

Over 24,000 Colombian Officials Implicated in War Crimes



Bogotá, December 23 (RHC-teleSUR) -- Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos assured Colombians Tuesday that the Special Tribunal for Peace – which will be in charge of prosecuting or granting amnesty to those involved in war crimes after a peace deal with the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) will not result in a “witch hunt.”

The president said only those civilians who voluntarily participated in serious crimes or crimes against humanity in the context of the decades-long conflict will be called to testify before the court.

Santos' comments come after Attorney General Jorge Fernando Perdomo announced earlier this week that at least 24,400 state agents could stand before the special tribunal for alleged involvement in war crimes.

The Special Tribunal for Peace is part of a transitional justice deal recently signed by the FARC guerrillas and the government as part of ongoing peace talks. It is expected to be implemented in the post-conflict period, after the two sides sign a final peace agreement.

According to the deal, the tribunal will work slightly differently for the two sides. All demobilized FARC guerrillas will have to appear before a clearance tribunal and be cleared of criminal charges, or face trial.

Members of the military and other officials will only have to appear before a clearance tribunal if they are accused or convicted of war crimes or human rights abuses. According to Perdomo, that number of state officials is as high as 24,400.

The number of guerrillas and guerrilla supporters expected to have to pass through a clearance tribunal stands at some 20,000, according to Colombia Reports.

In both cases, those found to have not committed human rights violations will be pardoned or granted amnesty. Those found guilty will be given an appropriate sentence aimed at bringing some type of justice to victims.

The tribunal is designed to give shorter sentences to those who acknowledge their participation in the war crimes, in order to encourage those actors to come forward and participate in the process.

The Colombian government and the FARC have been engaged in peace talks in Havana, Cuba, since 2012 in an effort to bring over 50 years of armed conflict to an end. The two sides have set a deadline of March 2016 to sign a final peace deal.

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