Colombian Guerrilla Group Reiterates Commitment to Peace

28/12/2016

The group has denounced what it sees as unilaterally imposed conditions hindering the peace process, but it is willing to forge ahead with dialogue.

The long-winded Colombian peace process, happening since January 2014, may be a step closer to fruition, after the National Liberation Army reiterated their commitment to peace and dialogue with the national government of Juan Manuel Santos.

“Despite the difficult climate and conditions which impede the peace process, we will promptly arrive to the appointment between our two delegations,” the group said in an end-of-year communiqué posted on their Twitter account. “We hope that by then, the government will have officially appointed its delegation.”

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But while the guerrilla group – second to the more well-known Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) – is willing to attend the Jan. 10 meeting in Quito, Ecuador, it denounced what it sees as the government's unilaterally imposed conditions.

Referring to the government’s recent abrupt decision to postpone the Oct. 27 talks, the group took the chance to remind Santos that mutual respect is a “golden rule for peace.”

“President Santos forgets that we are two parties, that we act according to what has been agreed upon and that among the rules established by our common agreement, there is one that says: ‘Agree and honor it, golden rule for peace,’” read the statement.

President Juan Manuel Santos canceled that meeting on the grounds that the ELN failed to confirm the release of a detainee, former lawmaker Odin Sanchez, held since April. The group holds that this demand “was not part of the agreements” they had come to on Oct. 6, which would have seen each side liberating prisoners on humanitarian

grounds as the first rounds of negotiations began. But that did not happen.

“These facts show us the regime’s arrogance and lack of true commitment to peace,” the group wrote. They also denounced what they considered the “government’s lack of action” in front of the “systemic killing of popular and social leaders, Human Rights defenders…(by) paramilitary bands.”

Earlier this month, the two parties agreed to a prisoner release that has yet to happen, leading rebel leader Israel Ramirez, better known by his alias Pablo Beltran, to assure that on "the same day our two are pardoned, Mr. Sanchez will be free."

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"We agreed they will happen simultaneously to eliminate mutual distrust," he added.

The ELN concluded by praising the role of the six guarantor states, which include Ecuador, Venezuela, Cuba, Norway, Chile and Brazil, and thanking the “sister nation of Ecuador” for hosting the talks.

“Our efforts for peace in Colombia continue, which is why we ask the six guarantor states and their representatives at the dialogue table, to continue to accompany us and to offer their professional efforts, worthy of note," the statement read.

This all comes about a month after President Santos signed a historic, definitive peace deal with FARC.