

Colombian Government Suspends ELN Peace Talks



Bogota, January 30 (RHC)-- Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos has announced that the fifth cycle of talks with the National Liberation Army, ELN, scheduled for the next few days, is suspended until the ELN shows what he calls "coherence." Santos said that law enforcement officials have been instructed to "maintain force against armed groups operating outside the law."

Peace talks between the Colombian government and the ELN destabilized following attacks that took place over the weekend. Armed suspects reportedly led three bomb attacks against police stations across the South American country that killed seven and wounded dozens more, Reuters reported.

Five police officers were killed and more than 40 wounded in a bombing in Barranquilla, located in northern Colombia. Two more officers died while another was wounded Saturday in Bolivar province.

Finally, another attack took place roughly four hours later in Soledad, injuring five police officers and one civilian.

The country's Ministry of National Defense has blamed ELN rebels for the attacks. Meanwhile, President Juan Manuel Santos' administration is weighing the future of peace talks with the guerrilla group, which has participated in dialogue with the government for almost a year. Both parties agreed to a ceasefire last October, but it came to an end earlier this month.

Following the attacks, Santos showed signs of reevaluating the peace talks. And the ELN has announced that it would support a new ceasefire, but that its armed struggle against the government would continue in the absence of one.

The ELN is Colombia's second largest rebel group with 1,500 members. It began its peace talks with the government last February after the biggest rebel group in the country, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), laid down its arms under UN supervision following a peace deal with President Santos. FARC has now disarmed and transformed itself into a political party, known as the Revolutionary Alternative Common Force.

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