

# *Venezuela Expresses Concern Over Colombian Talks to Join NATO*

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Caracas, December 26 (RHC)-- Venezuela has expressed “deep concern” over an announcement made by Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos that he has begun the final discussions for his country to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO.

In an official statement, Venezuelan Foreign Minister Delcy Rodriguez said the announcement breaks a promise made in 2010 by Santos to late Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez to not join the military alliance.

"The Venezuelan government strongly rejects the attempt to introduce external organizations with nuclear capability into our region, whose past and recent actions claim the policy of war," the statement from Delcy Rodriguez said.

Venezuela argues that this would violate the principles of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, which prohibits its members from forming part of international military alliances.

"The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela will use all diplomatic and political mechanisms to prevent

organizations with a pernicious record of war and violence in the world from disturbing the peace of our region," Rodriguez added.

Colombia, which chaired the NAM between 1995 and 1998, joined the movement as an observer in 1974 before becoming a permanent member in 1983 following the seventh summit in New Delhi. During its time as the head of the bloc, the South American nation defended the movement and promoted its modernization and strengthening.

During his Christmas speech to the army on Friday, Santos welcomed NATO's approval for the start of talks, which he considered "an acknowledgment of the country's military and police forces."

The Nobel peace laureate says the deal with NATO will be only for information exchange and to increase the fight against transnational crime, terrorism and drug trafficking.

NATO is the world's largest intergovernmental military alliance, formed during the height of the Cold War to guard members states against purported "Soviet expansionism." The pact currently has 28 member states across Europe, North America, as well as Turkey.

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