

Aung San Suu Kyi should be released immediately: US

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WASHINGTON— The United States said Thursday that pro-democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi should be released immediately after Myanmar's military junta brought new charges against her.

"I am ready to say something more than just that ... we're troubled," State Department spokesman Ian Kelly told reporters when asked if he would go further than a statement he released earlier in the day.

"Our bottom line is that she shouldn't be under house arrest. She shouldn't be, and even less so in prison," Kelly said during the daily media briefing. "Our bottom line is ... she should be released immediately."

Myanmar's military junta charged Aung San Suu Kyi Thursday with breaching the terms of her house arrest over a bizarre incident in which a US man swam to her lakeside house.

The 63-year-old goes on trial on Monday on the charges, which carry a jail term of up to five years and would stretch her detention past its supposed expiry date this month and through controversial elections due in 2010.

Aung San Suu Kyi would not be allowed to return home but would be held at a special house on the grounds of Insein Prison while proceedings were under way, her lawyer Kyi Win added.

Kelly said that the US embassy in Yangon had been in contact with the authorities to verify the charges against her.

He recalled that both publicly and privately, through diplomatic channels, the US government has long been calling for her release and that of more than 2,100 political prisoners.

In a statement released earlier, Kelly said: "We have seen this report (about the new charges), which is certainly troubling if true."

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton "has seen it as well, and has asked the Department to work to get more information," added Kelly.

During the briefing, Kelly said Clinton would comment on the case she holds talks here with foreign minister Datuk Anifah bin Haji Aman of Malaysia, which like Myanmar is a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

Howard Berman, the chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, echoed the call for the release of the pro-democracy leader.

"The military junta should immediately release her, allow greater political freedoms in the country, and respect the human rights of all of Burma's citizens," he said in a statement.

John Yettaw, who was held last week for sneaking into Suu Kyi's house and staying there for two days before he was caught, was also charged with breaking the security law and immigration conditions, officials said.

Yettaw, 53, apparently used a pair of homemade flippers to swim across a lake to her crumbling residence in an apparent show of solidarity, but Aung San Suu Kyi's main lawyer Kyi Win said they had asked him to leave.

"We have to blame him," Kyi Win said. "He is a fool."

Kelly said that the authorities allowed a US embassy consular officer access to the courtroom for Yettaw's hearing earlier Thursday.