

# *Colombian President Announces De-Escalation Deal with FARC*

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Bogota, July 13 (teleSUR-RHC)-- Colombian forces will de-escalate their military campaign against FARC rebels, but will not engage in a bilateral ceasefire, Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos said Sunday night in a televised message to the nation, just hours after the government and rebel group announced they had reached a deal to ease hostilities.

“It is not a bilateral ceasefire ... we will not leave the Colombian people defenseless,” said the president, emphasizing that the agreement would not translate into a total halt in military operations and that Colombia's security forces will continue to be alert.

Though the joint deal is a breakthrough after years of peace negotiations in Havana, Cuba, the Colombian president continued with his hard line against the FARC, also known as Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia.

The FARC rebel group announced a unilateral ceasefire earlier this month, which would come into effect on July 20. The president explained that the decision not to agree on a bilateral ceasefire was strategic and is based on achieving long lasting peace.

“Depending on whether the FARC fulfill the agreement or not, I will take the decision of continuing or not this process,” Santos said. The agreement will gradually de-escalate the conflict, the president said,

adding that its implementation would be monitored by international bodies – the United Nations and Union of South American Nations– and will be evaluated in four months.

Santos urged the Colombian public to support the peace process “Colombians don’t understand why, while in Havana we talk about peace, in Colombia the attacks and deaths continue,” said Santos, referring to skepticism around the peace talks. “(However) we are on the right path ... peace is for everyone, and peace is in everyone's hands,” he said. “We don't want an end to hostilities which would last a couple of months, we want to end the war forever.”

According to a joint statement released by the government and the rebel group, the de-escalation aims at speeding the peace talks in Havana, with the commitment to reach a final peace deal as soon as possible.

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