



NEWS

FARC Ceasefire Puts Ball in Santos's Court

Guerrilla Call for International Monitors, Military to Stand Down

REBECA MORLA | DECEMBER 18, 2014 AT 3:37 PM

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Marxist guerrilla group FARC announced a unilateral, indefinite ceasefire on Wednesday, December 17, creating the possibility of an end to its 50-year armed conflict with the Colombian government.

Español

The statement, issued during ongoing peace negotiations in Havana, promises to end attacks provided state forces reciprocate. This latest move from the rebel group comes only weeks after the FARC's kidnapping of a senior Colombian general threatened to derail the talks.

Giving Peace a Chance?



“Considering that we believe we have entered into a definitive path to peace,” reads the online statement, “we have resolved to declare a unilateral ceasefire, and end hostilities for an indefinite period of time.”

Although the FARC have announced unilateral truces before — the rebel group have halted hostilities during the holiday season for the last two years — this is the first one without an expiry date, and could prove the beginning of the end for a peace process two years in the making.

Moreover, the guerrilla group struck a markedly pacifistic tone in its announcement. It criticized President Juan Manuel Santos for his “rejoicing” on Twitter over the death of FARC militants in clashes on Sunday, December 14, arguing that “war can never be a source of joy, but only sorrow.”



Juan Manuel Santos ✓

@JuanManSantos

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Armed forces and police bring down nine members of FARC fronts 7 and 27 and capture 4. The offensive continues. We do not lower our guard!

“No more circus acts, no more exhibits of excessive strength, no more sacrificing the lives of others,” the rebel briefing continued.

“We want change. We want to move past unnecessary bloodshed,” it added, concluding that the ceasefire would come into effect one minute after midnight on December 20. The letter is then signed off by FARC’s highest level of command.

International Monitors Requested

Nevertheless, the truce kicks the ball into the government’s court, setting a single condition for the continuation of the ceasefire.

“This unilateral ceasefire, which we hope will last a long time, will end only if our guerrilla units are subject to attacks by the security forces,” it adds.

With this, all eyes are turned towards the position that the Colombian government will now adopt. In September 2012, President Santos ruled out a bilateral ceasefire proposed by FARC in Cuba, instead asserting that the government “would not give in” until the final agreement was reached, and even increasing military pressure on the guerrilla forces.

Furthermore, FARC have called for international organizations, such as the Union of South American Nations (Unasur) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), to

oversee the armistice.

“This decision is being formally communicated to the government of Colombia, to embassies and other diplomatic offices within our reach, to the Secretary General of the United Nations, [and] to the European Union,” notes FARC’s statement, even invoking “Pope Francis [and] leaders of different faiths.”

It stipulates that the ceasefire will only take effect if at least one of the organizations it lists agrees to verify and supervise it.

Breakthrough, or Buying Time?

Senator Alfredo Rangel, of the Democratic Center opposition party, told local news source [NTN24](#) that the ceasefire was little more than a cynical ploy by FARC.

“They announce a ceasefire ... on the condition that Colombian military forces fail to provide security to the country, and fail to prevent FARC from kidnapping and extortion, [and] as they continue to profit from drug trafficking,” Rangel said.



Colombia’s long-running armed conflict has claimed over 200,000 lives over 50 years. ([Señal Radio Colombia](#))



According to the senator, FARC are trying to take advantage of a bilateral ceasefire to recover their strength and recruit more people. In addition, he argued that the rebels were seeking to shift responsibility for the continuation of violence onto the government, and were likely to continue recruiting child soldiers.

On the other hand, Jorge Restrepo, director of the Center of Resources for Conflict Analysis (Cerac), argued that the Organization of American States (OAS) mission currently supporting the peace process should immediately deploy monitors to verify the ceasefire. Meanwhile, he suggested, Cuba and Norway – guarantor countries of the Havana dialogue – should facilitate lines of communication between the government and rebels to smooth out potential crises that might jeopardize the agreement.

Restrepo noted that the conditionality of the ceasefire “puts the government against the wall, and forces it to respond constructively to address this gesture of peace.”

The permanent ceasefire, if successful, represents a new stage for the talks in Havana, which were suspended in mid-November after rebels kidnapped General Rubén Darío Alzate in Colombia’s northern Cocho province, making him the highest-ranking official yet to fall into

rebel hands. Negotiations continued after his release two weeks later.

Edited by Laurie Blair.

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