



Post-conflict process debate

ACIPET congress organized an interesting debate on the post-conflict process and the role of the sector at this stage. Important public figures participated to talk about this subject.

Rodrigo Rivera, Commissioner for Peace, said that the country is experiencing a historic moment with the peace process. He pointed out that oil engineers also had had to face the worst times of the conflict in producing regions. However, they and the sector continued their development in the country and the new peace environment will ease operations in Colombia.

He commented that the country has made an effort for decades to strengthen institutions and the presence of the state in difficult access areas. Rivera said Colombia is seeing results of this effort, as the largest and most powerful illegal armed group, FARC, decided to enter into legality.

"We have removed that factor of disturbance, insecurity and violence from areas where the oil sector operates in the country. We are doing something similar with the ELN thanks to the bilateral ceasefire agreement," Rivera said.

Francisco Santos Calderón, former Vice President of Colombia, commented the sector showed growth during 2002 and 2010, when the country had armed conflict. He said the industry has shown a slowdown in recent years, as the government has made bad decisions, putting at risk the legal security of the country.

He acknowledged that peace is necessary and it will help to boost the industry, but there is more to do, because the oil reserves are very low.

"Investors will go to other places, if there are no (legal) conditions. Mexico opened its doors and here with changes of rules and with legal uncertainties, we see a deterioration of industry conditions," Santos said.

The former Vice-President said that the peace agreements have a very worrying chapter for the sector, which has to do with communities and social licensing.

"We are going to see how these issues are regulated, because the ELN and the FARC will want this to become a power for communities, which might end possibilities for the sector's development," Santos said.

However, Santos acknowledged that communities have great power through referenda at present.

"There will be no money to finance the post-conflict, without an oil industry. That is the truth," said Santos.

Luz Helena Sarmiento, former Minister of Environment and former Director of ANLA, said Santos's statements were true, but they need some clarification.

She said companies took up to 5 years to get an environmental license before 2010. Sarmiento said that the number of attacks increased by more than 300% between 2001 and 2010.

Sarmiento noted that attacks and kidnappings against the industry fell from 2010. She highlighted that the key point of discussion is how the sector will participate in the post-conflict process.

Juan Camilo Restrepo, Chief Negotiator of the Government in dialogues with ELN, recognized that the industry has had difficult years recently, but he said that advances in dialogues with the armed group will ease operations.

Restrepo emphasized that the cease-fire agreement with the ELN is a historical fact that no government had previously achieved with this illegal group.

He pointed out that this will benefit the sector, as the ELN has committed not to commit attacks on the oil infrastructure, nor to carry out any further kidnappings during the ceasefire period.

Restrepo criticized latest attacks by the ELN before the start of ceasefire. He highlighted that this actions weakened the position of this group in negotiations.

Bottom-Line: The industry is undoubtedly going to be key in the post-conflict process, as the industry is developing in many areas of conflict. The industry can contribute much to the construction of a new country, since it has also been a victim of the conflict.