

## Colombia's Farc rebels declare unilateral ceasefire

Guerrillas declare indefinite unilateral ceasefire but promised to call it off if they come under attack by government forces



Colombia's President Juan Manuel Santos speaking during a national address Photo: Reuters

By Agencies

12:18AM GMT 18 Dec 2014

Colombia's Farc guerrillas declared an indefinite, unilateral ceasefire on Wednesday in the 50-year conflict, saying they would only use weapons if they came under attack by the army.

The announcement - the third year running the leftist rebels have declared a ceasefire over the holiday season - comes soon after peace talks with the Colombian government resumed, following a crisis triggered by the capture of an army general on November 16.

Wednesday's move was noteworthy for the lack of an expiration date, but President Juan Manuel Santos has consistently refused to reciprocate.

"We have resolved to declare a unilateral ceasefire and end hostilities for an indefinite period of time,

which should be transformed into an armistice," said the rebels' peace negotiators in Cuba, where they are in talks with Colombian officials.

"This unilateral ceasefire, which we hope will last a long time, will end only if our guerrilla units have been the subject of attacks by the security forces."

The ceasefire will take effect at one minute past midnight on Saturday, said a statement posted on the website of the rebel delegation to the peace talks. The guerrilla group called for international observers from organizations including the Red Cross to monitor.

The rebels have repeatedly called for a bilateral ceasefire as part of the ongoing peace process.

But Santos, who has made the peace process his top political priority, has rejected the demand, saying the guerrillas could take advantage of a truce to regroup, dragging out the conflict.

However, the ceasefire announcement will put new pressure on the Colombian government to respond in kind, said political scientist Jorge Restrepo, the head of the Conflict Analysis Resource Center in Colombia.

"This obliges the government to respond in one way or another to this gesture," he told AFP.

The FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) defended their capture of an army general as a legitimate act of war, but released him on November 30 in order to revive the peace process.

Santos had suspended the talks in the wake of the kidnapping.

As part of the reopening of the negotiations, the two sides agreed to set up a "permanent mechanism" to resolve any future crisis, to be overseen by Cuba and Norway, the countries shepherding the peace process, Norwegian diplomat Dag Nagoda has said.

The two-year-old talks in the Cuban capital Havana are the most promising effort yet to end the five-

decade conflict, which has defied three previous attempts.

Negotiations have so far produced agreements on land reform, fighting the drug trafficking that has fueled the conflict, and political participation for guerrilla fighters.

The conflict has killed more than 220,000 people and uprooted 5.3 million since the FARC was founded in the aftermath of a peasant uprising in 1964.

© Copyright of Telegraph Media Group Limited 2015