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**Colombia-FARC Peace Talks Just Days Away from Cease-fire Deal**

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After more than three years of negotiations with the Colombian government, FARC rebels are hopeful that a final bilateral cease-fire deal will be sealed in the “coming days” after making crucial progress in the peace talks in Havana, Cuba, leaders announced Sunday.

“We have had important advances,” said FARC commander Carlos Antonio Lozada in a press conference on Sunday. “We are working with respect to the cease-fire and specifically on the characteristic of the encampment areas.”

The question of the terms of the bilateral cease-fire has been a key issue on the agenda in the final stages of the negotiations and a key piece of the puzzle to put in place in order to make way for a definitive end to 50 years of internal armed conflict.

Lozada also stressed that the issue of the FARC disarmament, another outstanding item on the peace agenda, will require commitments from both sides of the negotiating table.

“It must be a bilateral agreement in which both the state and the FARC take on commitments in the area of laying down of arms, understanding that at no point are we proposing that the state should disarm,” the commander added.

The statements come after FARC leader Timochenko penned an open letter to Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos reaffirming the group's desire to disarm and achieve peace, in response to recent misleading statements in the media.

The FARC, or Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, has repeatedly argued that putting an end to paramilitary activity in the country is key to safeguarding a lasting peace deal and offering guarantees to FARC rebels in their process of disarming and reintegrating into society. But as the peace deal nears, paramilitary violence has seen a

sharp resurgence in recent months.

The rebel commander also reiterated the group's demand that jailed FARC leader Simon Trinidad, serving a 60 year sentence in a super maximum-security prison in Colorado, be released in the name of "reuniting all Colombians that one way or another have been involved in the conflict" through the signing of the peace deal.

FARC and government negotiators missed the self-imposed deadline to finalize a peace agreement by March 23, but both sides of the conflict have expressed confidence that ending the conflict is just around the corner.

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