

Colombian FARC Rebels Unanimously Support Peace but Express Paramilitary Fears



Bogota, September 21 (RHC)-- On the third day of the 10th National Guerrilla Conference, some 51 delegates representing various Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army (FARC-EP) factions across Colombia unanimously reaffirmed their support for the nation's historic peace deal, but expressed concern over the threat of paramilitarism and the difficulties of reintegrating themselves into society.

Echoing the doubts of the delegates, in a press conference 63-year-old FARC Commander Pablo Catatumbo said "paramilitarism may be the biggest threat to the agreements, it's the major threat for Colombians, for democracy."

"The delegates wonder what will happen with the paramilitary groups, whether the government will abide to what was agreed, how our reintegration into the economy will go, employment... (and) whether political prisoners will be released."

But despite the widespread fears, Catatumbo reaffirmed that all delegates in attendance have expressed support for the deal. "The whole of FARC will ratify the deal and will commit to what was agreed." The

formal vote to ratify peace is expected Friday, the last day of the conference.

Meanwhile, FARC's First Front, the only faction that publicly disagreed with the deal, was invited to the conference but refused to attend. "This sector of the First Front is minimal," said Catatumbo.

Discussing the deal itself, Catatumbo lamented the fact the final agreement failed to include "more elements about extractivism."

"The FARC gave a tough battle, but everyone knows that the government refused to discuss the economic model," he said. Nevertheless, he insisted the agreement is not the end but rather the beginning of a longer struggle that will ensure the FARC's demands are heard within a peaceful, democratic framework.

The Colombian rebel commander said: "What we feel is that a door has been opened so people can fight to defend their territories under democratic conditions."

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