

First Group of UN Peace Process Observers Arrive in Colombia



Bogota, July 1 (RHC)-- The first group of United Nations observers arrived in Colombia to help with the monitoring and verification of the recently signed bilateral cease-fire between the government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, a U.N. spokesperson Farhan Haq confirmed.

The role of the U.N. observers is critical to the success of the peace process, as they will work to ensure all parties are complying with the terms of the agreement. Haq said: "For now, the team on the ground is engaging in preparatory activities, while the Special Representative of the Secretary-General Jean Arnault is actively engaged in the discussions in Havana about cease-fire implementation."

The 23-member team, which is comprised of observers from Argentina, Bolivia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Paraguay, and Uruguay, will be joined by a second team in late July when the final agreement is expected to be signed.

The June 23rd agreement between the FARC guerrilla rebels and the government gave terms for implementing the cease-fire, but not a specific date. According to Haq: "The United Nations will be able to begin monitoring and verifying activities as soon as a final peace agreement is signed and the bilateral cease-fire comes into effect."

Twenty civilian staff from the U.N. were already in Colombia to coordinate and establish the basis for the verification process. The United Nations has been a strong advocate of the peace process, with

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon having traveled to Havana, site of the peace talks, to participate in the ceremony celebrating the signing of the bilateral cease-fire.

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