

President Santos Suspends Colombian Peace Talks



Bogota, November 17 (teleSUR)-- Colombian peace talks between the government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) have been suspended due to the disappearance of an army general, President Juan Manuel Santos announced Monday, as the army investigates the apparent kidnapping. The decision throws into crisis the nation's ongoing efforts to end 50 years of war.

"Negotiations with FARC are suspended until the facts of the kidnapping of general (Ruben) Alzate are clarified," the Ministry of Defense said in a tweet, citing Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos on Sunday.

Santos accused the FARC of kidnapping the general, along with two others, but the rebel forces have not accepted responsibility for the disappearances.

Santos suspended the talks just a few hours before a new cycle was due to start in Havana on Monday. "Tomorrow negotiators were to travel to another round of talks in Havana," Santos said late Sunday. "I will tell them not to go and that the talks are suspended until these people are released."

The FARC has yet to comment on this incident, but as recently as Friday the FARC took credit for detaining two soldiers as prisoners of war, rejecting government claims that they kidnapped the soldiers.

The peace talks between the Colombian government and the rebels had started in November 2012. There had not been a bilateral truce during the negotiations. The rebels vowed to stop abducting civilians for ransom in 2012. However, they reserved the right to take police and soldiers captive as prisoners of war.

The FARC is Latin America's oldest insurgent group and has been fighting the government since 1964. The rebel organization is thought to have around 8,000 fighters operating across a large swathe of the eastern jungles of the Andean country.

The rebels expressed their willingness to negotiate freeing the government fighters, repeating past calls for a bilateral ceasefire, which the Santos administration has been insistently rejecting since the beginning of the peace talks two years ago.

The ongoing talks in Havana between the two parties have been lauded as largely successful, with both sides agreeing to provisional terms on three out of their five agenda items.

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