

Colombian Rebel Chiefs Hold Historic Meeting in Cuba



Bogota, May 13 (teleSUR-RHC)-- Colombia's President Juan Manuel Santos confirmed on Monday that he had authorized the travel to Cuba of the military heads of the country's largest guerrilla armies, Timochenko of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and Gabino of the National Liberation Army (ELN).

The meeting of the heads of both guerrilla armies, under the auspices of the government, bodes well for a successful end to the decades-long armed conflict in the country.

"In my capacity as head of state ... I facilitated, with the support of the accompanying and guarantor countries, the conditions so that this meeting could be held, with the sole purpose, of course, of achieving progress in the search for the end of the conflict," President Santos said Monday from the government palace.

The FARC and the Colombian government have been engaged in peace negotiations for over two years.

Recently the ELN has responded positively to overtures to also negotiate an end to the armed conflict.

Humberto de la Calle, the Colombian government's lead negotiator in the peace talks, said that the week-long meeting was conducted under strict conditions. Politicians in Colombia opposed to the peace process, who have steadfastly worked to derail it, were quick to condemn the visit by the guerrilla leaders as illegal, something that was rejected by de la Calle, who said, "The meeting falls within the confines of the constitution and the law."

Lawyers connected to far-right former President Alvaro Uribe said that the actions by Santos were an act of "treason," as there is a standing arrest order against Timochenko. News of the trip by the FARC and ELN head comes as the Accusations Commission of the Colombian House of Representatives opened an investigation against President Santos for having authorized two previous trips by Timochenko to Cuba.

The FARC leader visited Cuba to meet with the guerrilla's negotiating team. His presence is designed to ensure that the decisions being made in Havana will be palatable to the rank-and-file FARC combatants.

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