours Wednesday with Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez, who repeated that his government “is interested in meeting with officials from the United States at the highest levels of both governments to discuss the release of Alan Gross with no preconditions.”

But “we are not aware, and certainly the Cubans are not aware, of any ongoing discussions with the United States concerning Alan Gross,” Gilbert said during the interview with Mitchell.

“Our message, really, is to the president of the United States. And it is President Obama, please engage on this issue,” Gilberto said. “Sit down with the Cuban government. Try to reach a resolution. Do what you can do to bring Alan Gross back to his country. Make serving your government in a foreign country mean something.”

Gross spent nine days on a hunger strike to protest against both the Cuban and U.S. governments for his continued imprisonment. His family said the hunger strike was triggered by an Associated Press

report that USAID financed a Twitter-like platform for Cuba called ZunZuneo shortly after his arrest, risking complicating his case.

The family statement Wednesday said he has lost partial vision in his right eye. The lights on his room are kept on 24 hours a day, it added.

The Cuban government has repeatedly offered to free Gross in exchange for three Cuban spies serving lengthy sentences in U.S. prisons since 1998. Two other members of the “Wasp Network” arrested in South Florida completed their sentences and returned to Havana.

Obama administration officials have repeatedly rejected any such swap.

GROSS

