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U.S. Offered Russia 'Serious Proposal' to Release Jailed American Paul Whelan – CNN

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Paul Whelan. **Dimitar Dilkoff / AFP**

The United States has made a "serious proposal" to Moscow for the release of ex-Marine Paul Whelan as his imprisonment in a Russian nears five years, CNN reported Tuesday.

Whelan was accused of spying after agents from Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) detained him in a Moscow hotel room on Dec. 28, 2018.

He was sentenced to 16 years in prison on espionage charges in 2020, and the U.S. has designated him "wrongfully detained."

"We offered Russia a serious proposal for Paul's release and will not stop working on his case until he is reunited with his family," a U.S. State Department spokesperson told CNN, but did not go into further detail.

Related article: U.S. Ambassador to Moscow Visits Imprisoned American Paul Whelan

Whelan's Russian attorney responded to the CNN report by telling state news agency RIA Novosti later on Tuesday that he could not yet "disclose the details" of ongoing talks between Washington and Moscow, noting only that the former Marine's release was still "a work in progress."

Meanwhile, Whelan told CNN in a rare phone call that he had spoken with U.S. State Secretary Antony Blinken in August and urged him to step up efforts to secure his release.

"[Blinken] told me that he's working quite diligently and his team is working quite diligently to find a resolution to this situation," Whelan said.

But he argued that the longer Washington waited, the more "challenging" his release would be "from a health and safety point of view" given the poor living conditions in the Russian prison where he is being held.

The U.S. has been exploring options to exchange Whelan and other Americans jailed by Moscow for Russian nationals imprisoned in the United States and other allied countries.

CNN reported in May that the Biden administration was considering easing Russian sanctions in order to secure the release of Whelan and Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich, who faces trial on espionage charges he denies.

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