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Santos: Bilateral Cease-Fire with FARC Could Come Before Peace

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“At the proper time, we will see if we can implement (the cease-fire) immediately,” said the president on the government-sponsored program “Agenda Colombia.”

That option could become a reality, Santos said, depending on progress made on other points on the agenda of the peace talks, including transitional justice to be applied during the post-conflict period and the recognition of victims’ rights, aspects that the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC, will negotiate simultaneously to accelerate the talks.

The president’s remarks change the premise that has prevailed for months that, although an agreement might be reached regarding a cease-fire, it would only be put into effect when the talks with the FARC, which have been under way since 2012 in Havana, are finalized.

The bilateral cease-fire, which is a feature of the fifth and final point on the peace negotiation agenda, will begin to be discussed by the two sides on Feb. 2, when the parties will resume their dialogue in Havana after taking a lengthy Christmas break.

Last week, in a nationally broadcast address, Santos revealed that he had given instructions to his negotiating team in Havana to focus the dialogue with the Rebels on attaining a bilateral and open-ended cease-fire.

However, he avoided commenting specifically on whether a cessation of hostilities would come

before a peace accord is signed, something that sparked contradictory statements by some of his Cabinet ministers.

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