

# COLOMBIA TODAY

*A Weekly Update from the Embassy of Colombia*

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## President Santos: 'Peace is Closer than Ever'



*President Juan Manuel Santos announces an agreement has been reached between the government of Colombia and the FARC during peace negotiations in Havana, Cuba. Photo Credit: César Carrión*

On Wednesday, September 23, Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos announced a major development in the ongoing peace process between the government and FARC leaders – paving the way for a final agreement in the next six months. Speaking in Havana, Cuba, where the peace talks are taking place, President Santos announced that agreement has been reached on one of the final critical issues on the negotiating table – agreeing on a system of transitional justice to ensure justice for victims of past crimes committed during the conflict. That system, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace, as it is called, will be comprised of a tribunal and several justice chambers that will investigate, prosecute, judge and impose penalties for crimes.

**President Santos said:**

*“What we achieved today, which we announced today is great news for Colombia and the world. This is the first time a government and an illegal armed group – through a peace agreement, not as a result of subsequent impositions – created a system of accountability to a national court for the commission of international crimes and other serious crimes.*

*“We are setting a precedent in the international community that can give hope to other armed conflicts on the planet. And we are approaching peace, a peace that will not be easy and will require the contribution and work of all – in all regions – but will finally allow us to grow and prosper without the heavy burden of war.”*

In August 2012, the President embarked on a historic peace process with the FARC aimed at ending a more than 50-year internal armed conflict. The talks were initiated as part of Colombia’s efforts to continue moving the nation forward on the path to lasting peace and prosperity, and at a time when the FARC and other rebel groups that once plagued Colombia were at their weakest point. Through hundreds of military operations and with the unwavering bravery of the nation’s armed forces, Colombia has dealt severe blows to the FARC over the past few years, disrupting its structure and diminishing its influence. The conflict has no place in today’s Colombia, where the future ahead is bright.

**The President added:**

*“A Colombia at peace will shine like a bright star in the international arena. A Colombia at peace will allow us to move much faster towards equity. A Colombia at peace will make it easier for us to become the most educated nation in Latin America. A Colombia at peace will be safer because the police force dedicated to war will focus on improving the safety of citizens, of Colombians. A Colombia at peace will attract more investments that will create more and better jobs. A Colombia at peace will become a tourism power. A peaceful Colombia will take better care of the environment, the wonderful biodiversity we must preserve. ... Peace is possible ... and closer than ever!”*

What They’re Saying

Here is how U.S. government officials, world leaders and others are reacting to news about the breakthrough in the peace process.

**UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon:**

*“The announcements made in Havana by the parties represent significant progress towards reaching a final peace agreement and bring Colombia even closer to ending the hemisphere’s longest armed conflict. ... The Secretary-General looks forward to welcoming President Juan Manuel Santos of Colombia at the United Nations in New York and hearing his views about the way forward for the peace process. ... The Secretary-General reiterates the commitment of the United Nations to continue supporting the parties as they advance in their work toward reaching a Peace Agreement, particularly through the work of his Delegate to the sub-commission on End of Conflict. He also reiterates the willingness of the United Nations system to provide the support*

*required to ensure the successful implementation of the peace agreement in Colombia for the advancement of peace, human rights and development for all its citizens.”*

**President Barack Obama:**

*“The United States is encouraged by recent developments in the Colombia peace negotiations, including the six-month timeline for signing a final agreement. We are hopeful that negotiations will conclude successfully and lay the foundation for a lasting peace after more than 50 years of armed conflict. Sixteen years ago, the United States launched with broad bipartisan support Plan Colombia, a comprehensive program to support the Colombian government and people. Last year, at the request of President Santos, we appointed a Special Envoy to the Colombia Peace Process. We will continue to stand by Colombia to end the armed conflict and foster prosperity throughout the country. We congratulate President Santos and his team for their deep commitment to peace in Colombia and this major step toward a final accord.”*

**U.S. Special Envoy for the Colombian Peace Process Bernard Aronson:**

*“These are the most important breakthroughs since negotiations began more than three years ago. ... Taken together this means the war in Colombia is coming to an end.”*

**U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry:**

*“I am very pleased to see that the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) have reached major breakthroughs on the outstanding issues in the peace process negotiations: transitional justice, disarmament, and a timetable for signing a final agreement. The announcements made today at the peace talks in Havana represent historic progress toward a final peace agreement to end more than 50 years of armed conflict. Peace is now ever closer for the Colombian people and millions of conflict victims. We applaud President Santos and his negotiating team for their efforts to reach a just and lasting peace with the FARC.”*

In addition, while in Havana ahead of his U.S. visit, **Pope Francis said:**

*“[M]ay the long night of pain and violence, with the support of all Colombians, become an unending day of concord, justice, fraternity and love ... so that there may be lasting peace.”*

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