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Andrés Gaudín

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Colombia’s Peace Negotiators Agree on Three Points, Urge Continued Progress

by Andrés Gaudín
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President Juan Manuel Santos and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) were obliged to give a progress report to counteract false versions spread by warmongers seeking to discredit the negotiations and dismantle talks that began in November 2012 in Havana, Cuba (NotiSur, Dec. 6, 2013). The government and the rebels took care to not name those they called "enemies of peace," but the media and legislators identified former President Álvaro Uribe (2002–2010) as the main enemy.

The ultraright former president has openly made his opposition to peace talks public, and many remember his comment at the time he faced multiple lawsuits and the Senate debated his role in the paramilitary forces that caused thousands of deaths and undermined democracy. After saying repeatedly, "Santos is giving the country away to the FARC," Uribe offered no proof that the facts that now threaten to lead to his conviction were the result of "defamation by the terrorist FARC, its old paramilitary allies, its new government lackeys, TeleSUR [a Venezuela-based regional TV network], and others at the beck and call of terrorism, all led by the president."

Interior Minister Fernando Cristo broke the government’s resolve to ignore the ex-president’s diatribes by issuing a communiqué that accused Uribe of "deliberately lying to avoid the debate about paramilitarism."

Negotiators report on progress

The report issued in Cuba said agreements made to date call for creating institutions that would carry out the accords, passing laws to regulate agreements in the pact, and designing mechanisms to create a new, peaceful Colombia. Negotiators have agreed on basic generalities of the first three points of an agenda set in 2012. When reading the report of the agreements to date, Humberto de la Calle, the chief official negotiator, said it should be kept in mind that what may appear to be very little is the result of a dialogue between two parties who for the past 50 years have communicated only through the language of weapons.

A few days later, on Oct. 4, Iván Márquez, the FARC’s chief negotiator, said, "Having signed three partial accords and with the resolve to continue the discussion, it’s time that we ask ourselves with absolute transparency: Is it worth it to continue killing each other while we wait for a peace accord to be signed?" He then offered a proposal, saying, "We should go beyond the folly of the warmongers and immediately agree to terms of an armistice to hasten the signing of a final agreement."

The first agenda item—land ownership and tenancy—in addition to creating a parcel fund, carrying out a rural-property census, and investing in infrastructure, health, and housing, spells out who
will benefit from the fund awards, the land-protection mechanisms that will require a seven-year period before lands could be sequestered, and the rules on how the right to hold lands could be lost (NotiSur, April 26, 2013). In respect to the free land-distribution fund for campesinos who have insufficient or no land, the two parties agreed, "It isn’t just about turning over parcels to landless people but also including additional assistance for irrigation, credit, technical knowledge, and commercialization." This first point in the dialogue also establishes agricultural borders, bans the use of genetically modified seeds, and protects areas of environmental concern.

The second point—allowing for legal political participation of demobilized rebels following the peace accords—establishes special seats for deputies in the areas most affected by the conflict and, to facilitate creating new political parties, ensures the legal status of groups unable to immediately attain political representation. It would also establish an agency to protect political participation called the Sistema Integral de Seguridad para el Ejercicio de la Política that would protect persons who want to enter politics following establishment of domestic peace. Other points include creating laws to protect the opposition, measures to promote voting (only four of every 10 eligible voters participated in the last presidential election), and putting in place steps to promote political participation of women.

Finally, the third point—ending the cultivation of crops used to produce illegal drugs and drug trafficking in the country that is the world’s largest cocaine producer—stipulates that, since past violent crop-eradication practices have failed, crop substitution plans will be worked out with the communities involved. It further proposes a transition process in which coca farmers and harvesters can receive government support.

The document ends by saying: "What we have achieved is no small thing: we have planted the seeds that will make it possible to end this 50-year conflict with a strengthening of the rule of law throughout the country, thus creating a better life for future generations of Colombians."

Former president major obstacle to progress

Working in the trenches against the peace efforts are Uribe, paramilitaries, drug traffickers, and armed forces representatives who profit from war, said Senator Iván Cepeda, who has pushed for the debate on paramilitarism in Congress since Sept. 16. Since then, about 30 military personnel—including armed forces chief Gen. Juan Pablo Rodríguez and his predecessor Gen. Mario Montoya—have been arrested or legally prosecuted for their connections to the paramilitary forces, their collusion with drug gangs, or their responsibility for the murders of some 3,000 mentally challenged or unemployed youth who were recruited and later executed and made to look like guerrilla fighters who died in combat (NotiSur, April 27, 2007, and Dec. 14, 2012). These were the "false positives," crimes that military personnel carried out to gain recognition for "quality of service rendered."

Uribe figures in the foreground in each of these chapters, according to Cepeda’s statements made at the opening of the debate on paramilitary crimes (NotiSur, Feb. 8, 2013).

"What you will hear from this moment on is a compilation of proven events involving this leader of paramilitarism and state terrorism" since the 1980s when he headed the government’s civil aviation agency, the senator began. Cepeda went on to denounce Uribe for giving pilot licenses to drug dealers and cited the case of Luis Carlos Molina Yepes, who was sentenced for the 1986 assassination of Guillermo Cano, a journalist and editor of the daily El Espectador (Dec. 23, 1986).
The senator showed his colleagues a document that proved that Uribe sat on the board of a company with Molina Yepes. In addition it showed proof that during those years the former president also provided a qualifying license to a member of the Cifuentes Villa family, many of whom were killed in a settling of accounts between mafia groups fleeing justice or are serving terms in US prisons on drug charges.

The last case Cepeda referred to is one known by nearly everyone in Colombia in which Dolly Cifuentes Villa, Uribe’s sister-in-law, and his niece, Ana María Uribe Cifuentes, were detained and extradited to the US in October 2012 for involvement in cocaine trafficking and money laundering in an alliance with Joaquín Archivaldo "El Chapo" Guzmán Loera, kingpin of the Mexican Sinaloa drug cartel (NotiSur, July 27, 2012, and Aug. 17, 2012, and SourceMex, Sept. 3, 2014). Guzmán was arrested in February on the basis of information from the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA).

Following the opening of the Senate debate, three new judicial investigations against Uribe have been added to the 100 he already faces. Uribe was supposed to have appeared before the Fiscalía General to prove his allegations that drug traffickers financed Santos’ election campaigns, but he failed to appear (NotiSur, July 4, 2014). On Oct. 2, the Corte Suprema de Justicia (CSJ) opened an investigation into allegations that he engaged in espionage against the negotiators in Havana aimed at derailing the peace negotiations. Finally, on Oct. 3, the court’s criminal chamber opened a second investigation against him for the psychological torture of a journalist who had fled the country after being threatened.

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