

# *Colombian President Orders Speed Up of Peace Talks with FARC*

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Bogotá, January 6 (RHC-NNN) – Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos said on Monday that he had given instructions to his peace negotiators to “accelerate” the talks with the FARC guerrillas and he invited the National Liberation Army, or ELN, to also begin a formal dialogue with the government.

“The government’s negotiating team is going to return to Havana very soon with the mandate – with instructions – to speed up the pace of these talks, to finish them as soon as possible and once and for all end this armed conflict,” said Santos after a meeting with his advisers in the northern city of Cartagena.

The president said that the unilateral and open-ended cease-fire declared by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC, which began on December 20th, had been complied with, adding that the situation facilitates the conditions for accelerating the dialogue with the guerrilla group.

Santos said that the FARC’s commitment to abide by its cease-fire is a sign of the progress in the peace talks, which have been underway since November 2012 in the Cuban capital, and he added that the circumstances suggest that there may be a change in the site of the negotiations.

Santos reaffirmed his stance that “peace must strengthen the security of Colombians, not weaken it,” an apparent reference to the refusal of the government to accept the bilateral cease-fire the rebels have requested and have asked Colombian political and social sectors, mainly on the left of the political spectrum, to support.

Regarding the ELN, the president repeated his invitation to begin a peace dialogue with the government “as soon as possible.” The government and the ELN announced last June that they were engaging in “exploratory” discussions regarding peace talks, but since then there have been no reports of any progress.

However, on December 29th, the ELN published on its Web page a statement saying that it would make a “special announcement” on January 7th, although it provided no further details on the matter.

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