
FARC and Army Begin Preparations for Release of Colombian General

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After days of speculation about a possible release date and barely 24 hours after soldiers Cesar Rivera and Jonathan Diaz were freed by the guerrillas, President Juan Manuel Santos on Wednesday said the release would be this weekend.

“And finally, a notice of information has just come to me, that I had been asked a lot about when they are going to release the general, the lady and the corporal. According to the protocols, it can be done on Saturday,” Santos said at a forum in Bogota.

Hours later, the Defense Ministry announced in a statement that it had received the coordinates of where the three will be released, and it is expected to be in the same jungle region of Choco where they were captured on Nov. 16.

Military operations are to be suspended from midnight Thursday to facilitate the handover of the general, an army corporal and a woman lawyer.

On previous occasions, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) provided its offices to receive hostages from Colombian guerrilla groups.

Meanwhile, the FARC called on the Colombian authorities to avoid armed clashes and respect the clauses of the humanitarian agreement for the release of the general and his companions.

“We don’t want risks of armed clashes by the non-compliance of protocols,” said the guerrillas in a statement.

The rebel group said that during the release of the soldiers Diaz and Rivera on Tuesday in Arauca province there was an army patrol in the area that forced a change in the site planned for release.

Following the abduction of Alzate and his companions, Defense Minister Juan Carlos Pinzon deployed 500 soldiers to search for them.

The ICRC is maintaining a scrupulous silence to protect the operation and was reluctant to admit if it had already received the geographic coordinates to prepare for the release.

"We neither confirm nor deny having the coordinates," said the Red Cross spokesperson, Patricia Rey, when asked by journalists in Colombia.

It was not known who will be in the group to accept the hostages, which is expected to have representatives from Cuba and Norway, the guarantor countries of the peace process between the FARC and the authorities.

The jungle province has been experiencing incessant rains for the last three days, leading the media to speculate about the possibility that the ICRC will use a boat to transport the general and the others after their release.
