

Colombia's No 2 Rebel Group Considers Entering Formal Peace Talks



Bogotá, January 8 (RHC-EFE) --Colombia's second-largest guerrilla group said Wednesday it will weigh whether to enter formal peace negotiations with the Colombian government and may lay down its weapons as part of that process.

The National Liberation Army, or ELN, expressed its intention through a video statement read by the group's top leader, Nicolas Rodriguez Bautista, alias "Gabino," and uploaded Wednesday to the rebel group's Web site. The statement said Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos "has expressed his willingness to bring an end to the armed conflict and to that end has summoned the insurgent group for talks."

"We'll participate in this dialogue to examine the real will of the Colombian government; if during this trial period, we conclude that weapons are unnecessary, we would consider whether to stop using them," the statement said.

In the video statement, Rodriguez Bautista also said the ELN wants to be allowed to formally participate in Colombia's political system. The ELN has been in "exploratory" talks with Santos' administration since

early last year.

On Monday, Santos once again invited the ELN to follow the lead of the larger Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC, guerrilla group in terms of entering formal peace talks and declaring a unilateral and indefinite ceasefire.

The FARC has been engaged in formal peace talks with the Colombian government in Havana for more than two years and its unilateral ceasefire took effect on December 20th.

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