

# *Colombian Government Open to Bilateral Cease-Fire With FARC*

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Bogota, July 06 (teleSUR-RHC) In a departure from its previous position, the government of Colombia said to be ready to declare a bilateral ceasefire with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).

"We are ready to accept a cease-fire, even before the signing of an agreement," said the government's chief negotiator at the peace talks in Havana, Humberto de la Calle. The top official said the government of President Juan Manuel Santos that it was willing to explore a bilateral cease-fire with the FARC "if it is serious, bilateral, definitive and verifiable," he said.

The Colombian government had previously expressed its opposition to a bilateral cease-fire before the signing of a peace accord.

In a statement issued Saturday, the FARC guerrilla group reiterated its call for the Colombian government to reach a bilateral ceasefire.

Peace talks between the government and FARC have been going on for two years to end the five-decade-old conflict that has so claimed the lives of over 200,000 people and displaced millions in Colombia.

The government of President Santos has not sought a bilateral cease-fire with the FARC so far out of fears that the guerrilla army would seize the opportunity to strengthen its ranks.

In recent months however, there has been an increase in hostilities from both sides, putting a strain on the peace process. Partial agreements have been reached at the talks on three of the five agenda points, including land reform, an end to the illegal drugs trade, and political participation for the left-wing guerrillas. Discussions on reparations for victims, as well as the demobilization of combatants, are ongoing.

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