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From: Abedin, Huma <AbedinH@state.gov>
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Subject: Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter to visit Cuba (Reuters)

HAVANA(Reuters) - Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter and wife Rosalynn will visit Cuba next week to meet with President Raul Castro and discuss ways to improve U.S.-Cuba relations, a Carter spokeswoman said Friday.

The visit, made at the invitation of the Cuban government, raised the possibility that Carter would get involved in the case of U.S. aid contractor Alan Gross, recently sentenced to 15 years in prison for providing illegal Internet access to Cuban groups.

The case has strained U.S.-Cuba relations after a brief warming under President Barack Obama.

Carter, 86, was to arrive in Havana Monday for a three-day trip "to learn about new economic policies and the upcoming (Communist) Party congress and to discuss ways to improve U.S.-Cuba relations," said a statement from Carter spokeswoman Deanna Congileo.

He was to meet with President Castro and "other Cuban officials and citizens," the statement said.

It said the trip was a follow-up to the Carters' May 2002 visit to the island 90 miles from Florida and was a "private, non-governmental mission under the auspices of the not-for-profit Carter Center."

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