

# *Colombian President Vows to End Military Draft if Re-elected*

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Bogotá, June 5 (NNN-RHC) -- Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos says that he will abolish the military draft if re-elected and a peace deal is reached with the country's armed leftist rebels.

Santos, who initiated peace talks with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the country's largest rebel group, in 2012 to end a decade-long conflict, is battling for re-election against Oscar Ivan Zuluaga of the Democratic Center Party.

Zuluaga won the first round of voting in May and a runoff is set to take place on June 15. Zuluaga is a vehement opponent of the peace talks with the FARC, the centerpiece of Santos' presidency.

Under the Colombian constitution and a 1993 law all Colombian men, with exception of college students, must be conscripted into the police or army for one or two years after reaching the legal age.

Each year, 120,000 young men are drafted into the Colombian military. University students are exempted from the draft, so most of the recruits are youths from poor or low income families.

Any proposal to eliminate compulsory military service would have to be approved by Congress. Similar reforms presented in 1998 and again in 2012, that would have allowed young men to reject the draft as

conscientious objectors, were opposed in the Senate.

The peace talks began in November 2012, but some major issues remain unresolved, notably the surrender of weapons by the FARC, compensation for victims of the conflict, and whether a comprehensive peace agreement should be put to a referendum or ratified in some other way.

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