

# Colombia proposes hostage talks

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BOGOTA, Colombia --

President Alvaro Uribe offered Friday to have government officials meet with unarmed leftist rebels in a rural area absent of government forces for talks aimed at freeing dozens of rebel-held hostages, including three Americans and a former presidential candidate.

Uribe's proposal for a meeting with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC, comes amid mounting international pressure, especially from France, for a deal to swap 45 rebel-held hostages for hundreds of jailed rebels.

The rebels have long insisted that their negotiators not disarm for any such talks and it was unclear how they might respond to Uribe's offer.

Uribe, in a speech at a police academy, authorized government representatives to travel to an as-yet unidentified 93-mile zone, where there are no soldiers or police or major population centers.

He said both sides should travel to the so-called "meeting zone" without weapons, and be overseen by international observers. He did not provide further details about how long the proposed talks might last.

The proposal moves closer to the FARC's long-standing demand for a temporary New York City-sized safe haven in southern Colombia to carry out talks over a humanitarian accord.