

Colombian Rebel Group Reiterates Commitment to Peace



Bogotá, December 30 (RHC)-- Colombia's National Liberation Army, the ELN, has reiterated their commitment to peace and dialogue with the national government of President Juan Manuel Santos.

"Despite the difficult climate and conditions which impede the peace process, we will promptly arrive to the appointment between our two delegations," the group said in an end-of-year communiqué posted on their Twitter account. "We hope that by then, the government will have officially appointed its delegation."

But while the guerrilla group -- historically smaller in size and potency than the more well-known Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), yet still having played a powerful role in Colombian armed peoples' struggles -- is willing to attend the January 10 meeting in the Ecuadorean capital, Quito, it denounced what it sees as the government's unilaterally-imposed conditions.

Referring to the government's recent abrupt decision to postpone the October 27 talks, the group took the opportunity to remind Santos that mutual respect is a "golden rule for peace." The ELN statement reads: "President Santos forgets that we are two parties, that we act according to what has been agreed upon and that among the rules established by our common agreement, there is one that says: 'Agree and honor it, golden rule for peace.'"

President Juan Manuel Santos canceled that meeting on the grounds that the ELN failed to confirm the release of a detainee, former lawmaker Odin Sanchez, held since April. The group holds that this demand "was not part of the agreements" they had come to on October 6, which would have seen each side liberating prisoners on humanitarian grounds as the first rounds of negotiations began. But that did not happen.

"These facts show us the regime's arrogance and lack of true commitment to peace," the group wrote. They also denounced what they considered the "government's lack of action" regarding of the "systemic killing of popular and social leaders, Human Rights defenders...(by) paramilitary bands."

Earlier this month, the two parties agreed to a prisoner release that has yet to happen, leading rebel leader Israel Ramirez, better known by his alias Pablo Beltran, to assure that on "the same day our two are pardoned, Mr. Sanchez will be free."

The ELN concluded by praising the role of the six guarantor states, which include Ecuador, Venezuela, Cuba, Norway, Chile and Brazil, and thanking the "sister nation of Ecuador" for hosting the talks.

"Our efforts for peace in Colombia continue, which is why we ask the six guarantor states and their representatives at the dialogue table, to continue to accompany us and to offer their professional efforts, worthy of note."

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