

We are not drug traffickers: FARC

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One of the leaders of Colombia's largest guerrilla group, the FARC, on Sunday said that they are not a drug trafficking organization and though they have entered into peace negotiations with the government, they have not relinquished their desire to "take power" and change Colombian politics.

Rodrigo Granda, considered the FARC's foreign minister, told newspaper El Colombiano that the accusations that the FARC is nothing but a drug trafficking organization "is a shame."

"We are not drug traffickers, we are an organization with clear political policy ideas and for this reason the government is obliged to sit down and talk with us. Colombia would not sit down with a group of drug traffickers, Cuba would not sit as a guarantor with a group of drug traffickers, Venezuela and Chile would not sit down with with a group of drug dealers, I don't think Norway has recieved a group of drug traffickers," said Granda, referring to the four countries who have observed the peace process thus far.

The rebel leader said that the FARC's presence at the peace negotiation table did not mean the group had given up on its core demands.

"We have not given up on taking power. What happens is that our strategic plan takes various forms. From Marquetalia [where the FARC was founded], Marulanda [FARC founder] and his men saw that it was possible to develop non-violent, unarmed confrontation...We arrived in Havana and said that if the gates are opened and the political environment changes where no Colombian can be killed for their political ideas [then we will have opened] the gates to a democracy," said Granda.

Working with the state, however, is something Granda said the guerrillas were weary and even distrustful of.

"We have a sad history, the largest political genocide on the continent, [was] that of the Patriotic Union [which left] 5,000 people dead." The Patriotic Union (UP) party was formed in 1985 by the FARC and the Colombian Communist party as a result of peace talks between the rebels and the administration of Belisario Betancur. "The causes which [allowed] the extermination of the UP have still not been exterminated. What guarantees do we have in this moment?"

The rebel negotiator also criticized Colombia's Inspector General Alvaro Ordoñez, who said that leading FARC rebels should not be allowed to participate in politics if the peace process is successful.

"This attorney is a strange man, like something out of the basements of the age of the Inquisition. He seems unaware that here [in Cuba, where the peace talks are taking place] are some eminent political dialogues, where the legal issue is not fundamental and decisive. We are [here] to stop a war of [almost 50 years] years. No one is going to ask any of us to hand over the weapons and then [go] to prison. No revolutionary will do this," said Granda.

The so-called foreign minister was arrested in 2004 by Venezuelan police and taken to the Colombian border, where Colombian authorities awaited him. In 2007, he was released after the then-French president Nicolas Sarkozy asked the Colombian government for his liberation as a part of the "humanitarian exchange" between the rebels and the government.