

# *First Group of Colombian Rebels to Be Freed*

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Bogota, January 19 (RHC-PL) -- Colombian Justice Minister Yesid Reyes announced Monday that 16 rebel prisoners will be set free this week, benefiting from a presidential pardon approved for a group of 30 members of the FARC-EP.

Radio Caracol reports that the prisoners were convicted of political offenses who have no sanctions or investigations for other causes. The Colombian justice minister noted that those released will join a social reintegration program.

Last November 22nd, the government announced the decision to pardon 30 members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army (FARC-EP). The initiative was called a gesture of building trust between both parties.

Government representatives and FARC-EP are holding talks in Havana aimed at finding a concerted solution to the internal war, which has left about 300,000 dead. According to the progress and commitments made by the two delegations, such talks could end this year with the signing of peace.

In previous weeks, leaders of the FARC-EP called for flexibility in the pardoning process promised at the end of 2015. They have also demanded the Executive release members of the security forces, social leaders and fighters whose health is precarious.

More than 1,000 prisoners of the rebel group were involved in strikes in various jails to demands improvements in health care and freedom of those endangered by the worsening of their medical problems.

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