

Colombian government and ELN negotiate to resume peace talks



Bogota, Feb 24 (RHC)-- The Colombian government and the National Liberation Army, or ELN, are negotiating the possibility of a ceasefire that would remain in place until after the August 7 general elections, local media are reporting.

Carlos Velandia, a former member of the ELN national board and current negotiator in the peace process, told Publimetro that both sides are currently analyzing the proposal of a ceasefire that would continue after the general elections. "There are about 160 days left before the end of this government and we need to guarantee the continuity of the peace process with the ELN," he said.

If negotiations resume in the Ecuadorean capital, this would represent the fifth round of peace talks focusing on the participation of civil society in the process. A "pre-agreement of continuity" is being sought with the future president, along with a "transition process" guaranteeing dialogue with the next administration.

The ceasefire would include a humanitarian treaty suspending what the government calls "kidnappings" and the ELN calls "detentions" on political grounds, along with the use of landmines and the manufacturing of weapons. Ceasefire talks broke down on January 10 when President Juan Manuel Santos called his lead negotiator back to Colombia after receiving word that members of the ELN had allegedly attacked the state oil company, Colombian Petrol, in the departments of Boyaca and Arauca.

For more than a month, ELN leader Pablo Beltran – along with Colombian activists, academics, unions and United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres – has been urging Santos to return to the negotiation table to reach an enforceable ceasefire agreement.

Last week, the Attorney General's Office issued an arrest warrant for 21 ELN members, including Beltran himself, for alleged forced disappearances and rebellion.

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