

Positive Development in Second Round of Colombia-ELN Rebels Peace Talks

written by Ezba Walayat | March 20, 2023



Introduction

During a second round of peace talks held in Mexico City, both the Colombian government and the left-wing National Liberation Army (ELN) rebel group have welcomed the progress in their efforts to put an end to decades of armed conflict in the South American country. President Gustavo Petro is engaging in negotiations with armed group in order to reach a complete ceasefire and peace. The President, Petro is the Colombia's first left-wing leader who is making efforts to bring "total peace" to end six decades of violent conflict that killed almost 450,000 people and devastated the country. The ELN negotiator, Pablo Beltran, said in a statement, "We took the first steps to firm up a bilateral, national and temporary ceasefire which will create better conditions for Colombians' mobilization and participation in the peace process." The next round of negotiations, which will take place in Cuba, will focus on securing a ceasefire, according to Otty Patino, the leader of the Colombian side. According to a tweet from Cuban President Miguel Diaz, Cuba was honored to accept the request to host the next round of talks with the ELN. Meanwhile, Norway and Mexico, who have facilitated the talks, applauded the latest advancement. Norway's foreign affairs ministry welcomed the talks and said "Congratulations to the Colombian government and the ELN guerilla on substantial progress in the peace talks in Mexico, on key topics like participation, humanitarian relief and future cease fire."

Background

The ELN, was established in 1964 and it is the only largest surviving rebel group in the country. About 2,500 of the ELN's fighters are still active today and the group has been charged with using kidnapping,

illegal mining and drug trafficking to support its operations. In 2017, when Juan Manuel Santos served as president of Ecuador, negotiations with the ELN first began. In 2018, they were taken to Cuba. The talks were halted in 2019 by Ivan Duque, a former President, one day after the group bombed a police academy in Bogota, Colombia, that killed 21 policemen. After three years, the first round of negotiations initiated which took place in Venezuela's capital in November and December 2022. It was successful and served as a ray of hope in extreme conflict and destabilizing tensions as two sides reached a four points agreement. The violence in the Colombian districts of Choco and Valle del Cauca and the requirement for immediate assistance were highlighted by the two sides in the joint statement. Additionally, there were continued demands for the measures to improve circumstances for prisoners and for the return of indigenous communities i.e. members of the ELN, therefore a partial agreement was announced.



Petro's "Total Peace" Plan in Colombia

Total Peace is a policy that seeks to end the nation's long-standing armed conflict through talks with various armed groups, including the ELN and FARC, which pose the greatest threats to the Colombian government. Since taking office in August 2022, it has remained one of Gustavo Petro's main priority on political agenda, he wanted to initiate the 2016 FARC peace agreement's implementation and talks with the ELN and other armed organizations. For achieving "Total Peace" the Petro administration asserted that it will concentrate its strategy on protecting civilians while first attempting to negotiate humanitarian treaties with armed groups. Furthermore, Petro said he would give up the militarized and hardline strategy which is considered as a source of exacerbated conflict and violence in the country by human rights organizations. He has attempted to normalize relations with neighboring country Venezuela as a part of his efforts to strengthen trade ties and deal with border region unrest.

Conclusion

After the first round of peace negotiations between Colombia and ELN, divergent statements emerged as a result, which were held in the Venezuelan capital of Caracas at the end of the previous year. The ELN denied accepting any such deal, stating a ceasefire “was merely a proposal to be considered” as the Colombian government reported a truce had been achieved. Now, there is a hope for peace at the end of the second round of talks as the two sides have already reached an informal ceasefire.

Anti-Inflation Plan: Mexico and Latin American Allies Unite Against Inflation

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Introduction

Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, the President of Mexico, has declared intentions to conduct cooperative anti-inflationary measures with other Latin American governments. To tackle product shortages and keep prices low in the face of rising inflation, the alliance aims to boost economic trade and deal with tariffs. President Lopez Obrador said during the news conference, “We are going to carry out a mutually beneficial anti-inflation plan for growth and for economic and commercial exchange with the countries of Latin America.” He added “There will be a teleconference between the presidents on April 5 and then an in-person meeting to discuss the plan.” The statement by Mexican President came after the phone call with President of Brazil Lula da Silva, Colombian President Gustavo Petro, President of Argentina Alberto

Fernandez and Cuban President Miguel Diaz Canel.

Background

Many people in the region have been experiencing economic difficulty due to Latin America's severe inflation crisis. The region has suffered significant inflation over the past few decades, where different countries are experiencing inflation at higher rates. A number of factors have contributed to this, including structural problems including unsound economic policies, rising global commodity prices and significant budget deficits. Latin American officials have used a variety of policies, including price controls and fiscal and monetary policies to fight inflation and encourage economic growth. In an annual report, Preliminary Overview of the Economy of Latin America and the Caribbean, ECLAC estimated that the region's growth rate for the following year would be a third of that predicted for 2022. Despite regional limitations and global worries, the economies of Latin America and the Caribbean will expand by 3.7% in 2022, just over half of the 6.7% rate recorded in 2021. Economic growth is expected to slow down even more in 2023, reaching a ratio of 1.3%.



Latin America's Inflationary Landscape and the New Anti-Inflation Plan

For Latin America as a whole, 2023 is probably going to be a tough year. Growth will only reach 2% this year, according to IMF forecasts, as a result of rising interest rates and falling commodity prices. Consumer and corporate confidence are declining along with a slowdown in employment creation and consumer spending on goods and services. Growth will also be constrained with trading partners, particularly with the United State and the Europe. However, there are still a lot of downside risks, brought on by financial conditions and Russia-Ukraine war. Climate change is another factor, according to a Moody's Analytics estimate, the effects of climate change might cost Latin America 16% of GDP this century if new policies are not put in place for mitigation. After a projected 3.3% increase in GDP in 2022, it is anticipated that

regional GDP will grow by only 1.5% in 2023. Negative external conditions and monetary tightening intended to combat excessive inflation will be the main causes of the slowdown. The anti-inflation plan, according to the president of Mexico will be applied gradually at first before being extended to include neighboring nations like Bolivia, Chile and Honduras. This plan will be implemented by inviting wholesalers, merchants, importers and other people who deal in and understand food, can set pricing and eliminate obstacles like tariffs that make it challenging to purchase it at a fair price.

Conclusion

As inflation remains a major challenge in the region, continued efforts are required to ensure long-term economic stability. Due to the current development in regional integration, it is important that all the countries work together to formulate and implement shared policies and strategies to lower inflation. Governments of Latin American countries should increase support through carefully targeted strategies to mitigate the effects of inflation on the poor, i.e. by implementing supply-side policies which increase productivity. Furthermore, to boost economic activity in the region and to satisfy social concerns, it is important to take steps that can generate employment opportunities which will contribute in reducing inequality and poverty. Moreover, innovative governmental policies on productive, financial, trade and social issues are required not only to deal with inflation, but also for overall economic growth and long-term socio-economic stability in the region.