

Colombian Rebels Hand Weapons to UN Peace Mission



Bogota, June 14 (RHC)-- The head of the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces, FARC-EP, Rodrigo Londoño -- also known as Timoleon Jimenez or Timochenko -- announced that former rebels delivered another 30 percent of their weapons Tuesday to the United Nations peace mission. The weapons hand-over was part of the landmark peace agreement with the government ending over half a century of civil war.

"We are leaving our weapons behind to continue with politics that we have always maintained and our efforts to build a fairer and just Colombia, where people who think differently are not murdered for their ideas," Timochenko said during a press conference in Oslo with Norwegian Foreign Minister Borge Brende.

Timochenko arrived in Norway on Monday at the invitation of the government to attend a forum on conflict resolution.

On June 7th, the FARC delivered the first 30 percent of the weapons, beginning its historic disarmament. On Tuesday, another 30 percent were handed over, and the more than 7,000 members of the groups will deliver the total amount by June 20th.

"It has been an autonomous decision to advance the registry of withdrawal. Concrete steps! We expect

the same from the government," Timochenko said on Twitter on Monday.

The rebel leader noted that the government has been slow in implementing the agreement and that there have been problems including security issues and infrastructure shortages for the 26 transition zones where the rebels have assembled before returning to civil life. He stressed that the most critical issue, though, was that Santos administration has not admitted the ongoing problem of paramilitary violence in the country or set out a course of action to tackle it.

Timochenko called on the international community to pressure the government to eradicate the paramilitary problem in Colombia, as he says it has become "an obstacle for peace." FARC leaders and prominent human rights activists have repeatedly highlighted paramilitary violence as the greatest threat to the country's budding new era of peace with the dangerous potential to upend the entire peace agreement.

Norway's Brende told Timochenko that although the implementation will be difficult "with your leadership and President Santos it will be able to end a conflict of more than 50 years."

Norway, together with Cuba, was a guarantor country in the four-year peace negotiations between the FARC and the Colombian government. Talks wrapped up in Havana last year once the historic peace accord was finalized.

The peace deal brings an end to over 50 years of internal armed conflict that killed some 260,000 people and victimized millions more.

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