

CUBA

Jackson Hopes To See Jailed American

BY PETER ORSI Associated Press

HAVANA — The Rev. Jesse Jackson traveled to Cuba on Friday for talks with the island's religious leaders and said he hopes to visit Alan Gross, a U.S. government subcontractor serving a 15-year sentence.

In brief comments outside a seaside Havana hotel, Jackson told reporters he intended to meet with local clergy about their concerns for the poor and to discuss relations between Cuba, the U.S., and the rest of the Caribbean.

Asked whether he would meet with Gross, Jackson said: "I would like to."

Gross was arrested in December 2009 after authorities caught him importing restricted communications equipment into the country.

He said he was only setting up Internet networks for Jewish groups, but a court convicted him on a statute governing crimes against the state and sentenced him to 15 years. The case threw already cool U.S.-Cuba relations into a deep freeze, although there have been signs of some thawing this year.

Jackson has traveled to Yugoslavia, Syria, and Iraq in the past to help gain freedom for U.S. citizens jailed there.

In March 2011, shortly before Gross' trial, he appealed to Cuba to release the man on humanitarian grounds and offered to help mediate.

Former President Jimmy Carter came to Havana that month but left without Gross. In September 2011, the former governor of New Mexico and U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, Bill Richardson, made a visit to try to negotiate Gross' release.

But the trip abruptly fell apart amid mutual recriminations as Richardson wasn't even allowed to see Gross.