
Farc guerrillas hope to meet Pope Francis in Cuba

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Ivan Marquez, chief negotiator for Farc, arrives for a new round of peace talks with Colombia's government accompanied by fellow Farc delegates Pastor Alape, right, and Carlos Antonio Lozada, centre

Colombia's largest guerrilla movement wants the Church to name a permanent delegate to their peace negotiations with the government

Representatives of Colombia's largest guerrilla movement have asked to meet Pope Francis in Cuba in September and have requested the Catholic Church name a permanent delegate to their peace negotiations with the government.

Ivan Marquez, representing the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, known by the Spanish acronym Farc, at the peace talks, told reporters on August 17, "We want to give a heartfelt greeting to Pope Francis. We hope to have this opportunity."

Pope Francis is scheduled to visit Cuba on September 19-22.

The guerrillas, who have been in conflict with the Colombian government for five decades, "want to move the peace process forward, particularly with the support of the Catholic world," Marquez said. "The Church can offer all its experience to help reach a final agreement."

Farc and the Colombian government began the peace talks in Cuba in late 2012, hoping to find a way to end the conflict, which has claimed some 220,000 lives.

After a meeting on August 17 in Havana with the president of the Colombian bishops' conference, Marquez tweeted: "We are optimistic. We are promoting bilateral cease-fire and righteousness. (The) Church has renewed its commitment to peace in Colombia."

Archbishop Luis Castro Quiroga of Tunja, president of the Colombian bishops' conference, told reporters after his meeting with the Farc delegates that a final decision on a papal meeting in Cuba was up to the Pope, the Vatican and the Pope's Cuban hosts.

Pope Francis, he said, has been following news of the peace talks, but would probably be interested in talking directly to those involved.

The Pope has said he would like to help promote peace, the archbishop said. The idea of the Pope naming a delegate to the talks could be one way to do that.
