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## **Colombia: Talks With M-19 Rebels To Be Concluded By June 30**

*by John Neagle*

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On April 18, according to unidentified sources close to talks among representatives of the M-19 rebels, government and several political parties are to continue bi-weekly discussions until reaching a final agreement by June 30. The sources said the three participants in the talks agreed to create a general secretariat comprising representatives of each of the delegations. Next, the Roman Catholic Church was named as guarantor of any final agreement. M-19 signed its truce March 18 under a peace plan announced in September by President Virgilio Barco, who has said rebel leaders would be pardoned. Disarmament of the guerrilla group, which numbers 2,500, has not yet been discussed. The April 19 Movement was established in September 1973 to protest what it described as electoral fraud committed by then-strongman Gustavo Rojas Pinilla. Its original members were dissident guerrillas from other groups, professionals, workers, students and former soldiers. In January 1974, the rebel group made headlines by stealing a sword that had belonged to Simon Bolivar, which they promised to use to "redeem" the country. M-19's most spectacular operation was its 1985 takeover of the Palace of Justice in Bogota. In the military operation to retake the building, more than 100 people died, including six top judges as well as visitors, employees and rebels. In an interview by Mexican television on the evening of April 18, M-19 leader Carlos Pizarro said his organization will not withdraw from the peace dialogue with the government because doing so would condemn the country to an increasingly cruel civil war. Pizarro asserted that the decision to accept peace at present must be extended to the interior of the government, armed forces, parties, labor unions and guerrilla groups. The peace talks were suspended for over a week after the April 6 assassination of guerrilla leader Afranio Parra and two members of M-19. Pizarro denied that the assassinations would lead to a change in M-19's decision to negotiate. Pizarro concluded by stating that the guerrillas will "demobilize" previous to their reintegration in the country's political life. (Basic data from AFP, Notimex, 04/18/89)

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