

# *Encouraging news for Colombians*

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## **Encouraging news for Colombians**

By María Josefina Arce

Colombians received 2023 with encouraging news. The government of President Gustavo Petro agreed to a six-month bilateral ceasefire with five armed groups, which began on January 1st.

The agreement, which concerns among others the ELN, the National Liberation Army, the Second Marquetalia and the paramilitary group Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia, will have national and international verification.

This will be in charge of the UN Verification Mission, the Organization of American States, the Ombudsman's Office and the Catholic Church, according to the information provided by the authorities.

The main objective of the ceasefire is to suspend the humanitarian impact on the population in general and, in particular, on ethnic and peasant communities, and to avoid armed incidents between the security

forces and armed groups.

The UN Verification Mission in Colombia welcomed the announcement made by Petro in the last hours of 2022 and expressed its support for the government's effort to build peace in the South American nation.

Petro, who assumed the presidency last August, has made it a priority of his mandate to achieve total peace, for which he has been taking concrete steps on that path. In fact, he resumed talks with the ELN, paralyzed by his predecessor in the Casa de Nariño, Iván Duque.

The first round was held in Caracas, the capital of Venezuela, and a new meeting between both parties is scheduled for this month in Mexico.

The National Liberation Army had already decreed a cease-fire from December 24 for the Christmas holidays, in a gesture of goodwill, very well received by the authorities and the population.

This new announcement is a hope for the country, which last year reported alarming figures of social and political violence that plagues the population. According to INDEPAZ, Institute of Studies for Development and Peace, 189 social leaders and 42 former guerrillas were murdered, while more than 70,000 people were forcibly displaced from their homes.

Camilo González Posso, president of INDEPAZ, described the agreement as extraordinary and of great impact for some 350 Colombian municipalities where these groups operate, especially in those that are the scene of illicit economies, such as drugs and contraband.

The new Colombian government has embarked on a difficult path; there are many challenges. But what is certain is that in only four months in office, Petro has achieved concrete results and made progress in his goal of making peace a reality in the South American nation.

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