

Colombia's National Liberation Army and Government to Hold Peace Talks



Caracas, October 11 (RHC)-- The Colombian government and the National Liberation Army (ELN), the country's second largest guerrilla group, have announced they will begin peace talks on October 27th in Quito, the Ecuadorian capital.

The announcement came on the heels of the government's peace agreement with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the country's largest insurgency group, which was rejected in a plebiscite on October 2nd.

In a joint statement issued from Caracas, Venezuela, the two sides said that negotiations will begin the "public phase" in Ecuador. And, in a goodwill gesture, the ELN released a kidnapped victim to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) on Monday. The ELN has pledged to release two more captives before peace talks start.

Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos said: "It was essential for the process of liberation to begin" before negotiations could go ahead. The man freed on Monday, Nelson Alarcon, spent three months in captivity. His release followed the liberation of two other civilians over the past two weeks.

Monday's joint statement said the two sides have already worked out an agenda to discuss issues including the participation of society in the peace process, democratic reforms, and reparations for victims.

The rejection of the peace deal with FARC in a national referendum doesn't seem to have dampened the ELN's desire to pursue its own peace deal. Immediately after the referendum results were revealed, the ELN said that it called on "Colombians to continue to tirelessly fight for peace with changes."

After the peace deal with FARC was rejected, Santos began talks last week with leaders opposing the current peace deal to seek ways for reconciliation in the country. Former Colombian President Alvaro Uribe and other leaders of the opposition party, the Democratic Center, attended the meeting.

The government and the FARC also agreed over the weekend to set up a "rapid and effective" process to "quickly" salvage a hard-won peace deal. In a joint statement, they pledged commitment to the peace deal signed on September 26, and to address doubts and concerns that Colombians expressed in the plebiscite.

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