

France to help former FARC fighters become forest rangers



Paris, October 26 (RHC)-- Members of the demobilized Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) will be trained in France to be forest rangers, as part of international efforts to bring economic opportunities to former fighters, and contribute to peace-building in the South American country.

"A successful demobilization comes hand-in-hand with the application of a training system so they can go into the labor market," said the Council of Nouvelle-Aquitaine, located in the southeast of France. The measure was proposed by the French Foreign Minister to help former fighters.

Five rangers from the Landes de Gascogne Natural Park will travel to the Nariño Colombian department to start the training in 2019. There, a still undetermined number of candidates will travel to France to complete their training as forest rangers, focusing on environmental and biodiversity protection.

"Regardless of what happened before, which is more than reprehensible, the reality is that if we want a peace process to take place in Colombia the international community has to help," the president of the natural park, Renaud Lagrave, told EFE.

Lagrave will visit Colombia in December to conclude the final details of the 60,000-euro plan, out of which Nouvelle-Aquitaine will contribute with 30,000, Nariño with 15,000 and the rest will be given by the Environment Ministry, the park administration and several agencies of regional cooperation.

The candidates' profile, its number and the time of the training are still undetermined. The project will "contribute with solutions to the deforestation and deterioration of diversity problems of Nariño," the main coca producing territory in Colombia.

Rodrigo Londoño 'Timochenko,' president of the Common Alternative Revolutionary Force (also FARC) political party, denounced the State's abandonment and said it's worrying that they have not been able to guarantee basic security measures for the more than 7,000 former fighters, who are also struggling for reincorporation into the market.

Even though the project was approved by the regional council, of socialist leaning, the center-right Republicans (LR) and the far-right National Rally (RN), rejected it.

"Bringing former terrorists could be particularly dangerous, is there going to be a psychological or psychiatric following? What will guarantee us they will not backslide?" the RN counselor Edwige Diaz told EFE.

Diaz also showed her economic concerns, as "importing terrorists" would be expensive. "The region has no obligation to expend so much money in a battle that is not its own. The strike is happening in France, besides insecurity, and each time we have more poor people... Those 30,000 Euros could be used other way."

But Lagrave doesn't think this is about finances. "They would have voted instead even though only one euro had been approved. It's an excuse to not help," said Lagrave. "Everybody knows they are the party of exclusion. They are systematically against all cooperation."

The president of the party thinks that the experience of "modestly" contributing in favor of peace will also help the French training experience, as their guides and scholars will learn from it and share with colleagues and students.

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