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Colombian President Says Peace Deal with FARC to be Signed within Four Months

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In a speech, broadcast on radio and television, the president said reaching agreements on land rights, political participation of rebels, illicit drugs and most recently on victims shows "it is possible to end the conflict as agreed, latest by March 23 next year. In less than four months!"

On Sept. 23, Santos and FARC leader Rodrigo Londoño Echevarri alias Timochenko, set a six-month deadline to sign a peace deal, a commitment they followed up with a historic handshake in the presence of Cuban President Raul Castro.

Santos added the two sides are now working "to achieve a definitive and bilateral ceasefire" as soon as possible so they can focus on concluding the accords.

On Tuesday, government and FARC negotiators signed a deal related to victims of the civil war, which includes a comprehensive system of justice, truth, reparations and guarantees of non-repetition.

Santos said the latest deal clarifies there would be no amnesty for serious crimes against humanity, war crimes, genocide and human rights violations or grave violations of the International Humanitarian Law, including abductions, extrajudicial executions, enforced disappearances and displacement, torture, sexual abuse and forced recruitment of minors as rebel soldiers.

The last point on the dialog agenda - the end of the conflict - is still pending, which includes a bilateral ceasefire, disarmament and demobilization of the rebels.

In his address, Santos said the peace talks in Cuba are limited to negotiating an end to the five-decade-long armed conflict, and that rights and liberties of Colombians are not at stake.

The talks, he asserted, are a way out for the guerrillas to give up arms, help implement victims' rights, and re-

integrate them into society enabling them to "defend their ideas with votes, not bullets."

He also reiterated his promise that members of the State military who may have been involved in armed conflict-related offences will be given "the same benefits as given to FARC rebels in terms of justice," although "agents of the State cannot be seen at par with the guerrilla...The injustice of having rebels at liberty and soldiers behind bars will not be committed again."

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