

12-12-1989

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Recommended Citation

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Colombian Government Disarmament Agreement With M-19 Rebels Blocked In National Congress

by John Neagle

Category/Department: General

Published: Tuesday, December 12, 1989

On Oct. 18, the Colombian government submitted to the national congress a constitutional reform bill that would provide amnesty for leftist guerrillas. Under the new law, individual guerrillas or guerrilla organizations would submit formal requests for amnesty, and a government commission would have two months to render a decision on each individual request. The amnesty does not apply to guerrillas guilty of crimes committed outside the context of combat, e.g., those who killed persons who had no means of self-defense, or who have participated in terrorist attacks promoted by drug traffickers. The amnesty legislation is part of a negotiated settlement between the April 19 Movement (M-19) and the Colombian government completed in October. Under the agreement, the guerrillas would disarm upon receiving amnesty. M-19 requested that members be permitted to turn themselves in to an international organization such as the United Nations, the International Red Cross, or Germany's Green Party. The government has also effectively assured former M-19 rebels of 12 seats in the national congress in future elections, by permitting them to be elected with approximately only one-fourth the number of votes normally required. M-19 spokespersons said they plan to form a political party, separate from the leftist Patriotic Union (UP). The agreement also provides former M-19 rebels of protection, and pledges the government to implement a socio-economic reform program in areas of traditional M-19 influence. Colombian politicians of all parties have publicly expressed opposition to the government's agreement with M-19. On the one hand, they argue, since M-19 has been at least partially demobilized since 1985, the government's agreement is tantamount to a gift for the rebels. According to Social Conservative party senator Raymundo Emiliani Roman, the plan is an unqualified disaster. Liberal party presidential candidate and senator, Hernando Duran Dussan, said it effectively penalizes parties that have legal status. The Union Patriotica said the plan is "exclusivist," since the UP itself and other beleaguered opposition groups have not received similar treatment. Some politicians are also upset with the pardon which they argue is benefits all types of "delinquents," including drug traffickers. They assert that government promises of safety guarantees to former M-19 rebels are greater than those requested by judges and magistrates threatened by the drug mafias which authorities have not been able thus far to provide. A ceremonial signing of the agreement with M-19 at the Congress building in Bogota was first scheduled for Nov. 2, and then postponed several times. On Nov. 3, M-19 leader Carlos Pizarro Leongomez said that the rebels will turn over their weapons to the International Red Cross at the main square in Cali on Dec. 16. Since Leongomez's announcement, plans have changed. Venezuelan President Carlos Andres Perez, Peruvian President Alan Garcia, Willy Brandt, president of the Socialist International, and several other VIPs were invited by M-19 to participate in the disarmament ceremony rescheduled for Dec. 19. The event is tentatively to take place at the guerrilla camps in Santo Domingo, Cauca province. On Nov. 30, in statements to reporters in Caracas, Venezuelan President Perez said that as a head of state he cannot attend the disarmament ceremony. As of Dec. 8, the legislation necessary to legalize the government's agreement with M-19 was blocked by opposition parties in the national congress. Under Colombian

law, the congress must act before Dec. 16. (Basic data from Notimex, 11/15/89, 11/18/89, 11/30/89, 12/08/89; AP, 11/03/89; Xinhua, 11/03/89, 11/27/89)

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