

Colombia rebels say peace requires social 'justice'

Agence France-Presse
March 20, 2013

Colombia's leftist FARC rebels said Wednesday that an end to Latin America's longest-running armed conflict would only come about as a result of policies providing for social "justice."

The Colombian government has been holding talks with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) in Cuba since November in a bid to end a conflict that began as a peasant revolt against inequality in the 1960s.

"The government should not forget that peace cannot be reduced to an end to the military confrontation or the demobilization of the insurgency. Peace is the fruit of justice," said Jesus Santrich, a rebel delegate to the talks.

"We need to see profound economic, political and social transformations in our country that will aim to end inequality, which is the fundamental cause of the confrontation."

"Important segments of the Colombian population continue to be excluded from the benefits of economic development and fail to escape poverty because of the government's contempt."

Rural development and land ownership is the first of five points on the agenda of the peace talks launched last November. The sixth round of negotiations was set to end Thursday.

On Tuesday the FARC called for a "demilitarization" of the Colombian state, which has received considerable US military aid over the last decade in its battle against drug cartels and insurgents.

The group also called for "reparations" for Colombian peasants.

There has been little sign of progress in the negotiations, but Colombia's President Juan Manuel Santos expressed optimism Monday that an accord could be reached by year's end.

The talks are the first attempt in more than a decade to reach a negotiated truce between the Colombian government and the FARC, Latin America's largest insurgency. Three previous attempts have failed.

© Copyright Agence France-Presse 2013