

Colombia-Venezuela Crisis: Chavez Agrees to Meet Colombia's New President Juan Manuel Santos

By [Global Research](#)

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Hugo Chavez, the Venezuelan president, has said he will meet with his Colombian counterpart on Tuesday to try to end a diplomatic rift between the two countries.

Juan Manuel Santos was inaugurated as the Colombian president on Saturday and immediately offered to talk with Chavez in hopes of mending Colombian-Venezuelan ties.

"We had a frank and direct dialogue, with both our countries' aim to restore relations within a framework of transparency," Maria Angela Holguin, the Colombian foreign minister, said on Sunday.

Chavez, who sent his foreign minister Nicolas Maduro to the swearing-in ceremony, said he was willing to "turn the page" and work with Santos, even offering to go to Bogota if necessary.

Venezuela [broke off ties with Colombia last month](#) in the latest swing in their on-again, off-again relationship. The previous Colombian government alleged that the leftist guerrillas it is fighting were hiding in Venezuela, and accused Caracas of aiding them.

Call to disarm

Colombia blames the rebels for killings, kidnappings and drug trafficking along the country's long border with Venezuela. Chavez denies giving sanctuary to the rebels.

Chavez on Sunday called for Colombian rebels to lay down their arms, and warned Santos' government not to accuse his country of helping the guerrilla movement. Santos' predecessor, Alvaro Uribe, had accused Chavez's government of sheltering Colombian rebels.

Chavez tried to deflect the accusations by calling on rebels to give up their decades-old armed struggle and seek a negotiated solution.

"The guerrillas should come out in favour of peace. They should release all their hostages," he said during his weekly "Alo Presidente" radio and television show. "They have no future by staying armed."

"Furthermore, they have become an excuse for the [US] empire to intervene in Colombia, and threaten Venezuela from there," he added, a reference to the US military presence in Colombia.

Chavez blocks US ambassador

Chavez also announced on Sunday that he will not allow the newly-nominated US envoy to take up his post in Caracas.

He said Barack Obama, the US president, should “look for another candidate” to replace Larry Palmer, whose nomination as ambassador to Venezuela is pending confirmation by the US senate.

“How can you think I’d accept this gentleman coming here?” Chavez said on his show. “You’d best withdraw him, Obama. Don’t insist, I’m asking you.”

Palmer last month voiced concern about Cuba’s growing influence in the Venezuelan military. He said the country’s military had “considerably low” morale and professionalism.

In written answers during a senate confirmation hearing, Palmer also said there were “clear ties” between leftist Colombian rebels and Chavez’s government.

On Thursday the Venezuelan foreign ministry protested Palmer’s statements as “interference and interventionism” and asked the United States for an explanation before he was confirmed in his post.

“[Palmer] disqualified himself by breaking all the rules of diplomacy. He messed with all of us. He can’t come here as ambassador,” Chavez said.

“The best thing the United States government can do is to look for another candidate [for ambassador to Venezuela].”

Palmer, who has served as ambassador in Honduras and charge d’affaires in Ecuador, was picked to try to manage the US’ difficult relationship with Venezuela.

Colomba

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