

Cuba to host Colombia's peace talks with ELN

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Colombia and the ELN rebels said on Saturday that they will move peace negotiations to end more than five decades of war to Cuba, after original host Ecuador pulled its support for the talks.

The Andean nation has been at war with the National Liberation Army (ELN), founded by radical Catholic priests, since 1964.

The government of outgoing President Juan Manuel Santos and the ELN started formal talks 15 months ago in Quito.

Last month Ecuador, then one of six guarantor countries, said it would not host the negotiations as long as the guerrillas continued to wage attacks.

The ELN is well known for kidnapping and for bombing oil and military infrastructure.

Ecuador's decision came after two Ecuadorean journalists and their driver were killed by a group of former members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) rebels, the majority of whom demobilized under a 2016 peace deal negotiated in Havana.

Fifth cycle of talks

"After jointly examining the options to restart talks as soon as possible, we have decided to continue the fifth cycle of talks in the city of Havana, Cuba, beginning next week," the two sides said in a joint statement.

Negotiations will continue to focus on agreeing a new ceasefire, the statement said. The two sides' first-ever ceasefire ended in January and was followed by a period of increased violence and a six-week pause in talks.

Santos, who won the Nobel Peace Prize for his work on the FARC peace deal, has repeatedly expressed his gratitude to Cuba for hosting those negotiations, which lasted four years.

Brazil, Chile, Cuba, Norway and Venezuela are the five remaining guarantor countries for the ELN negotiations.

Colombia's long conflict between the government, rebel groups, paramilitaries and crime gangs has killed at least 220,000 people and displaced million
