

# *FARC's Southern-bloc Commander in Cuba to Support Peace Process*

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Havana, Dec. 29 (RHC) – Joaquín Gómez, commander of the Southern Bloc of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and a member of the rebel group’s Secretariat, arrived in Havana Sunday to join ongoing peace negotiations between the rebel group and the government of President Juan Manuel Santos.

According to the guerrilla organization’s peace delegation, the presence of Gómez in Cuba represents “a new gesture of peace from the FARC, expressing our determination to advance toward the signature of the final agreement that will establish a foundation for the Colombia of the future.”

The government of Colombia confirmed Gómez’s trip to Cuba in a statement asserting that his departure from Colombia “was carried out according to established protocol and with the express authorization of the President of the Republic.”

The FARC has been in dialogue with Colombian government negotiators attempting to broker a peace deal to end the five-decade-long armed conflict in the South American country.

Gómez joins Pastor Alape and Carlos Lozada, FARC leaders who joined the peace negotiations in late October. In total, five of the seven FARC Secretariat members are now in Havana. Achievements of the negotiations have included agreements on issues of rural reform, political participation and illegal drugs.

The negotiators are currently dealing with the issue of victims of the conflict.

According to official figures, a total of 6.8 million Colombians were victims of the armed conflict.

A government report, published in the Monday edition of the newspaper El Tiempo, revealed that 86 percent of the total number were classified as displaced persons and the remaining 14 percent were either killed or the target of threats, kidnapping, sexual violence, and child abuse.

The paper cited Paula Gaviria, Director of the Unit for Care and Compensation to War Victims, as saying: "These are certainly painful figures."

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